



**United Nations**  
Convention to Combat  
Desertification

# Youth Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 2024



## Acknowledgements

*The Youth Engagement Strategy and Action Plan is the result of a team effort led by the UNCCD Secretariat, supported by the UNCCD Youth Caucus Focal Points, based on an extensive peer review process, including numerous stakeholder consultations, and funded by the Government of Switzerland.*

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Supported by:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
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**Swiss Agency for Development  
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DESERTIFICATION AND  
DROUGHT DAY • 17 JUNE 2024

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# Foreword



UNCCD Executive  
Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw  
Credit: UNCCD

In the face of escalating environmental crises, the role of youth in steering our planet toward a sustainable future has never been more critical. Representing over 40% of the global population, the 1.7 billion young people under the age of 25 are not just a demographic. They are the vanguard of change, and the need to engage and empower this generation is both a present-day imperative and a long-term investment. Yet, today's youth inherit a world grappling with multiple crises including land degradation—a threat to food security, water quality, agricultural productivity—and ultimately, their future prosperity and wellbeing,

More than a billion young people in developing countries depend on land and natural resources. They are key to transforming their communities and driving innovation in sustainable land management. There is an urgent need to involve young people in this mission. They bring fresh perspectives, innovative solutions and the energy needed to effectively address land degradation. We must harness this potential to ensure a sustainable future.

Recognizing the urgent need for action and the pivotal role young people can play, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is fostering youth engagement and placing it at the forefront of global efforts to restore land and boost drought resilience.

This Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) requested by the Parties to the UNCCD, with its comprehensive vision, guiding principles and strategic objectives, is a blueprint for action and serves as a roadmap for youth's role as a key stakeholder in land stewardship. It articulates a future where young people are not only participants but agents of change in shaping the policies that affect their lives and the land they inherit. The strategy underscores the necessity of advancing youth-focused policies, fostering meaningful participation, providing support and opportunities, such as decent land-based jobs, and building capacity through networking and knowledge-sharing. The strategy is also a call to all stakeholders to unite in creating a fertile ground for youth-led initiatives, ensuring that the voices of the young are amplified and their contributions valued.

As we stand at this critical juncture, the strategy offers a path forward. It is a commitment to nurturing the seeds of innovation and resilience sown by the youth and cultivating a landscape where sustainable land management is not just a concept but a lived reality. Our collective efforts today will determine the legacy we leave for generations to come. By working together to empower and support youth as stewards of the land, we can create a world where healthy soil sustains vibrant communities, diverse ecosystems, and a thriving planet for all.

It is with profound gratitude that we acknowledge the generous financial support of our donors and the contributions of those who have laid the groundwork for this strategy, particularly young people, and look forward to its effective implementation.

## **Ibrahim Thiaw**

Executive Secretary

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

# Executive Summary

**Land is the operative link between biodiversity loss and climate change – making sustainable land management and restoration the most effective interventions to address species loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.** Developing the capacity for implementing long-term integrated strategies to sustainably manage our finite land resources inherently involves meaningful engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, including women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and other groups most at risk of being adversely impacted by environmental changes.

**Today's young generation is the largest in history and will inherit the legacy of desertification and land degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and growing socioeconomic inequality.** In many rural and peri-urban areas, young people are directly dependent on land and natural resources to meet basic needs and secure their livelihoods. Youth are often the first and most affected by the impacts of desertification, land degradation, and drought.<sup>1</sup>

**The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) recognises that youth can bring positive energy and enthusiasm that motivate diverse stakeholders to act.** Accordingly, during the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15), the Parties to UNCCD adopted Decision 5/COP15, "Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification", which requested the Secretariat to develop a youth engagement strategy and the modalities for its implementation to ensure stronger, effective, and meaningful participation of youth in the meetings and processes of the Convention.<sup>2</sup>

**This UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) presents a compelling vision, guiding principles, and strategic objectives which frame the modalities for its implementation (Action Plan).** Youth priorities are indicated for all levels of action, recognising their need to be tailored to national and local circumstances. The YES outlines the roles and responsibilities of UNCCD stakeholders, as well as strategies to raise awareness and mobilise resources with the aim to promote meaningful youth engagement, support youth-led initiatives, and build youth-adult partnerships.

## Objectives of the UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy

- 1. Advance youth-focused policies:** Ensure policies that govern land management are drafted in consultation with diverse youth, and address their vulnerabilities, particularly around access to land, markets, and finance, as well as representation in decision-making.
- 2. Support meaningful participation and partnerships:** Mainstream spaces and avenues for youth, with emphasis on youth from diverse backgrounds, remote locations, and marginalised communities, to participate and influence decision-making, and partner with young people on the ground to create an enabling environment for effective collaboration.
- 3. Provide dedicated financial and technical support:** Set aside dedicated resources to support initiatives designed and led by young people, and offer the necessary technical assistance to enhance the design, implementation, and monitoring of these initiatives.
- 4. Build capacity and support networking:** Build young people's knowledge and skills in sustainable land management in ways that are accessible to disadvantaged and marginalised youth and which enable youth to connect with each other, adults, and other relevant stakeholders.

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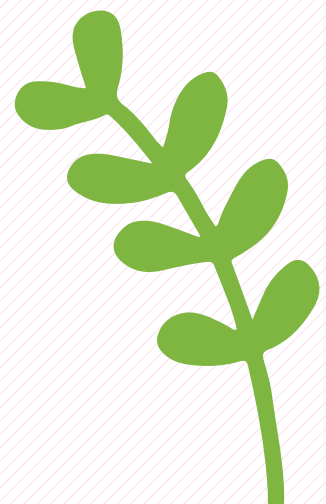
1 International Fund for Agricultural Development. 2019. Creating opportunities for rural youth. 2019 Rural development report. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development.

2 Decision 5/COP 15 and Decision 8/COP 15 contained in ICCD/COP(15)/23/Add.1. UNCCD. 2022. Report of the Conference of the Parties on its fifteenth session, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 9 to 20 May 2022. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties at its fifteenth session. <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-06/cop23add1-advance.pdf>



“

**“[...] We must focus on both, fostering the inclusion of young people and making space for them in our organizations and activities and on building their skills and capacities to engage and provide inputs to our activities and programs.”**



# 1. Background

## 1.1. Youth and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

### Land degradation: A challenge for future generations

Land degradation is one of the most pressing environmental challenges that the world is facing today with 20–40 per cent of global land area degraded or degrading.<sup>3</sup> Globally, 3.2 billion people – 40 per cent of the world’s population – are affected by land degradation, especially rural communities, smallholder farmers, and the very poor. Land degradation accelerates climate change and biodiversity loss, and contributes to droughts, wildfires, forced migration and the emergence of zoonotic diseases.<sup>4</sup> Land degradation is occurring at an alarming pace, contributing to a dramatic decline in agricultural productivity with considerable impacts on food and water security. Drylands, particularly in developing countries, are most vulnerable to the impacts of land degradation and drought.<sup>5</sup>

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the global voice for land and promotes “*practices that avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation to achieve SDG target 15.3 and Land Degradation Neutrality*”.<sup>6</sup> Article 2 of the Convention encourages “long-term integrated strategies that focus simultaneously, in affected areas, on improved productivity of land, and the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources, leading to improved living conditions...”, achieved “through effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements”.<sup>7</sup>

UNCCD’s 2018–2030 Strategic Framework presents a vision of the future that avoids, minimises, and reverses desertification/land degradation, and that mitigates the effects of drought and strives to achieve a land degradation-neutral world consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>8</sup> With its 197 Parties, UNCCD brings together decision makers, scientists, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders around a shared vision and framework for action to transform the way we use and manage land resources.

### Youth and land

Of the world’s 8 billion people,<sup>9</sup> nearly 1.8 billion are below the age of 25 years.<sup>10</sup> Nearly 1 billion youth live in developing countries, comprising the bulk of their populations which are growing far more rapidly than in higher-income countries.<sup>11</sup> Africa has nearly 420 million young people aged 15–35 years. Of these, one third is unemployed, another one third is employed (often in jobs with harsh conditions, low wages, and uncertainty), and only one sixth is in formal wage employment. Young women comprise over half of unemployed youth.<sup>12</sup> Despite the challenges youth face in securing livelihoods, the global youth population is projected to rise considerably in the coming decades.<sup>13</sup>

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3 UNCCD. 2022. Global Land Outlook, 2nd ed.

4 UNCCD. (n.d.). High-Level dialogue on desertification, land degradation and drought. <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/stories/high-level-dialogue-desertification-land-degradation-and-drought>

5 Global Environment Facility. 2022. “Land Degradation”. <https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/land-degradation>

6 UNCCD (n.d). Our Work & Impact. <https://www.unccd.int/our-work/overview>

7 Article 2. Convention text. <https://www.unccd.int/resource/convention-text>

8 UNCCD. 2017. The future strategic framework of the Convention 7/COP.13. Report of the Conference of the Parties on its thirteenth session, held in Ordos, China, from 6 to 16 September 2017. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the parties at its thirteenth session. [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2017-11/cop21add1\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2017-11/cop21add1_eng.pdf)

9 UNDESA. 2022. World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results. UN DESA/POP/2022/TR/NO. 3.

10 UNFPA. 2023. State of the World Population 2023 – 8 Billion Lives, Infinite Possibilities: The Case for Rights and Choices. ISBN (PDF): 9789210027137, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210027137>

11 IFAD. 2019. Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth. <https://www.ifad.org/ruraldevelopmentreport/>

12 UNCCD: Youth. (n.d) <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/youth/overview>

13 United Nations. 2019. World Population Prospects 2019. [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019\\_Highlights.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf)

**Recent trends in desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) have serious economic, social, and security implications for the current youth population and generations to come.** With today's young generation the largest in history, these trends are particularly concerning. Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America are home to more than half of the world's youth and experience high levels of land degradation and desertification.<sup>14</sup> They are and will face declining levels of productivity, conflict over increasingly scarce land resources, and the lack of meaningful jobs and livelihoods that trigger forced migration out of rural areas. The interlinked crises of land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change can result in food and water insecurity, poor hygiene and health, psychological distress and disenfranchisement, and disruptions in employment and schooling, factors that render communities vulnerable to tension, instability, and conflict.

The severity and scale of these impacts in the future will directly depend on the action we take today to transform these systems, in partnership with young people.

## UNCCD youth engagement

UNCCD has strived to engage youth in its processes and implementation objectives, including by hosting various youth-led fora and initiatives.

