



## UNCCD Conference of Parties (COP15)

**For Prelims:** UNCCD, COP15, land degradation, climate change, Drought, Delhi Declaration of 2019, desertification, IWMP, Soil Health Card Scheme

**For Mains:** Desertification and its impact, Environmental Pollution & Degradation

### Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change addressed the **fifteenth session of the [Conference of the Parties \(COP15\)](#)** of the **[United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#) in Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa)**.

### What are the Highlights of the COP15?

#### ▪ About:

- COP 15 is a **key moment in the fight against desertification, land degradation and drought**.
- It will **build on the findings of the second edition** of the **Global Land Outlook** and offer a concrete response to the interconnected challenges of [land degradation](#), [climate change](#) and biodiversity loss.
  - The Global Land Outlook (GLO), the **UNCCD flagship publication**, **underscores land system challenges**, showcases transformative policies and practices, and points to cost-effective pathways to scale up sustainable land and water management.

#### ▪ Top Agenda:

- [Drought](#), **land restoration, and related enablers** such as land rights, gender equality and youth empowerment are among the top items on the Conference agenda.

#### ▪ Theme: 'Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity'

### What is Desertification?

#### ◦ About:

- Land degradation is defined as the **reduction or loss of the biological or economic productivity of drylands**.
- Land degradation in arid, semiarid and dry subhumid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.

#### ◦ Causes:

##### ◦ Loss of Soil Cover:

- **Loss of soil cover, mainly due to rainfall** and surface runoff, is one of the biggest reasons for desertification.
- Cutting forests adversely affect the soil and cause degradation. As urbanization increases, the demand for resources is also increasing.

##### ◦ Vegetation Degradation:

- Vegetation degradation is defined as, **"the temporary or permanent reduction in the**

**density**, structure, species composition or productivity of vegetation cover".

- **Water Erosion:**
  - It results in **Badland Topography** which itself is an initial stage of desertification.
    - Badlands are a type of dry terrain where softer sedimentary rocks and clay-rich soils have been extensively eroded.
- **Wind Erosion:**
  - **Sand encroachment by wind reduces fertility of the soil** making the land susceptible to desertification.
  - It was found to be responsible for 5.46% of the desertification in India.
- **Climate Change:**
  - It may exacerbate desertification through alteration of spatial and temporal patterns in temperature, rainfall, solar radiation and winds.

## What are the Related Efforts Taken?

- **Global Efforts:**
  - **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):** It was established in 1994, the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
    - The [Delhi Declaration of 2019](#), signed by 14th CoP of the UNCCD, called for better access and stewardship over land, and emphasised gender-sensitive transformative projects.
  - **The Bonn Challenge:** To bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.
  - **Great Green Wall:** Initiative by Global Environment Facility (GEF), where eleven countries in Sahel-Saharan Africa have focused efforts to fight against land degradation and revive native plant life to the landscape.
- **India's Efforts to Check Land Degradation:**
  - **India is focusing on sustainable land and resource management** for livelihood generation at community level for making the local lands healthier and productive for providing a better homeland and a better future for its inhabitants.
  - The **National Action Programme for combating [desertification](#)** was prepared in 2001 to take appropriate action in addressing the problems of desertification.
  - Following the **global call for the submission of nominations for World Restoration Flagships**, India endorsed **six restoration flagships** that target the restoration of 12.5 million hectares of degraded land.
  - Some of the **major programmes which address issues related** to land degradation and desertification, being implemented currently are as follows:
    - [Integrated Watershed Management Programme \(IWMP\)](#) (Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana)
    - National Afforestation Programme (NAP)
    - National Mission for Green India (GIM)
    - The [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme \(MGNREGS\)](#),
    - Soil Conservation in the Catchment of River Valley Project
    - National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (NWDPPRA)
    - Fodder and Feed Development Scheme-component of Grassland Development including Grass Reserves.
    - Command Area Development and Water Management (CADWM) programme,
    - [Soil Health Card Scheme](#), etc.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions

**Q. What is/are the importance/importances of the ' United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification' ? (2016)**

1. It aims to promote effective action through innovative national programmes and supportive international partnerships.
2. It has a special/particular focus on South Asia and North Africa regions, and its Secretariat facilitates the

allocation of major portion of financial resources to these regions.

3. It is committed to bottom-up approach, encouraging the participation of local people in combating the desertification.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (c)**

- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification aims to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa. Hence, 2 is not correct.
- It seeks to take effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements in the framework of an integrated approach which is consistent with Agenda 21, with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas. Hence, 1 is correct.
- Parties should ensure that decisions on the design and implementation of programmes to combat desertification and/or mitigate the effects of drought are taken with the participation of the populations and local communities and that an enabling environment is created at higher levels to facilitate action at national and local levels. Hence, 3 is correct. Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.

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