2016	<p><b>Decent Jobs for Youth (DJY):</b><sup>15</sup> DJY is a global initiative to scale up action and results on youth employment under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Launched in 2016 and hosted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), DJY is a unique platform for partners to address fragmentation and catalyse effective, innovative, and evidence-based action at country and regional levels. DJY brings together the resources and expertise of multiple partners to create linkages that maximise the effectiveness of youth employment investments.</p>
2017	<p><b>UNCCD Youth Forum:</b> The first UNCCD Youth Forum, held during the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) in China, stressed the need for consultations with youth, including young farmers and entrepreneurs, Indigenous and vulnerable groups, such as young people with disabilities. It called for a "ruralisation" intervention with incentives to bring young jobseekers back to rural communities, with the aim to inspire the revival of rural societies and give youth an opportunity to lead and engage in efforts to address the impacts of climate change and land degradation.</p> <p><b>The resulting Declaration,</b><sup>16</sup> adopted by the first UNCCD Youth Forum in 2017, put forward a call for stakeholder support to help achieve the following commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Invest in both formal and non-formal education for youth.</li> <li>» Equip young graduates with knowledge and practical skills which are useful to succeed in the green jobs market.</li> <li>» Establish apprenticeship and young innovator programmes to give young talent the opportunity to learn and be creative in the area of land restoration.</li> <li>» Support young researchers in producing fresh insights based on local knowledge.</li> <li>» Revive farming and agriculture-related occupations with more modern techniques, and make it appealing to youth through incentives that develop expertise, offer subsidies, and help secure land rights.</li> <li>» Support young people to share Indigenous knowledge with the aim to help shape decision-making, by organising seminars, workshops, and conferences.</li> <li>» Facilitate online and offline spaces for dialogue among youth so they can work together and cross-learn.</li> </ul>

14 Ibid.

15 Decent Jobs for Youth. <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/about>

16 UNCCD. 2017. Global Youth Initiative for Combating Desertification. [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-02/Global%20Youth%20Initiative\\_Youth%20Declaration\\_220917-%20new%20format\\_final.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-02/Global%20Youth%20Initiative_Youth%20Declaration_220917-%20new%20format_final.pdf)



2018	<p><b>Capacity Building Marketplace:</b> The Marketplace<sup>17</sup> is a platform that allows individuals and organisations to find and offer current learning, funding, and job opportunities. It provides an array of resources, including learning videos, publications, courses, and university programmes on land-related issues and sustainable land management (SLM) practices to help achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN), in different languages, as well as up-to-date vacancies for internships, fellowships, consultancies, and professional work.<sup>18</sup> Youth can create a personal profile and connect with others. The Marketplace also posts relevant financing opportunities for projects or studies in the field of land restoration.</p>
2019	<p><b>Youth Caucus on Desertification and Land:</b> The <b>UNCCD Youth Caucus</b> is the youth constituency of the UNCCD. UNCCD formalised its youth engagement in March 2019 after extensive discussions with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) youth constituency, YOUNGO, and the United Nations Environment Programme’s Major Group for Children and Youth. UNCCD’s Youth Caucus held its first official forum in New Delhi on the sidelines of UNCCD’s 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP14) in 2019. The forum convened over 100 young people from all over the world to build their capacity, share knowledge, and create networks in SLM and desertification. This first forum set the pace in how young people would be engaged in UNCCD.<sup>19</sup> Since then, the Youth Caucus, although still fairly young, has worked on setting up its structure, amassing a network (over 1,400 members as of March 2024), and streamlining its coordination. The Declaration,<sup>20</sup> adopted by the UNCCD Youth Forum during COP14 in 2019, highlighted several priorities:</p> <p>Emphasise the role of land tenure security and property rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Emphasise the need to focus on community-based management of natural resources (land, water and forest) with Indigenous peoples.</li> <li>» Create localised job opportunities for Indigenous youth with traditional knowledge to formalise traditional practices and instrumentally contribute to restoring land and preventing desertification.</li> <li>» On meaningful youth engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Establish regulatory norms and forums to ensure youth voices are on record and being used in decision-making by policymakers.</li> <li>o Support more frequent and permanent engagements of youth bodies, beyond intergovernmental proceedings.</li> <li>o Make efforts to reach a mandatory 30 per cent of youth representation as part of country delegations for the effective representation of youth issues in all UNCCD decision-making processes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2020	<p><b>Land Heroes Campaign:</b> In 2020, in celebration of Desertification and Drought Day, UNCCD launched the Land Heroes<sup>21</sup> campaign on social media to promote SLM initiatives from around the world. Youth aged 15–30 years were invited to apply and submit projects that offer a solution to pressing problems in SLM. The initiative selected 11 Land Heroes who are engaged in land restoration efforts on the ground. To ensure a sustained and far-reaching impact of the UNCCD Land Heroes competition, UNCCD facilitated communication between competitors and encouraged Land Heroes to follow and interact with each other on social media to build a community and keep the youth connected. In the past, UNCCD had hosted similar challenges, such as the “Dryland Champion”<sup>22</sup> and “Land for Life Youth Social Media Activists Challenge”.<sup>23</sup></p>

17 UNCCD. (n.d). Capacity Building Marketplace. <https://knowledge.unccd.int/cbm/about-capacity-building-marketplace>

18 UNCCD. (n.d). Capacity Building Marketplace. <https://knowledge.unccd.int/cbm/capacity-building-marketplace>

19 UNCCD. 2021. Global Land Outlook Working Paper: Youth Engagement in Land and Ecosystem Restoration. <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-03/UNCCD%20GLO%20WP%20youth.pdf>

20 UNCCD. 2019. Report of the Conference of the Parties on its fourteenth session, held in New Delhi, India from 2 to 13 September 2019. [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2019-12/ICCD\\_COP%2814%29\\_23-1918294E.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2019-12/ICCD_COP%2814%29_23-1918294E.pdf)

21 UNCCD. (n.d). Become #UNCCDLandHeroes. <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/stories/become-unccdlandheroes>

22 IISD’s SDG Knowledge Hub. 2014. UNCCD Announces 35 Dryland Champions. <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/unccd-announces-35-dryland-champions/>

23 UNCCD. 2017. Winners of Land for Life Youth Social Media Activists Challenge. <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/stories/winners-land-life-youth-social-media-activists-challenge>

<p><b>2022</b></p>	<p>In May 2022, the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the UNCCD adopted 36 decisions, which had 26 mentions of youth engagement. Decision 5/COP15<sup>24</sup> requested that the UNCCD Secretariat design a Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) and the modalities for its implementation to ensure stronger, effective, and meaningful participation of youth in the meetings and processes of the Convention. It also called on Parties to the Convention to raise public awareness and promote youth engagement on Convention issues. Decision 5/COP15 placed emphasis on several aspects of youth engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Confirm that young people are an important positive force leading the next generation to create more sustainable urban and rural environments, and commit to partnering with young people to create meaningful and dignified employment opportunities, especially in rural areas.</li> <li>» Support youth belonging to groups or communities that are typically underrepresented and/or in situations of vulnerability to provide inputs to the decision-making process.</li> <li>» Promote, together with other partners, decent land-based jobs for youth and land-based youth entrepreneurship.</li> <li>» Design policy options that make ecological restoration appealing in terms of financial inclusion, social protection, and adaptive safety nets, as well as contingent finance and reserve funds to support young land users to reduce the financial burden caused by the added cost of land degradation.</li> <li>» Reaffirm that empowerment of vulnerable youth, especially girls, will make an important contribution to the effective implementation of the Convention.</li> <li>» Welcome the organisation of the first Youth Forum, which took place 8–9 May 2022 as a way to foster the involvement of future generations in the implementation of the Convention, and take note of the Declaration of the Youth Forum with appreciation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2024</b></p>	<p>Coinciding with the Convention’s 30th anniversary, Desertification and Drought Day 2024 took the theme of “United for Land. Our Legacy. Our Future.” The theme puts the spotlight on the future of land stewardship – our most precious resource to ensure the stability and prosperity of billions of people around the world. The global observance of Desertification and Drought Day in Bonn, Germany was also used to convene youth leaders and announce the 2024 cohort of Land Heroes.</p>

## Supporting meaningful youth engagement

**UNCCD recognises that youth can bring positive energy and enthusiasm that motivate diverse stakeholders to act.** During the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15), the Parties to UNCCD adopted Decision 5/COP15 which requests that the Secretariat develop a youth engagement strategy and the modalities for its implementation to ensure stronger, effective, and meaningful participation of youth in the meetings and processes of the Convention. Decision 8/COP15 requests that the Secretariat develop, in partnership with relevant organisations and networks, stakeholder engagement plans, including awareness-raising strategies, for youth, civil society organisations (CSOs), the media and the private sector.<sup>25</sup>

**Youth are both the present and the future: their engagement is an integral part of the development and operations of many organisations and institutions.** However, young people continue to be marginalised, unrecognised, and underrepresented in decision-making spaces and often lack adequate support and resources to implement sustainable land and water management practices. Meaningful youth engagement refers to young people actively participating in planning and decision-making that empowers them to be agents of change. It also involves building authentic youth-adult partnerships that allow both groups to work and learn together.

**The UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) and related Action Plan aim to create a shared sense of responsibility among all people, young and old, to protect the global commons,<sup>26</sup> restore degraded land and**

24 UNCCD. 2022. Decision 5/COP.15. Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-10/5\\_cop15.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-10/5_cop15.pdf)

25 Decision 5/COP 15 and Decision 8/COP 15 contained in ICCD/COP(15)/23/Add.1. UNCCD, 2022. Report of the Conference of the Parties on its fifteenth session, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 9 to 20 May 2022. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties at its fifteenth session. <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-06/cop23add1-advance.pdf>

26 Stafford-Smith, M. and Metternicht, G. 2021. Governing drylands as global environmental commons. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 48, pp.115–124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2020.12.006>

soil,<sup>27</sup> and re-establish a safe operating space for humanity.<sup>28</sup> In the spirit of intergenerational equity, youth must be invited to participate in UNCCD decision-making processes, regarded as essential stakeholders in the implementation of the Convention, and empowered to create opportunities for sustained and meaningful engagement.

**The strategic objectives of the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) are aligned with the core functions in the UNCCD 2018 to 2030 Strategic Framework** and specifically addresses expected impact 2.3: “Local people, especially women and youth, are empowered and participate in decision-making processes in combating DLDD”. The YES 2024 to 2030 will be revised with the new strategic framework post-2030.

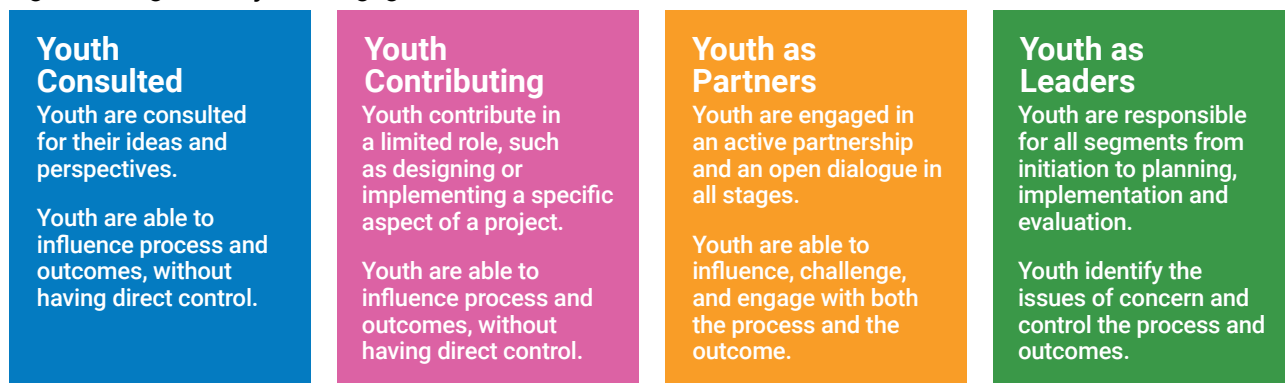
**For the purposes of the YES and its Action Plan, youth are defined as people aged 15–35 years.** The YES will actively create and support an enabling environment that allows young women and men to take part fully in decision-making and management practices to combat DLDD, restore degraded land, and protect healthy land.

### What is meaningful youth engagement?

*Meaningful youth engagement refers to how youth should be involved in decision-making and policymaking processes. Core principles of meaningful youth engagement are that the engagement must be rights-based and safe, institutionally mandated, designated, resourced, transparent, accessible, voluntary, informative, based on a partnership and ensuing reciprocal accountability, as well as diversity and inclusion.<sup>29</sup>*

**Meaningful youth engagement must be gender-responsive, ensuring more equitable participation of young women and girls in line with UNCCD’s Gender Action Plan, with emphasis on diverse groups of women and girls, who are differently affected by the impacts of DLDD.<sup>30</sup>** Cultural barriers, social norms, customary and inheritance rights, and education opportunities present greater obstacles to young females (than to males) who wish to access and control productive land resources.<sup>31</sup> This points to a need for more targeted support and initiatives that engage and empower young women and girls, in line with the UNCCD Gender Action Plan.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 1. Degrees of youth engagement<sup>33</sup>**



**Youth engagement must not be a one-off effort; it must be a consistent and strategic commitment.** SLM and land restoration are goals that require long-term commitment and sustained effort from all stakeholders. Through sustained and consistent support to young people, they can champion the cause and assume a leadership role to create more SLM systems.<sup>34</sup>

27 UN General Assembly. 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 [A/RES/70/1]. New York: UN. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

28 Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., et al., 2009. A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature*, 461(7263), pp. 472–475. <https://doi.org/10.1038/461472a>

29 United Nations. 2023. Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 3 – Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policy and Decision-making Processes. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-youth-engagement-en.pdf>

30 UNCCD. 2022. The differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought on women and men. Summary for decision makers. Bonn [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-05/SDM\\_ENGLISH\\_webfile.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-05/SDM_ENGLISH_webfile.pdf)

31 IFAD. 2014. Lessons learned: Youth and land tenure. <https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/40196966/Land+tenure+and+youth.pdf/38e4c76f-5f9e-45e3-8ef7-7349759339d4>

32 UNCCD. 2017. Gender Action Plan. [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2018-01/GAP%20ENG%20%20low%20res\\_0.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2018-01/GAP%20ENG%20%20low%20res_0.pdf)

33 UN. 2019. Meaningfully engaging with youth: Guidance and training for UN staff. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2021/05/Meaningfully-engaging-youth-Guidance-training-UN-staff.pdf>

34 UNCCD. 2021. Youth Engagement in Land and Ecosystem Restoration.



**Currently, young people face numerous challenges that limit their opportunities for engaging in UNCCD's mandate to assist country Parties with the adoption and scaling up of sustainable land management and restoration practices, owing to their specific vulnerabilities.**



## 1.2. Barriers and challenges

*Currently, young people face numerous challenges that limit their opportunities for engaging in UNCCD's mandate to assist country Parties with the adoption and scaling up of sustainable land management and restoration practices, owing to their specific vulnerabilities.*

**Despite their collective vulnerability as a generation, young people must not be considered a homogenous group.** Subsets of highly vulnerable youth, particularly Indigenous youth, young women, youth from marginalised or conflict-affected communities, youth in rural, remote or hard-to-reach areas, displaced youth, and youth with disabilities, face unique challenges due to land degradation. Barriers and challenges differ by age group, level of vulnerability and (dis)ability, gender, education and skills level, social capital, access to land and finance, prevailing social norms in the community, etc.<sup>35</sup> For example, young women tend to face exclusion from the management of land, lack access to agricultural extension services and institutional credit, and encounter barriers to participation in the processes of development, planning, and policymaking. They are particularly vulnerable due to unequal power relations and gender-based discrimination, weak legal and social protections for women's land rights, and less access to information.<sup>36</sup>

**Youth from marginalised communities tend to experience high economic insecurity and social discrimination** which can affect their access to land, information, and extension services, as well as their participation in the labour force due to intergenerational disadvantages. Their unique needs and vulnerabilities must be acknowledged and addressed so they can have equal access to land stewardship initiatives.

*"We must acknowledge that youth is diverse, not a monolith, not one group but many. We must adopt an intersectional lens to identify and act upon the rights and needs of young people."*

### Access to land

Food systems are the largest employer of young people, particularly in the Global South.<sup>37</sup> **Young people who want to engage in independent food production often have no access to land.**<sup>38</sup> Laws and norms create a system of inheritance that makes it difficult for some youth, especially young women, to obtain land: for example, by passing land to the oldest son and limiting the subdivision of land into smaller plots, denying ownership not only to females but also to younger males. Local customs are also key determinants of land rights in rural areas.<sup>39</sup> In addition, **a progressively smaller proportion of young people are inheriting land due to land scarcity.**<sup>40</sup>

In many developing countries, medium-sized commercial farms occupy sizeable amounts of arable land to the detriment of small-scale farming.<sup>41</sup> This land scarcity has been driving rapid changes in land distribution patterns over the past decade and shaping the employment and migration decisions of rural youth.<sup>42</sup> **Young people also experience higher levels of land tenure insecurity.** They are more likely to live in rented accommodations and have lower incomes.<sup>43</sup> Limited access to land and land tenure insecurity inhibits youth from investing in regenerative activities.<sup>44</sup>

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35 CGIAR. 2019. Creating jobs for rural youth in agricultural value chains. [https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/99347/2063\\_PDF.pdf](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/99347/2063_PDF.pdf)

36 UN Women. 2018. Towards A Gender-responsive Implementation of The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Research Paper. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/Towards-a-gender-responsive-implementation-of-UN-Convention-to-Combat-Desertification-en.pdf>

37 IFAD. 2021. Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb5464en/cb5464en.pdf>

38 Ibid.

39 YouthPower. (n.d). Youth and Land. <https://www.youthpower.org/youthpower-issues/topics/youth-and-land#:~:text=Youth%20access%20to%20land%20is,oldest%20boy%20will%20inherit%20land>

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41 IFAD. 2019. Creating opportunities for rural youth. 2019 Rural Development Report. [https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41133075/RDR\\_report.pdf/7282db66-2d67-b514-d004-5ec25d9729a0](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41133075/RDR_report.pdf/7282db66-2d67-b514-d004-5ec25d9729a0)

42 IFAD. 2019. Youth access to land, migration and employment opportunities: evidence from sub-Saharan Africa. Papers for the 2019 Rural Development Report.

43 Prindex. 2020. Prindex Comparative Report 2020. <https://www.prindex.net/reports/prindex-comparative-report-july-2020/>

44 Agroforestry Network. 2022. Agroforestry and Youth – Possibilities and Barriers. [https://agroforestrynetwork.org/database\\_post/agroforestry-and-youth-possibilities-and-barriers/](https://agroforestrynetwork.org/database_post/agroforestry-and-youth-possibilities-and-barriers/)

## Finance and entrepreneurship

**In developing countries, the vast majority of young agricultural entrepreneurs rely on informal financial service providers** to obtain credit, savings, insurance, and other financial services.<sup>45</sup> Informal financial products are often more costly and less flexible, which increases their risk and cost of capital.<sup>46</sup> Given young people's limited experience with financial transactions, **banks or other formal financial institutions often consider youth to be risky clients.**<sup>47</sup> Youth have more difficulty accessing credit when financial institutions require collateral or previous land ownership. Youth also possess weaker social networks, which would allow them to obtain informal credit or to find a respected guarantor to back their formal loan application.<sup>48</sup> **For rural youth, access to finance is even more challenging**, due to the physical distance and cost of travelling to the nearest town for a bank, and financial products that are unsuited for the seasonality and commodity risks of rural agriculture.<sup>49</sup> Among rural youth, young female entrepreneurs are a particularly vulnerable category due to the triple burden of being female, young and rurally located, keeping them vastly unserved by the formal financial sector.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to these challenges, young people also face legal and regulatory restrictions (e.g., a minimum age requirement to open a bank account or obtain a loan), and a lack of adequate protection measures.<sup>51</sup> A weak or discriminatory legal environment (e.g., limited access to a formal national identity card [ID]), also hampers access to finance.<sup>52</sup> **Developing countries have a scarcity of financial facilities that explicitly promote financial access for rural young entrepreneurs**, such as revolving funds, partial credit guarantee schemes, and technical assistance facilities with less rigid access requirements.<sup>53</sup>

Even when youth are supported with grant funding to develop certain initiatives, they **lack fundraising capacity to sustain these initiatives.** For example, despite winning in the Land Heroes challenge, projects on the ground are underfunded. There is little support towards capacity-building on writing grant proposals, exploring avenues for fundraising, or accessing networks of funders.

## Knowledge, information, and capacity

**For young people to be agents of change in land protection and restoration, they need to be educated on these issues and the various ways they can contribute to the process.** A lack of information and capacity can be attributed to low literacy rates, inaccessible or too technical information, a lack of materials available in local languages or in youth-friendly formats, and a lack of dedicated capacity-building programmes.<sup>54</sup> In many rural areas, agricultural knowledge and farming know-how are passed on from parents to children. There is often a mismatch between the education provided by traditional school curricula and the types of practical skills required to be successful in regenerative agriculture.<sup>55</sup> Capacity-building must go beyond technical capacity and enable youth to assess the validity of the financial services they are offered, prepare solid business plans that can be used to attract formal financing, and navigate the intricacies of loan application processes at formal financial institutions, which often require considerably high levels of financial literacy to be completed.<sup>56</sup>

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45 World Bank. 2019. Global Financial Development Report 2019/2020: Bank Regulation and Supervision a Decade after the Global Financial Crisis. Global Financial Development Database. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/gfdr/data/global-financial-development-database>

46 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: A synthesis of lessons and experiences. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc2868en/cc2868en.pdf>

47 FAO, CTA and IFAD. 2014. Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions. [https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/39135645/Youth+and+agriculture\\_Key+challenges+and+concrete+solutions/e803da0e-edc8-461b-961a-233a2dc61458](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/39135645/Youth+and+agriculture_Key+challenges+and+concrete+solutions/e803da0e-edc8-461b-961a-233a2dc61458) .

48 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: : A synthesis of lessons and experiences.

49 IFAD. 2015. How to do: Youth access to rural finance. <https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/40184033/htdn+Youth+access+to+rural+finance.pdf/12f21585-a827-4c1f-bc07-9eb962ff0951>

50 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: : A synthesis of lessons and experiences.

51 IFAD. 2015. Youth access to rural finance.

52 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: A synthesis of lessons and experiences.

53 Ibid.

54 IFAD. 2012. Summary of the findings of the project implemented by MIJARC in collaboration with IFAD and FAO: 'Facilitating access of rural youth to agricultural activities'. The Farmers' Forum Youth session. <http://www.ifad.org/farmer/2012/youth/report.pdf>

55 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: A synthesis of lessons and experiences.

56 Ibid.

## Access to markets and value chains

**Today's youth face dire challenges in the labour market, which increases vulnerabilities.** Of all young workers in developing countries, 96.8 per cent is in the informal economy and many young people in rural areas are employed in low-paid jobs in agriculture.<sup>57</sup> Young people are three times as likely as adults (25 years and older) to be unemployed.<sup>58</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges: between 2019 and 2020, global youth employment declined by 34 million.<sup>59</sup> Of the 429 million young workers worldwide, 13 per cent lives in extreme poverty, and 17 per cent lives in moderate poverty.<sup>60</sup>

**For rural entrepreneurs, market access for their products and opportunities to engage in the broader value chain, including processing, wholesale, and exporting, are fundamental obstacles.** Market linkages are often informal, which increases uncertainty over potential profits and weakens both creditworthiness and business growth prospects in the eyes of formal financial institutions.<sup>61</sup>

## Participation in governance and policymaking

**From international to national to local levels, youth have limited influence in governance and policies for land management.** Existing institutions and policy processes, which support policy development and programme implementation on land restoration rarely include youth on their decision-making bodies, and youth are also mostly absent from national delegations at conferences of key international bodies. Even where youth forums or constituencies do exist, they are under-supported, under-resourced, and inaccessible to the most disadvantaged youth on the ground. Voluntary non-remunerated engagement of young people requires personal time and resources. Not all young people can afford to forego a paid activity, particularly low-income youth.<sup>62</sup>

*"[...]it even turns into "Youth-wash" – it may appear as though there is a room for young people, but their presence is scarce; they're not at the table; their roles are reduced to mere decoration."*

Youth platforms, such as the **UNCCD Youth Caucus or Land Heroes**, often lack a clear mandate and require consistent collaboration with the UNCCD Secretariat to co-create activities. They also need upfront investment of staff time, resources, and technical support in the initial years to engage their network, set up coordination mechanisms, attend and engage in forums that are pertinent to UNCCD's mandate, and support communications to engage their network online and through social media. They may also **lack the capacity to understand the technical language used in the Convention**, especially for youth on the ground, making it hard for them to engage meaningfully in the negotiation process. There are few capacity-building opportunities available to make these processes and technical concepts more accessible. These limitations also exist at the national level. There is little engagement between Land Heroes and their UNCCD national focal points and their national institutions that oversee land management.

Some of the challenges above are systemic and faced by rural residents, youth or not, in most developing countries. It is imperative that these challenges be addressed for all rural land-based populations, to ensure the youth of today are not faced with the same challenges in their future.

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57 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2017. Unlocking the Potential of Youth Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries: From Subsistence to Performance. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/unlocking-the-potential-of-youth-entrepreneurship-in-developing-countries\\_9789264277830-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/unlocking-the-potential-of-youth-entrepreneurship-in-developing-countries_9789264277830-en)

58 ILO. 2020. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_737648.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_737648.pdf)

59 ILO. 2022. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_853321.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_853321.pdf)

60 Ibid.

61 FAO. 2020. Agricultural finance and the youth: prospects for financial inclusion in Kenya. <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb2297en>

62 OECD. 2017. Evidence-Based Policy Making for Youth Well-Being: A Toolkit. Chapter 8: Engaging youth in policy-making processes (Module 6). <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264283923-en>

### 1.3. Strategic opportunities

*Youth are already leading crisis recovery efforts and building resilience in their communities – proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress, and inspiring transformative change, in both urban and rural contexts.*

Despite barriers to their meaningful engagement, many young people are eager to channel their ideas, aspirations, and talents to improve the sustainability of their societies and nations. Their diversity and connectivity are a significant advantage as they become the leaders and changemakers of today and tomorrow.

Given the simultaneous climate, health, and economic crises, more and more youth are recognising that the world's food systems are unsustainable.<sup>63</sup> Most of the youth today are better educated than previous generations and better at adopting new technologies. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has created considerable opportunities for farmers by providing information on the weather, market prices, disease management, and best practices. The use of mobile phones and the Internet differs considerably between age groups: In Sub-Saharan Africa, around 57 per cent of farmers aged 18–25 years have mobile phones with Internet access, which is almost triple the rate of people aged 56 years and above. As a result, youth are in a better position to realise the full potential of ICT technology for agriculture and land restoration.<sup>64</sup>

Youth can be partners in bringing new innovations, skillsets, and ideas to support the transformation of food systems and land restoration. **Indigenous youth** can become leaders in land restoration by blending Indigenous peoples' knowledge and practices with new technologies and resourceful networks. They are well-positioned to effectively reach their communities, understand their needs, and make public information more accessible for community members (e.g., through social media), effectively bridging technological gaps.<sup>65</sup> Involving youth in transforming food systems and land restoration activities can contribute to the creation of the estimated 600 million jobs required over the next 15 years to meet youth employment needs.<sup>66</sup>

**There is largely underexploited potential in investing and building capabilities for youth in agri-food industries** (e.g., production, processing, preservation, and other handling processes, as well as packaging and marketing). Domestic demand for diversified foods is rising in many developing countries and agricultural value chain development presents a real opportunity to support local youth enterprises.<sup>67</sup> Rural areas are limited in terms of access to market and infrastructure, but opportunities exist in early value addition. For example, first-stage food processors (e.g., flour mills, beer breweries) can create jobs in rural areas because these industries are more amenable to being in small towns and rural areas than are enterprises in other sectors.<sup>68</sup>

Financial institutions can leverage the unique strengths that young agricultural entrepreneurs bring, such as increased familiarity with digital financial services, attitude towards innovation, and flexibility to develop targeted, innovative financial products. Collaboration between a young entrepreneur and an established value chain agent could also be a mechanism to give financial institutions some security given the youth entrepreneur's lack of collateral. In exchange, the value chain agent receives regular delivery of the entrepreneur's production at a price formally agreed upon beforehand.<sup>69</sup>

**Youth engagement is a win-win proposition.** Young people benefit by gaining skills, knowledge, autonomy, and a sense of control over their future. Public and private organisations benefit by increasing the value and effectiveness of their processes, projects, and programmes, leading to improved living conditions for all people, young and old, in the countries and communities they serve.

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63 IFAD. 2021. Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems.

64 Landesa (n.d). Landless Youth: A Barrier to Agricultural Transformation and Youth Economic Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa. <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Issue-Brief-FINAL.pdf>

65 IFAD. 2021. Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems.

66 ILO. 2022. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people.

67 OECD. 2018. The Future of Rural Youth in Developing Countries: Tapping the Potential of Local Value Chains. Chapter 2: Approaches for youth inclusion along the agricultural value chain. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264298521-en>

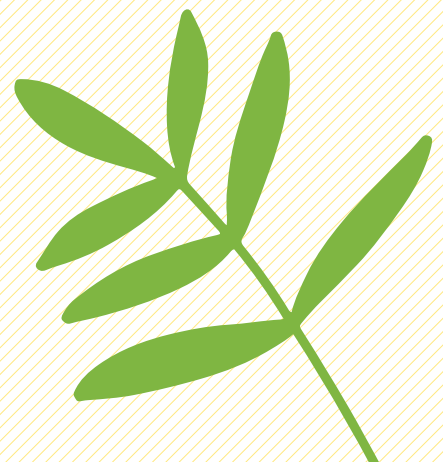
68 CGIAR. 2019. Creating jobs for rural youth in agricultural value chains.

69 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: A synthesis of lessons and experiences.





**“We must acknowledge that youth is diverse, not a monolith, not one group but many. We must adopt an intersectional lens to identify and act upon the rights and needs of young people.”**



# 2. UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy and Action Plan

## 2.1. Vision

The UNCCD YES envisions a future where each successive generation of young people is aware, capacitated, and empowered to fully engage with policies and integrated approaches to land restoration that can support multistakeholder action and positive outcomes for livelihoods, communities, nature, biodiversity, and climate.

Fully recognising that youth are central to achieving UNCCD's strategic and implementation objectives, the YES strives to realise a future where youth and youth organisations are:

- **Invited to participate in UNCCD decision-making processes** and have a strong voice in the broader policy discussions on land use and governance issues that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.
- **Regarded as essential stakeholders in the work of UNCCD**, specifically to assist countries and communities in combatting DLDD through the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of their land resources.
- **Empowered to create opportunities for sustained engagement**, resulting in leadership positions and meaningful jobs and careers that generate shared prosperity from sustainable land and water management practices.

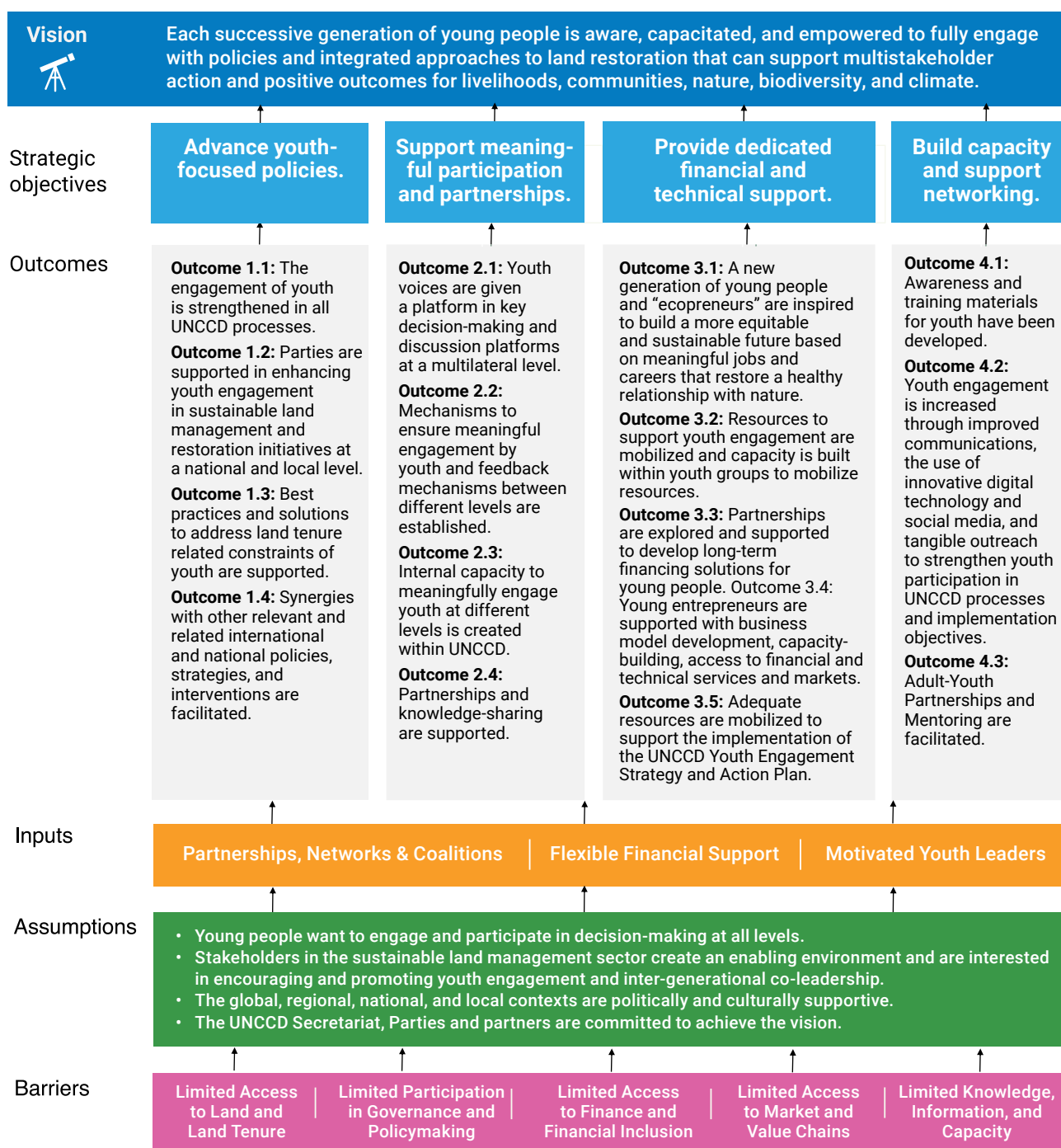
## 2.2. Guiding principles

The YES guiding principles are fundamental understandings that set the standards for, and help drive, UNCCD stakeholder efforts to engage youth in the processes and implementation objectives of the Convention.

1. **Recognise youth as essential agents of change:** UNCCD recognises the significant potential of young people as the changemakers and leaders of today and tomorrow, and views them not just as beneficiaries, but also as actors, knowledge holders, innovators, and partners whose perspectives and contributions should be integrated into the work of the Convention. This recognition calls upon stakeholders to uphold human rights, promote gender equality, and respect the diversity of youth values and experiences through systematic, sustainable, and responsible engagement.
2. **Promote inclusive and meaningful youth participation:** UNCCD recognises the need to cultivate and support enabling environments that promote inclusive and meaningful youth engagement in the processes and implementation objectives of the Convention, including through structured, substantive, and effective participation in official policy processes. This recognition calls upon stakeholders to set clear priorities, implement concrete actions, and establish clear pathways whereby youth participation can have a visible impact on outcomes and decisions.
3. **Build capacity for youth engagement and development:** UNCCD recognises the need to leverage and align resources, networks, and expertise to address the diverse needs of youth and strengthen their agency in the pursuit of sustainable development. This recognition calls upon stakeholders to invest in human and social capital that builds the capacity (e.g., knowledge, green skills, technologies) of young people while enhancing mutual responsiveness, trust, and collaboration needed for civic engagement and healthy development.
4. **Encourage intergenerational partnerships and multistakeholder approaches:** UNCCD recognises the critical importance of intergenerational partnerships and multistakeholder approaches for the success of long-term and integrated development strategies to combat DLDD and scale up SLM and restoration activities. This recognition calls upon stakeholders to create formal and informal mechanisms whereby young people can engage with each other, adults, and society more broadly. This includes participation in volunteering, mentoring, and training schemes, multistakeholder platforms and initiatives, and innovative youth-adult partnerships that attract sustained funding and technical assistance.

Figure 2, below, outlines the theory of change utilised to develop the UNCCD YES and Action Plan.

**Figure 2: Theory of change**



The YES aims to address the barriers and challenges that limit meaningful youth engagement outlined in Section 1.2. Section 2.4 outlines key strategies and actions required to address or overcome these barriers and challenges and achieve the immediate priorities outlined in Section 2.3. These strategies and actions are clustered into outcomes that fall under the four main strategic objectives of advancing youth-focused policies, supporting meaningful participation and partnership, providing dedicated financial and technical support, as well as building capacity and supporting networking.

## 2.3. Immediate priorities

Youth priorities and related actions are interconnected and involve awareness-raising, capacity-building, trusted partnerships, involvement in decision-making processes, and resource mobilisation. The broad focus is on building human and social capital aligned with financial capital to enhance youth engagement in restoring natural capital. This section identifies the strategic priorities for the YES and its related Action Plan, based on the strategic challenges and opportunities outlined above.

- **Include youth in existing governance structures for decision-making and policymaking at different levels.** Ensuring the effective and meaningful participation of youth in UNCCD processes and implementation is vital to strengthen their agency in decision-making on SLM, safeguard environmental rights, and take integrated approaches to biodiversity, climate, and land degradation. Land governance, and related institutions and their administration, can be reformed or restructured in ways that are more inclusive and participatory, increase tenure security, and promote the human rights and dignity of all young people.
- **Enhance access to information and build the capacity of youth to ensure meaningful participation.** Youth engagement is increased through: improved communications with them; their increased knowledge and understanding of UNCCD mechanisms, language and structure; the use of innovative digital technology and social media to support both their access to information and their engagement; and tangible outreach to foster their participation in UNCCD processes and implementation objectives.
- **Create an enabling environment for youth to participate in SLM and land restoration efficiently and effectively.** This includes finding solutions for land ownership and land tenure constraints and enhancing access to finance and markets. The goal is to inspire a new generation of young people and “ecopreneurs” already working to build a more equitable and sustainable future based on meaningful jobs and careers that restore a healthy relationship with nature, in tandem with improvement in the quality of life in rural areas.

## 2.4. Strategic objectives and action plan

**Following the vision and guiding principles, the YES will be implemented through actions at all levels**, from local to global, with the support of UNCCD entities, parties, partners, and other relevant stakeholders. The YES implementation plan describes the diverse roles and responsibilities of UNCCD stakeholders, indicates youth priorities and related actions, and explores options for awareness-raising, capacity-building, and resource mobilisation.

### Strategic objective 1: Advance youth-focused policies.

Youth have an inherent right to be treated as partners in the governance of land resources as they are the ones who will inherit a legacy of land degradation or restoration. Youth, particularly young women, often face bias and discrimination regarding access to, and control of, land resources due to land scarcity and cultural or institutional factors, such as tenure and inheritance systems.

To ensure the meaningful engagement of youth, it is vital that the policies governing land management are drafted in consultation with youth and that they address youth vulnerabilities, particularly around access to land, markets, and representation in policymaking.

#### *Outcome 1.1: The engagement of youth is strengthened in all UNCCD processes.*

Youth are essential stakeholders in implementing the Convention and assisting countries and communities to combat DLDD through the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of land resources. However, young people are often underrepresented in UNCCD decision-making processes and still lack a strong voice in broader policy discussions on land use and governance issues that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.



**“[...] Youth perspectives are rarely considered in decision making processes. Structural barriers such as excessive bureaucracy and the lengthy procedures of international organizations challenge the concrete involvement and representation of youth in agriculture in decision making procedures.”**



*"[...] Youth perspectives are rarely considered in decision making processes. Structural barriers such as excessive bureaucracy and the lengthy procedures of international organizations challenge the concrete involvement and representation of youth in agriculture in decision making procedures."*

The strategic approaches outlined below will strengthen youth engagement in UNCCD processes.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
Support youth to be part of decision-making within the Convention and in official policy development processes at the international, regional, national, and local levels.	Consult or hold workshops with youth to ensure their involvement at all levels.	Short-term	Parties, Secretariat
	Empower youth as negotiators and push for their inclusion in official country delegations to the COP.	Short-term	Parties, Secretariat
	Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for the YES to understand the performance of UNCCD, Parties, and partners on meaningful youth engagement.	Short-term	Secretariat, Parties, Youth Caucus
Embed youth engagement and intergenerational equity within UNCCD work priorities, including the development of operational guidelines and tools for staff, in line with the UNCCD Gender Action Plan.	Develop a systematic framework to ensure the meaningful participation of young people in interventions led by the Secretariat, and design feedback mechanisms.	Medium-term	Secretariat
Build the capacity of youth and support engagement at the multilateral level.	Develop a programme that capacitates youth to engage with the government and take part in policy discussions at the multilateral level.	Long-term	Secretariat
	Organise annual youth conferences ahead of important multilateral events or conferences.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Youth Caucus

**Outcome 1.2: Parties are supported in enhancing youth engagement in sustainable land management and restoration initiatives at a national and local level.**

Youth around the world have an increased awareness of unsustainable food systems and challenges created by the climate, health, and economic crises.<sup>70</sup> Given their higher levels of education and enhanced understanding and access to online information, they can be partners in bringing new innovations, skillsets, and ideas to support the transformation of food systems and land restoration.

*"Poor governance, lack of legal and policy frameworks, and corruption lead to youth often being excluded in decision-making processes in national and traditional spheres, marginalising leadership, management and access to resources."*

Building on the UNCCD Land Heroes campaign, the engagement of youth as champions for SLM can create considerable opportunities to drive land restoration and protect natural capital.

<sup>70</sup> IFAD. 2021. Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
Develop national policies that ensure youth participation and support youth efforts in decision-making processes.	Enshrine youth engagement in long-term national development strategies to avoid fragmentation and promote synergy.	Short-term	Parties
	Support Parties to prepare local, national, and regional level plans for the achievement of LDN involving youth.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties
	Review and reform national laws and policies that prevent youth engagement due to age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, abilities, geographic location, and socioeconomic status.	Short-term	Parties
	Work collaboratively with young people in the communities to obtain long-term and sustainable results in existing policies.	Long-term	CSOs, local government
Raise awareness on, and create linkages between, the international, national, and local policy levels.	Reduce barriers between decision makers and youth by disseminating results of international and national debates at the local level and collecting feedback.	Long-term	Parties, local government, CSOs, academia
	Support youth in their engagement with the government to ensure young people are capacitated and able to actively participate in policy dialogues.	Long-term	Local government, CSOs, academia
	Strengthen the capacity of Parties and partners on youth engagement, so they can work with and for young people as equal partners.	Long-term	Secretariat
	Develop, adapt, and roll out guidance and tools co-created with the UNCCD Youth Caucus on how to meaningfully engage young people in policy discussions.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties

**Outcome 1.3: Best practices and solutions to address land tenure related constraints of youth are supported.**

*“Collective and individual land tenure insecurity among the youth in the climate crisis make them vulnerable contributing to youth marginalization, migration and disenchantment, thus requiring an intersectional approach to climate action.”*

The lack of secure tenure tends to undermine food production and the sustainable use of natural resources. Youth are less likely to access the financing and services needed to make long-term investments in land. Evidence suggests that landlessness, tenure insecurity, and a lack of economic opportunities are the primary drivers of youth migration away from agricultural and rural areas in many developing countries.<sup>71</sup>

Land governance, related institutions, and their administration, can be reformed or restructured in ways that are more inclusive and participatory, increase tenure security, and promote the human rights and dignity of all young people. Inclusive land governance can capitalise on youth energies and capabilities, ensure their needs and expectations are well represented, and build leadership capacities that prepare them for both their current and future responsibilities.<sup>72</sup> Key strategies to support inclusive land governance to the benefit of youth are outlined below.

71 F. Kwame Yeboah et al. 2019. Youth Access to Land, Migration and Employment Opportunities: Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa.

72 See: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/What%20land%20means%20to%20youth\\_English\\_2013.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/What%20land%20means%20to%20youth_English_2013.pdf)

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Strengthen legislation, local institutions, and legal services for youth to ensure that their rights to land resources are recognised and protected.</b>	Ensure that international policies recognise the role of land rights, support traditional knowledge and practices, and provide targeted support to Indigenous and marginalised youth.	Long-term	Parties, Secretariat
	Assess and enhance the status of youth in terms of equal, non-discriminatory, and active participation in formal governance mechanisms related to land administration, development, and planning.	Medium-term	Parties
	Promote the development and implementation of policies and programmes that support the rights of rural youth to access, conserve, sustainably manage, and restore land resources, such as those that include young women and men in state land allocation and redistribution programmes.	Medium-term	Parties
	Ensure the recognition of a range of legitimate tenure rights for youth, especially customary or collective land ownership arrangements, by applying the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) and related technical guides.	Medium-term	Parties, Secretariat
	Strive to reform land inheritance systems, both customary and statutory, to improve young women's access and safeguard more equitable intergenerational transfers, recognising that land provides many benefits that go beyond its productive purposes.	Long-term	Parties
<b>Support the establishment of collaborative governance initiatives to increase rural youth access to land.</b>	Explore the potential of different mechanisms to enhance youth access to land, such as intergenerational transfers, sharecropping or leaseholds, allocation of public or community land, land purchase, rent subsidies, or "matchmaking" services to place young farmers in communities with available land, housing and agricultural advisors.	Medium-term	Parties, local government, CSOs
	Formulate action plans to provide land tenure for youth who implement sustainable land and ecosystem restoration activities.	Short- to medium-term	Local government, CSOs

*Outcome 1.4: Synergies with other relevant and related international and national policies, strategies, and interventions are facilitated.*

Youth will inherit the lasting effects of land degradation, climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, and worsening inequality. Land restoration is one of the most effective interventions to address both species loss and greenhouse gas emissions. There is an increasing need to enhance coordination and capitalise on synergies in the policies and commitments of the three Rio Conventions, which share common themes and have interrelated goals. This also involves creating synergies between the youth bodies established under these conventions to ensure coordinated advocacy, action, and knowledge-sharing.



Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
Support cross-convention collaboration of youth.	Facilitate national and/or international level youth dialogues on the Rio Conventions, so youth can create linkages between the efforts on biodiversity, climate, and land degradation.	Short-term	Parties, CSOs, Secretariat
	Host common youth conferences or platforms to discuss linkages between the conventions, identify key challenges, and find common solutions.	Medium-term	Secretariat(s)

## Strategic objective 2: Support meaningful participation and partnerships.

To ensure stronger, effective, and meaningful participation of youth in UNCCD governance processes and implementation, youth voices and agency in decision-making on sustainable land and water management policies and practices must be strengthened. This involves creating a platform and mechanisms for youth to participate in important discussions and decision-making, and partnering with young people at different levels to offer support and opportunities for collaboration.

*"[...] We must focus on both, fostering the inclusion of young people and making space for them in our organizations and activities and on building their skills and capacities to engage and provide inputs to our activities and programs."*

### Outcome 2.1: Youth voices are given a platform in key decision-making and discussion platforms at a multilateral level.

To promote meaningful engagement, the perspectives and unique challenges of youth must be understood, and existing power dynamics must be addressed to support more inclusive participation, give youth a platform to voice their ideas and concerns, and allow them to contribute to discussions and take action. Young people need access to gender- and disability-responsive safe spaces, with youth-friendly methods and resources, and to have their voices heard without judgment or discrimination. It is important to integrate information and feedback from these platforms into land management and land restoration policy and implementation processes, and to ensure that their inputs and feedback are considered and actioned.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
Support youth-centric governance and advisory bodies to influence global, regional, and national policy deliberations, including youth parliaments and commissions, task forces and student councils, and youth networks, assemblies, and caucuses.	Involve young people in formal and informal governing processes, such as through paid internship, mentorship, or fellowship programmes at national ministries or focal agencies responsible for UNCCD-related matters.	Medium-term	Parties
	Support the institutionalisation of youth participation in LDN target setting and LDN transformative projects and programmes through national and sub-national LDN planning commissions, including youth involvement in LDN working groups or task forces.	Medium-term	Parties
	Ensure the fair and balanced representation of youth who can speak on behalf of the target population.	Medium-term	Parties, Secretariat
	Support the creation of Youth Advisory Groups/chapters at the national level that are integrated with the UNCCD Youth Caucus to ensure local-level inputs.	Medium-term	Secretariat

<b>Provide youth-inclusive and safe spaces for engagement.</b>	Promote youth-led events, by creating space and opportunity for youth to create their own events and take the lead.	Medium-term	Secretariat, donors
	Organise annual UNCCD Intergenerational Dialogues in collaboration with the UNCCD Youth Caucus where a diverse group of young people can present their perspectives and discuss with national governments and other key stakeholders how to collaborate on the land restoration agenda.	Short-term	Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, donors
	Create a forum to showcase youth initiatives on land restoration at a high-level event of the UNCCD COP with the UNCCD Youth Caucus, and provide travel-paid opportunities for young persons to represent their organisations and initiatives.	Short-term	Secretariat, donors, CSOs
	Promote the inclusion and consideration of youth in organisations (including boards of directors, city councils, etc.) and existing rural or urban networks.	Long-term	Parties, local government, CSOs, private sector
<b>Strengthen the role of the UNCCD Youth Caucus.</b>	Clarify the mandate of the caucus, by benchmarking it with other youth constituencies, such as YOUNGO and Global Youth Biodiversity Network and enhance synergies with the activities of the Secretariat.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Consider establishing thematic working groups relevant to SLM and land restoration.	Long-term	Secretariat, Youth Caucus
	Have a dedicated UNCCD staff focal point to coordinate with the caucus.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Involve the caucus in the design of initiatives, implementation, and monitoring.	Long-term	Secretariat
	Support the caucus with fundraising.	Short-term	Secretariat, donors, CSOs
	Connect the caucus with Parties and other stakeholders so they can build trust and relationships for engagement at regional, national, and local levels.	Medium-term	Secretariat
	Ensure youth representation on the UNCCD CSO panel to build their capacity and support their collaboration with CSO stakeholders.	Short-term	Secretariat, CSOs
	Provide resources for the caucus to support vulnerable youth members to attend the COP.	Medium-term	Secretariat, donors
	Support the caucus in developing a website and social media outreach to become the go-to place for youth interested in land restoration.	Medium-term	Secretariat, donors
	Establish an alumni network to inspire, motivate, and educate current members on how to build on progress made in policy processes, based on the experience of previous members.	Long-term	Youth Caucus

*Outcome 2.2: Mechanisms to ensure meaningful engagement by youth and feedback mechanisms between different levels are established.*

Creating mechanisms for youth engagement includes reaching out to youth and gathering their inputs and perceptions in a structured way. An important feature is ensuring that young people are involved at every level and that there are efficient and effective feedback mechanisms between the levels to ensure information flows in both directions and to enhance accountability.

*“Established mechanisms to engage young people are often fragmented, leading to duplication of efforts. Collaboration and coordination between youth-serving organizations can help overcome this challenge and amplify our efforts in meaningfully engaging with young people.”*

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Support youth-led research and inputs to inform policy at the national level.</b>	Support youth-inclusive and youth-led data collection, analysis, and research on meaningful youth engagement in environmental and land issues.	Short-term	Parties
	Establish representative youth advisory councils at the national level, with members selected through a fair and transparent process, for youth to regularly engage with national-level policy and programmes.	Short-term	Parties
	Develop strong and adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, for example by linking youth councils with national and local parliaments or other decision-making bodies.	Medium-term	Parties
	Work with communities at the local level and provide opportunities for youth to have meaningful dialogues with policymakers.	Medium-term	Parties, local governments, CSOs
	Consult youth, particularly from Indigenous communities, on the ground for publications and knowledge products through extensive surveys and questionnaires to ensure research considers their needs and perspectives.	Short-term	Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, academia
	Create youth focal points within government, institutionalise youth engagement in negotiations, and embed them in the system.	Long-term	Parties, Secretariat
<b>Involve young people in the implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the YES and its Action Plan and other UNCCD processes.</b>	Encourage youth to hold governments and non-state actors to account in implementing LDN targets and other commitments and priorities under the UNCCD, including participation in associated monitoring, reporting, and evaluation activities.	Medium-term	Parties, Youth Caucus, Secretariat, CSOs
	Engage youth at all stages of decision-making, including design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of interventions.	Long-term	Secretariat, Parties

**Outcome 2.3: Internal capacity to meaningfully engage youth at different levels is created within UNCCD.**

In addition to strengthening youth engagement in UNCCD governance processes, there is also a need to strengthen the consideration of youth in internal processes and procedures, enhancing capacities for youth engagement, and exploring how youth can contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives.

*“An effort that aims to engage youth needs to be led by youth, the main focal points and drive behind youth engagement in UNCCD should also be reflected within the ranks of UNCCD itself: How many youths in UNCCD are in senior and decision-making positions. Empowered youth inspire youth, and for UNCCD to engage and empower the youth of the world, the youth working in it needs to be empowered as well.”*

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Create internal capacity to engage youth.</b>	Conduct a capacity needs assessment to inform all stakeholders of the challenges and opportunities to increase youth engagement in efforts to combat DLDD through the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of land resources.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Dedicate resources and staff to make intergovernmental processes more youth-friendly, while, at the same time, building youth capacity on how these processes work.	Medium-term	Secretariat
<b>Employ more youth and enhance the engagement of existing young staff.</b>	Employ more youth as staff in the UNCCD Secretariat.	Medium-term	Secretariat
	Establish an internal youth group to look at innovative strategies to better engage and retain young talent and partake in decision-making.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Establish a mentorship programme to foster professional growth and cross-team collaboration among employees and ensure regular exchanges to facilitate meaningful connections between interns, young colleagues, and senior managers within the organisation.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Build internal capacity of young staff based on a skills and capacity needs assessment.	Medium-term	Secretariat
	Review and improve the onboarding support for young staff by developing an onboarding programme.	Short-term	Secretariat

**Outcome 2.4: Partnerships and knowledge-sharing are supported.**

An important part of facilitating the meaningful participation of youth in SLM discussions, decision-making and implementation at an international, regional, national, and local level is developing partnerships and networks to link youth groups or youth champions to important stakeholders in land governance and management to facilitate their presence at key events and in important discussions.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
Create awareness around successful youth initiatives and the need to involve youth in SLM and land restoration efforts.	Map young leaders working in land restoration to enhance visibility of their efforts and create a network/group of champions.	Short-term	Parties, Secretariat, CSOs
	Recognise youth as land champions and work with youth-led organisations/networks/groups to raise awareness and influence others in their communities.	Medium-term	Parties, Secretariat
	Increase institutional understanding on how to utilise the connections, knowledge, skills, and capacities of young people to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	Long-term	Parties, Secretariat, CSOs, academia
Support youth in building partnerships with key land management actors.	Build partnerships with youth-led organisations/networks/groups and advocates, such as through memoranda of understanding (MoUs), joint campaigns, direct grants, etc.	Medium-term	Secretariat, local governments, CSOs
	Facilitate platforms that bring together the private sector, CSO stakeholders, and youth who are already working in SLM, agriculture, or forestry, or who are interested in becoming involved in these areas.	Short-term	Parties, private sector, CSOs
	Work with large groups of young people who can collaborate on large-scale initiatives, with the support of national networks that have a diverse membership of CSOs and youth groups.	Long-term	Secretariat
	Encourage and incentivise youth political participation, through their engagement with employers' and workers' organisations to enhance their involvement in social dialogue processes.	Medium-term	Parties, local government, CSOs
Support the development of partnerships and collaboration between youth groups at different levels.	Support learning and knowledge exchange among youth through peer-to-peer initiatives that convene youth leaders – particularly Indigenous youth leaders – on a periodic basis, annual workshops to provide updates on UNCCD activities, and landscape storytelling initiatives.	Medium-term	Secretariat

### Strategic objective 3: Provide dedicated financial and technical support.

To ensure youth engagement and their meaningful participation, dedicated resources must be set aside and made available to support initiatives led by young people, and include technical support to enhance design, implementation, fundraising, monitoring, and scaling of youth-led activities.

*Outcome 3.1: A new generation of young people and “ecopreneurs” are inspired to build a more equitable and sustainable future based on meaningful jobs and careers that restore a healthy relationship with nature.*

Youth access to land for livelihoods does not simply refer to economic gain or employment but also to other necessities of life, such as education, community, and culture, which influence their quality-of-life decisions. Unemployment rates for youth are three times higher than for adults in all regions of the world, and most of the unemployed youth are young women. Youth also have a higher incidence of working poverty and vulnerable employment than adults as they face barriers in accessing land, credit, services, and other productive assets needed to secure stable livelihoods.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> ILO. 2022. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people.

**Decent Jobs for Youth** is the global initiative to scale up action and impact on youth employment under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Launched in 2016, Decent Jobs for Youth is a unique platform for partners to address fragmentation and catalyse effective, innovative, and evidence-based action at country and regional levels.

The African Agribusiness Youth Strategy (AAYS) creates a continental framework for creating an enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship and youth employment in agribusiness including the integration of Youth Agribusiness into National Agriculture Investment Plans, Youth Employment Strategies, Entrepreneurship Development Plans etc.<sup>74</sup>

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Strive to create meaningful, safe, and dignified employment opportunities that unlock the potential of a young vibrant workforce, especially in rural areas.</b>	Explore the potential of youth public employment programmes, private sector incentives, community-based initiatives, and protected area management.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, CSOs, academia
	Ensure youth training and employment opportunities lead to leadership positions, jobs, and careers that generate security and shared prosperity from nature conservation, sustainable land and water management, and rewilding practices.	Long-term	Government, CSOs, private sector
	Co-create promotional fairs with youth-led clubs/groups, with the participation of the public and private sector stakeholders, to create awareness of the emerging sectors, among students, and offer opportunities for employers to meet potential new employees.	Short-term	Government, donors, CSOs, academia
	Promote youth entrepreneurship and green jobs in land restoration, and link existing initiatives with youth to include skill development for these roles.	Medium-term	Government, donors, CSOs, academia
<b>Support youth innovation and entrepreneurship in land restoration activities, both individually and collectively, through innovative social finance, digital innovation, and resource distribution, including through cooperatives, networks, and other mechanisms that facilitate young people's access to productive assets, technologies, markets, and infrastructure.</b>	Repurpose harmful farm subsidies and offer incentives that promote agroecological and regenerative practices, technologies, and approaches to support the transition to more sustainable and resilient local and regional food systems, specifically to generate new employment opportunities or enhance the quality of existing agricultural employment for youth.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, private sector
	Invest in the development of peri-urban food systems activities and jobs as part of a rural-urban continuum, supporting youth mobility between food manufacturing and retailing, agripreneurship, and primary production in, or close to, urban areas.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, private sector, CSOs
	Work with existing cooperatives to assess their level of youth engagement and support them to engage more youth in their governance and membership.	Short-term	Parties, CSOs, private sector
	Support youth engagement down the agriculture and forestry value chain.	Medium-term	Parties, CSOs, private sector
	Provide business development and marketing trainings, including digital marketing, the basics of selling produce, etc.	Short-term	Parties, CSOs, private sector, academia

<sup>74</sup> Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (n.d.). Creating Opportunities for youth entrepreneurship – African Agribusiness Youth Strategy (AAYS) launched. <https://www.donorplatform.org/post/creating-opportunities-for-youth-entrepreneurship-african-agribusiness-youth-strategy-aays-launched/>



**“An effort that aims to engage youth needs to be led by youth, the main focal points and drive behind youth engagement in UNCCD should also be reflected within the ranks of UNCCD itself: How many youths in UNCCD are in senior and decision-making positions. Empowered youth inspire youth, and for UNCCD to engage and empower the youth of the world, the youth working in it needs to be empowered as well.”**

*Outcome 3.2: Resources to support youth engagement are mobilised and capacity is built within youth groups to mobilise resources.*

*"[...] Youth engagement is a programmatic matter which takes planning and financial resources [...] which brings in the either targeted youth or youth as a constituency."*

Strengthening youth engagement and meaningful participation requires considerable human and financial resources. These resources can be mobilised by building partnerships with governments, CSOs, and the private sector, and by developing and securing dedicated donor-funded projects and programmes. To ensure sustainability in the long-term, it is also important to capacitate youth to be able to build partnerships and mobilise resources.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Provide financial and technical support for youth engagement.</b>	Secure dedicated technical and financial resources for meaningful youth engagement in institutions, including for interventions, such as developing and rolling out capacity-building activities, undertaking research, implementing projects, supporting youth-led initiatives, facilitating young people's participation, etc.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, CSOs, private sector
	Offer monetary grants and other incentives or serve as connectors, brokers, and conveners for mobilising public and private finance, including matching contributions for youth and youth groups to develop grant proposals and business plans, manage programme budgets, and apply monitoring and evaluation protocols.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, CSOs, private sector
	Provide capacity-building for developing long-term strategic financing plans to ensure youth-led groups are equipped with the tools, relationships, and models to sustainably manage land resources and build funding partnerships that create dignified jobs and careers.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, CSOs, private sector, academia
<b>Build capacity among youth groups and individuals to mobilise resources.</b>	Explore ways to financially support youth-led non-governmental organisations and entities, which traditionally rely upon volunteer donors – particularly those in low-income countries that have restricted access to grants from developed countries or UN agencies due to stringent requirements or other structural barriers.	Medium-term	Secretariat, donors, CSOs, private sector
	Support training and mentorship programmes for restoration entrepreneurs, targeted at building pitching, communications, financial, and supply chain management skills, as well as providing networking opportunities, mainstreaming gender, and boosting the investment readiness of youth-led companies.	Short-term	Donors, CSOs, private sector
	Mobilise resources for young people and support youth entrepreneurs with fundraising, by engaging with philanthropy, large CSOs, and climate funds.	Short-term	Secretariat, donors, CSOs, private sector



*Outcome 3.3: Partnerships are explored and supported to develop long-term financing solutions for young people.*

Youth and youth organisations are eager to move beyond seed funding and are calling for investments in long-term partnerships. Youth civil society is currently seen as fragile, with the norm being short-term, non-continuous funding for youth organisations. The ongoing impacts of environmental disasters, increased conflict and violence, and the COVID-19 pandemic put the sustainability of youth engagement even more at risk.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Promote the development and availability of affordable and inclusive financial services.</b>	Explore the potential of direct funds, favourable interest rates, cash transfers, targeted subsidies, microcredit and other credit programmes, start-up capital, and insurance targeted at youth and their needs.	Short-term	Parties, private sector, donors
	Develop financial advisory, training, and extension services tailored to the needs of young people.	Medium-term	Parties, private sector, donors, CSOs
	Support young people to engage in designing financial instruments and mechanisms to finance land restoration and conservation at the local levels.	Medium-term	CSOs, academia
	Work with local banks and financial institutions to increase young people's financial inclusion and devise simpler processes and dedicated programmes to provide loans to youth for SLM.	Long-term	Parties, private sector
	Enhance diaspora contribution to rural development by fostering diaspora investments to agricultural enterprises.	Long-term	Private sector, donors
<b>Provide funding and investments for youth-led restoration initiatives.</b>	Consider establishing a special grantee fund for youth to provide working capital to youth-led businesses in land restoration at the country level.	Medium-term	Secretariat, parties, donors
	Governments can consider providing credit lines and low-interest loan programmes to enable better access to finance for youth.	Medium-term	Parties, private sector
	Invest in youth-led projects and provide technical and financial support to innovative youth-led initiatives.	Short-term	Donors, private sector
	Establish a youth fund supporting young farmers, showcasing best practices and kickstarting collective action.	Long-term	Donors, private sector
	Support incubators and accelerators for youth enterprises in land restoration, which can support youth to start enterprises and provide both infrastructure (labs, computers, equipment, demonstration plots) and services (coaching, training and direct support to access resources) to help scale up enterprises.	Long-term	Secretariat, Parties, donors, CSOs, private sector

*Outcome 3.4: Young entrepreneurs are supported with business model development, capacity-building, access to financial and technical services and markets.*

In many areas of the world, youth are leading crisis recovery efforts and building resilience in their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress, and inspiring transformative change, in both urban and rural contexts. Youth are well-positioned to effectively reach their communities, understand their needs, and develop targeted, well-adapted solutions to local challenges. Building youth's capacity must go beyond

technical capacity and enable youth to assess the validity of the financial services they are offered, prepare solid business plans that can be used to attract formal financing, and navigate the intricacies of the loan application processes of formal financial institutions, which often require high levels of financial literacy.<sup>75</sup>

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Build capacity and incentivise youth entrepreneurship in SLM and land restoration.</b>	Provide training and incentives for young people to take the lead in creating greener and more sustainable urban environments and strengthening urban-rural linkages (e.g., by caring for forests, wetlands, and parks, revitalising landfills, wastelands, and brownfields, building green, blue, and renewable energy infrastructure, and managing organic farms and gardens).	Short-term	Parties, CSOs, academia, private sector
<b>Support the development of linkages between youth and key partners that can support business development.</b>	Create spaces and networks where youth organisations can share their know-how and establish connections to build long-term collaborative relationships for sustained finance, including through the public sector, crowdfunding campaigns, business loans, foundation grants, individual and corporate donations, and contributions from faith-based organisations and CSOs.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, CSOs, private sector
	Facilitate and support the participation of young people in meaningful and paid internship and fellowship programmes, youth land ambassador programmes, and mentoring programmes (intergenerational partnerships) so they can gain core and technical skills, experience, and networks.	Medium-term	Donors, CSOs, academia
	Support collaboration between young established entrepreneurs and youth-led start-ups, to create peer-to-peer mentoring and guidance opportunities for youth-led start-ups, as well as opportunities for pairing with companies and national governments.	Medium-term	Secretariat, donors Parties, CSOs, private sector, academia
	Support community-based initiatives through business models that promote the engagement of youth.	Long-term	Parties, donors, private sector
	Support youth agripreneurs and foresters with access to markets and inputs.	Medium-term	Parties, donors, private sector, CSOs
	Support agripreneurs and community-based initiatives with access to finance by connecting them with savings groups and dedicated programmes in financial institutions.	Long-term	Parties, donors, private sector, CSOs
<b>Create an enabling environment for youth entrepreneurs.</b>	Invest in the infrastructure that can support youth farmers, foresters, and entrepreneurs to access markets and storage for their produce.	Long-term	Parties, donors, private sector
	Invest in extension services for youth entrepreneurs to learn about agroecological approaches, and expand extension services to enable better access for youth.	Long-Term	Parties, donors, CSOs
	Support youth-led technological innovation by supporting young scientists and technical experts to advance research in land restoration in local contexts.	Short-Term	Parties, donors, private sector, CSOs

75 FAO. 2022. Promoting access to agricultural finance for youth in developing countries: A synthesis of lessons and experiences.

*Outcome 3.5: Adequate resources are mobilised to support the implementation of the UNCCD Youth Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.*

The YES aims to increase funding and support to ensure that youth engagement activities are adequately resourced. Many youth initiatives currently rely on a diversified portfolio of private and public funding. Increased financial and in-kind assistance would strengthen and expand the ecosystem of youth-led and youth-inclusive organisations working on SLM, DLDD and land restoration.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
Increase the amount of flexible funding available that supports youth engagement and empowerment in their local communities and decision-making bodies at all levels, including through boosting existing financial mechanisms and youth funds.	Develop a detailed budget for YES implementation priorities and include YES activities in annual workplans.	Short-term	Secretariat, parties
	Identify available funding sources and opportunities for future funding to support the implementation of YES strategies and actions.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Work with donors and other partners to secure funding for youth initiatives and actions outlined in the YES.	Medium-term	Secretariat

**Strategic objective 4: Build capacity and support networking.**

Building young people’s knowledge and skills in SLM in ways that are accessible to disadvantaged and marginalised youth and enabling youth to connect with each other to collaborate is an important step towards intergenerational equity.

*“Colonial, post and neo-colonial, and neo-liberal based systems lead to profit driven land governance, rather than community or people led governance. Unequal access to education, information, and training, prevent young people from engaging with land.”*

*Outcome 4.1: Awareness and training materials for youth have been developed.*

Awareness-raising seeks to inform and educate people about a challenge or problem with the intention of changing or shaping their attitudes and behaviours towards implementing solutions. Central to YES implementation and, as recently demonstrated by youth movements and campaigns on climate action and food systems, awareness can lead to advocacy that mobilises the power of public opinion and influences the political will of decision makers.

*“Farmers are often perceived with negative connotations of low education, economically disadvantaged and from lower social classes. There is also a knowledge gap that is increasing between older and younger generations. Agriculture should be normalized and perceived as an intriguing and essential profession for youth. It is essential to develop local competencies, for example through local networks delivering technical trainings, combining indigenous knowledge and innovative practices targeted to local needs.”*

There are many awareness-raising strategies, methods, and tools that stakeholders can employ to help make youth engagement more visible within a community or globally, and more importantly to issue a call to action that will prompt youth and adults to do something they have not done before.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<p><b>Ensure youth have access to the knowledge and support needed to meaningfully participate in national and local level planning, decision-making, and management practices, such as those employed in regenerative agriculture, agroforestry and silvopastoralism, forest and watershed restoration, and green, blue, and renewable energy infrastructure.</b></p>	<p>Incentivise youth-focused non-governmental organisations to consider more contextual nature-based solutions to land management problems through initiatives like the farmer school programmes.</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>	<p>Parties, CSOs, academia</p>
	<p>Incentivise more university programmes and executive courses on sustainable agriculture and forestry.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Parties, academia, CSOs</p>
	<p>Offer tuition-free training in regenerative practices at agricultural schools, and/or interest-free loans and stipends for their first few years of farming or technical research on land restoration.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Parties, donors, academia, CSOs, private sector</p>
	<p>Fund scholarships for young students in all majors and degrees that include research and applied science in the many fields related to SLM, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental sustainability, and nature-based solutions.</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Parties, donors, academia, CSOs, private sector</p>
	<p>Educate children and students of all levels on the key role of farmers and land stewards, elevating professions along agri-food systems from production and value chains to consumption.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Parties, academia, CSOs</p>
	<p>Raise awareness of school students on SLM through curriculum enhancements.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Parties, academia, CSOs</p>
	<p>Train the trainers and inform teachers educating children in different settings about the importance of sustainable agriculture, food security and diverse diets, to enable the engagement of new generations in food systems and SLM.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Parties, academia, CSOs</p>
	<p>Develop innovative programmes that integrate basic education curricula with the restoration agenda, and train youth in environmental beautification, urban agriculture, and urban landscaping.</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>	<p>Parties, donors, academia, CSOs</p>
	<p>Produce educational resources that promote an understanding of national and local land laws and youth rights, especially in relation to the commitments made under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 (LDN), Paris Agreement, Global Biodiversity Framework, and other global and regional processes.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, academia</p>
	<p>Develop youth-friendly knowledge products, guides, tools, and other resources that could be used/adapted at the country level for supporting young people to develop their skills and capacities to be able to contribute to national and multilateral processes and agendas.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, academia</p>
	<p>Work with Parties to ensure land restoration is better incorporated in extension services that are currently more focused on conventional practices for agriculture and forestry.</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>	<p>Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, academia</p>

<b>Raise awareness on land degradation and restoration among young people at different levels.</b>	Share information on DLDD and land restoration through a range of tools and platforms, such as radio, television, video, websites, social and digital media, mobile phones, newspapers, newsletters, poster campaigns, and the arts.	Short-term	Secretariat, Parties
	Use awareness-raising campaigns as an advocacy tool to build trust and knowledge within diverse youth communities, especially those that have been disenfranchised or are in vulnerable situations.	Short-term	Secretariat, Parties
	Work with young role models (e.g., Land Heroes) to gain interest and build the capacity of larger groups of youth on land restoration, agroecological approaches, and how to be an entrepreneur.	Medium-term	Secretariat
	Facilitate access to relevant information and knowledge in more accessible and simpler formats at local levels.	Short-term	Secretariat, CSOs, academia
	Document young people's initiatives for visibility, and support and raise public awareness on the role of youth in land restoration and drought prevention, by showcasing concrete examples.	Short-term	Secretariat, CSOs
	Ensure communications strategies for awareness-raising and advocacy lead to action on the ground, respect the traditional knowledge and practices of young Indigenous peoples and local communities, consult and include them in decision-making processes, and ensure free, prior, and informed consent.	Short-term	Secretariat
<b>Foster dialogue and intergenerational exchange around SLM and DLDD.</b>	Organise national consultations with key stakeholders within government, the private sector, and civil society working to combat DLDD and restore degraded land and soil, with the aim to foster interministerial and intersectoral dialogue to identify entry points for increased awareness and youth engagement in the national context.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, academia
	Support youth networks and host public events that engage youth in policy debates, thematic discussions, roundtables, seminars, webinars, workshops, conferences, vigils, exhibitions, demonstrations, and the arts, as vehicles to raise public awareness and consciousness.	Short-term	Secretariat, Parties, donors, CSOs, academia
	Strengthen collaboration with relevant organisations working on youth engagement, by jointly organising and launching in-depth trainings in collaboration with potential investors and policymakers.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties, donors, private sector

*Outcome 4.2: Youth engagement is increased through improved communications, the use of innovative digital technology and social media, and tangible outreach to strengthen youth participation in UNCCD processes and implementation objectives.*

Youth are often excluded from transparent communication processes regarding land and water management policies and practices. Many young people remain unaware and unengaged in environmental issues that directly affect their local communities and ecosystems, and are not informed of the possibilities for engagement in decision-making and SLM activities. Effective communications tools and platforms require clearly defined goals and the ability to capture an audience with inspirational and memorable stories. Regardless of the method, the key focus is to build connection and credibility among youth, so they pay attention and are motivated to engage with a call to action.

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Strive for better communication methods and information-sharing that consider, value, and treat young people and youth networks, associations, and organisations as essential and trusted partners in the work of the Convention.</b>	Create and support open and decentralised spaces that encourage and respect youth participation to improve decision-making and effectively respond to immediate and convergent social, economic, and environmental challenges, including youth-led digital platforms aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue on approaches and technologies that preserve their tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties, donors, CSOs, academia
	Utilise modern information dissemination outlets, such as social media, online tools, webinars, and video clips, to reach a wider youth audience and facilitate outreach and communication, including through innovative public advocacy campaigns that raise their awareness of environmental challenges and land-based solutions that can be tailored to their local development priorities.	Short-term	Secretariat, CSOs
	Explore new formats for increasing the effectiveness of the Young Land Heroes campaign, and consider organising a Youth Restoration Hackathon to engage youth in sharing ideas and brainstorming solutions to combat DLDD and scale up LDN and restoration initiatives.	Short-term	Secretariat
	Work with youth-led organisations to launch multilingual social media campaigns in collaboration with influencers, particularly those from local communities, on the importance of land restoration.	Short-term	Secretariat, CSOs

#### *Outcome 4.3: Adult-youth partnerships and mentoring are facilitated.*

Youth-adult partnerships treat young people as equal partners, cultivate trust, enable them to build self-esteem, and encourage the development of problem-solving and leadership skills. These partnerships are based on honest information exchange, respect for a diversity of experiences and opinions, and clear expectations about roles and decision-making. These relationships not only contribute to positive youth development and civic engagement but can also promote adult development and strengthen local institutions, policies, and programmes.<sup>76</sup>

Youth-adult partnerships provide young women and men with legitimate opportunities to build social networks, gain competencies, and experience a sense of connectedness even during periods of personal vulnerability and developmental risk.<sup>77</sup>

Strategic approaches	Actions	Time Horizon	Responsible
<b>Establish youth-adult partnerships, both individually and collectively.</b>	Provide mentoring and business opportunities for youth to create secure and stable livelihoods from their engagement in responsible governance and planning, sustainable land and water management, and green entrepreneurship.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties, CSOs, academia
	Fund projects, programmes, campaigns, and organisations that encourage youth and policymakers to work side-by-side, focusing on initiatives and youth-adult partnerships that provide financial support to young people interested in restoring the land, especially those in vulnerable situations.	Medium-term	Secretariat, Parties, donors, CSOs

<sup>76</sup> See: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-framework-for-effectively-partnering-with-young-people>

<sup>77</sup> See: <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/youthadultpartnership/files/2012/10/Am-Journal-of-Community-Psych-paper.pdf>



**Youth are already leading crisis recovery efforts and building resilience in their communities – proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress, and inspiring transformative change, in both urban and rural contexts.**



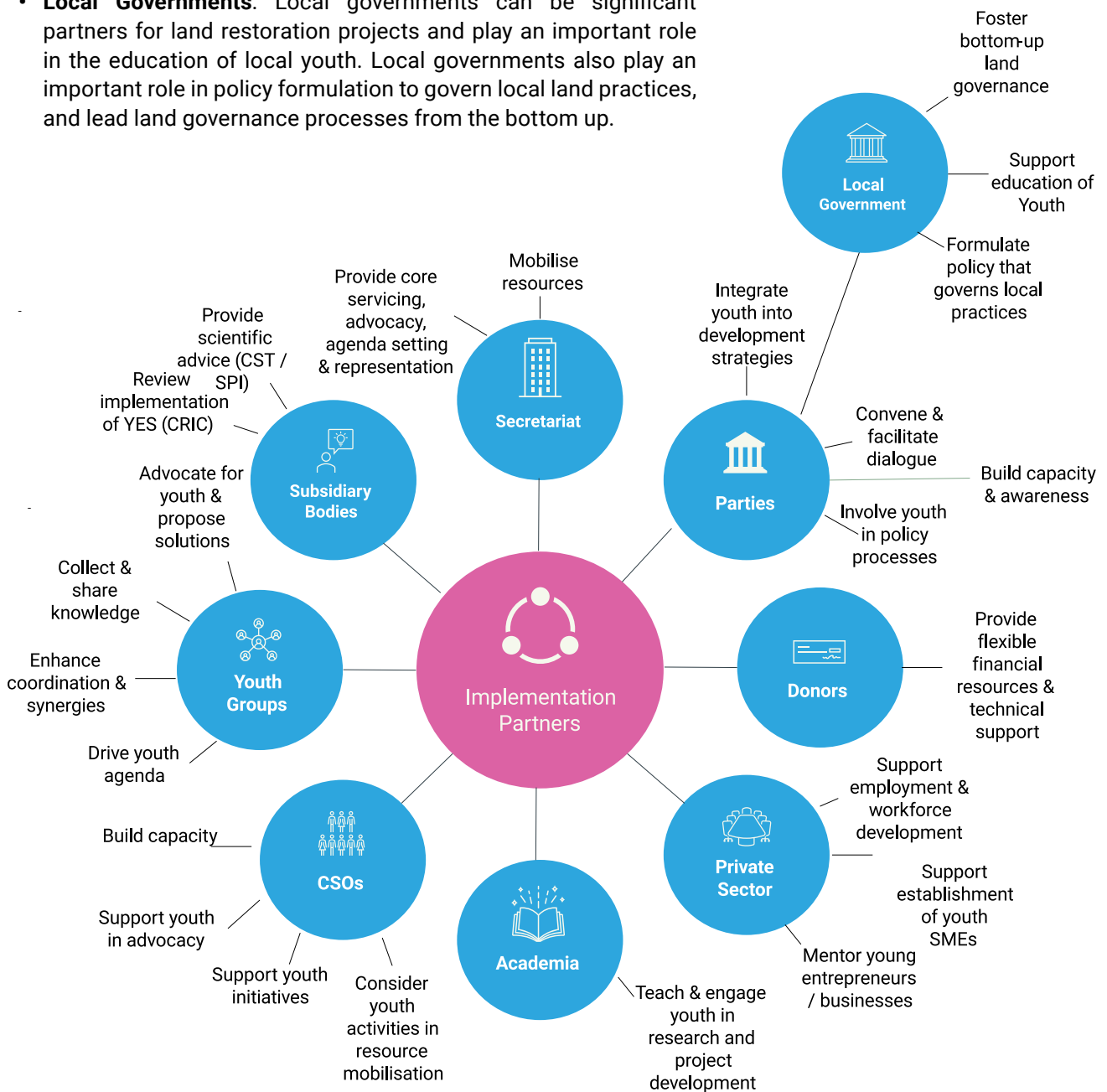
## 2.5 Implementation partners for youth engagement in UNCCD

**UNCCD stakeholders offer diverse entry points for increasing youth engagement in the processes and implementation objectives of the Convention.** Each can leverage their unique assets, capacities, and networks to promote youth-adult partnerships at different levels to support SLM, combat DLDD and restore degraded land and soil. Following the vision and guiding principles, the YES will be implemented through actions at all levels, from local to global, with the support of UNCCD entities, partners, and other relevant stakeholders.

- **Secretariat:** Successful implementation of the YES requires the strong core servicing, advocacy, agenda-setting, and representation functions of the UNCCD Secretariat and the Global Mechanism, with the commensurate capacity and resources to support Parties and other stakeholders in fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities.
- **Parties:** National governments play an important role in implementation of the YES. Policies and programmes that promote capacity-building for youth participation can be integrated into long-term development strategies at national and sub-national levels to facilitate their meaningful engagement in land and ecosystem restoration activities. Parties can explore youth inclusion in the COP, LDN targets, national drought plans and action programmes, in accordance with their development priorities and in a spirit of youth solidarity and partnership.
- **Subsidiary bodies:** The Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) can play a role in assisting the COP with review of YES implementation. The Committee on Science and Technology (CST), with input from the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), can provide scientific advice for the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of the YES. SPI could also include young representatives among their members.
- **Youth organisations:** Young people and youth organisations, networks, and movements are the core constituents essential for making YES implementation a success. They are not just beneficiaries, but also knowledge holders, innovators, and trusted partners who, when authentically engaged, can advance the work of the Convention.
- **Civil society organisations:** CSOs often drive initiatives at both national and grassroots levels, including awareness-raising, monitoring and evaluation, and resource mobilisation. As part of their efforts to increase meaningful youth engagement in UNCCD processes and implementation objectives, CSOs can reassess their ongoing youth activities (e.g., climate action, organic agriculture, land restoration, protected areas, urban greening) to enhance the intensity and diversity of their participation for synergistic results that benefit both people and the planet.
- **Donors and development partners (philanthropic and public):** Private contributions are generally the most flexible type of funding that youth programmes receive, often filling budget gaps (due to public funding restrictions) and covering in full the costs of providing engagement opportunities. Youth philanthropy can be an effective approach toward community development by encouraging young people to act locally. Private funding sources can also provide crucial resources since many public sources require matching contributions. In addition, international aid agencies and public donors can also play an important role in providing direct access to finance for youth and supporting sub-national governments with land restoration initiatives.
- **Private sector:** The private sector can create concrete employment opportunities and initiate youth workforce development programmes, through the provision of education, skills training, mentoring, and financing, to support young people with the establishment of small- and medium-sized enterprises. There is wide scope for collaboration between youth-owned enterprises, young entrepreneurs, and youth-led start-ups to leverage peer-to-peer learning and guidance opportunities as well as pairing with companies, governments, or non-profit organisations to enable them to become even more sustainable independent businesses.
- **Academia:** Teachers and researchers have the capacity to engage youth in academic research projects and the development of collaborative, youth-engaged research agendas – from the early planning and grant-writing phases through project implementation and results dissemination – which can increase the value and impact of their data and findings.



- **Local Governments:** Local governments can be significant partners for land restoration projects and play an important role in the education of local youth. Local governments also play an important role in policy formulation to govern local land practices, and lead land governance processes from the bottom up.



## 2.6. Monitoring and Evaluation of the YES

Outcome 1.1. foresees the establishment of “a monitoring and evaluation framework for the YES to understand the performance of UNCCD, Parties, and partners on meaningful youth engagement”. The development of a monitoring and evaluation framework with global indicators will be presented and discussed at COP16.

[www.unccd.int/youth](http://www.unccd.int/youth)



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