

Regional Position Statement of Local and Regional Governments for UNCCD COP17

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia – August 17-28, 2026

This position represents the political contribution of local and regional governments from ICLEI South America and Mercocities to the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Addressed to the UNCCD Secretariat and key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Rio Conventions, including national governments, international organizations, and strategic partners, this document seeks to strengthen the recognition of the role of subnational governments in combating desertification, land degradation, and drought, promoting integrated implementation with the agendas of climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable urban development.

This document was jointly prepared by ICLEI South America and Mercocities, with contributions from their member governments and other subnational governments committed to climate action and sustainable development, including signatories of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), who will contribute to expanding this regional consultation and mobilization process. It also recognizes the leadership of the Northeast Consortium in promoting innovative policies to combat desertification and restore degraded lands, establishing itself as a benchmark for Brazil and South America on this agenda. The document draws inspiration from the positions of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) *constituency*, the [Call for Engagement from the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments \(GTF\)](#) and the [Open Letter from the 5th ICLEI Brazil Meeting in the Northeast](#), in addition to the Mercocities documents towards COP16, COP30, WUF 12 and 13.

Considering that,

1. Desertification, land degradation and drought constitute one of the most urgent environmental threats, affecting more than 40% of the Earth's land surface and compromising food, water, climate security and the livelihoods of millions of people;
2. These processes are driven by multiple interrelated factors, including land use change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, overexploitation of water resources, unsustainable production practices and the impacts of climate change;
3. Although they are often associated with rural areas, their causes and consequences are closely linked to urban dynamics, including unplanned urban expansion and increased vulnerability, soil impermeability, loss of green infrastructure, extreme weather events related to droughts, heat waves and floods, and the growing demand for water, food and other natural resources;
4. South America has some of the largest biodiversity reserves on the planet and is home to ecosystems that are strategic for global climate and water regulation, but it faces a large increase in land degradation, loss of vegetation cover, water stress, forest fires and extreme weather events that compromise its territories;
5. Local and regional governments are on the front line of response to these challenges and play a fundamental role in territorial planning, sustainable management of natural resources, adaptation to climate change and ecosystem restoration, translating the commitments of the Rio Conventions into concrete actions in the territory;
6. The UNCCD COP16 recognized the strategic role of local and regional governments through the Declaration and Call to Engagement promoted by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), reaffirming their essential contribution to combating desertification, land degradation and drought;

On this basis, the local and regional governments of the region call upon to move forward together on the following priorities:

1. Integrate the UNCCD objectives into the urban agenda

Integrate combating desertification, soil degradation and drought in urban and territorial planning, promoting policies that integrate in an articulated manner the sustainable management of soil, water and food security, the protection of water sources, the promotion of nature-based solutions and the conservation and recovery of native ecosystems.

2. Promote synergy among the three Rio Conventions

Promote the synergy and territorialization of the three Rio Conventions in the urban sustainable development policies of cities and regions, through solutions that integrate the agendas of desertification, climate change and biodiversity, considering the ecological characteristics of the territory, prioritizing the conservation and strengthening of local fauna and flora and recognizing the multiple environmental, social and economic benefits of these approaches.

3. Strengthen multi-level governance

Promote permanent multi-level governance mechanisms that strengthen coordination and cooperation between national, regional and local governments for the effective implementation of UNCCD objectives and the development of integrated territorial policies.

4. Expand subnational governments' access to financing and technologies

Promote more accessible and direct international financing mechanisms for subnational governments, as well as green and social technologies, risk monitoring tools, and urban planning instruments, recognizing their role as indispensable implementers of actions for ecological restoration, adaptation, resilience, and sustainable territorial management.

5. Strengthen capacities and cooperation

Strengthen the technical and institutional capacities of subnational governments through South-South cooperation and the development of strategic partnerships with research institutions, universities, centers of excellence, and specialized bodies, fostering knowledge exchange and promoting scientific output, innovation, and technical assistance to support the implementation of the UNCCD at the local level.

6. Promote social justice and a just transition

Recognize the differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation and water scarcity on women, inhabitants of peripheral areas and indigenous peoples, local communities and family

farmers, underlining their fundamental role, promoting a cross-cutting gender perspective and ensuring equitable access to quality water, their participation and leadership in decision-making. It will also promote youth participation, strengthening environmental education and creating stable mechanisms for intergenerational dialogue.

7. Define indicators, evaluate results and guarantee public access to information

Establish common systems of clear, measurable, territorially defined goals and indicators with specific time frames to evaluate the implementation and fulfillment of commitments. These indicators should cover, among other aspects, soil condition and restoration, water availability and quality, biodiversity, risk reduction, the participation of women and youth, mobilized financing, and the population benefiting. This will involve promoting the development of baseline data, periodic evaluations, open and disaggregated data, public monitoring dashboards, and accessible reports.

8. Promote a resilient territorial transition

Promote territorial development models that combine land restoration, water and food security, climate change adaptation, social inclusion, the valorization of socio-biodiversity, sustainable production, local economic development, and the promotion of green jobs, while incorporating measures to protect the most vulnerable populations and strengthening the resilience of cities and regions.

9. Consolidate a regional advocacy agenda

Consolidate a permanent agenda of political cooperation between local and regional governments in the region that strengthens the exchange of experiences, promotes joint initiatives and contributes to building the future global positions of the LGMA *constituency* in the framework of the UNCCD and the other Rio Conventions.

Conclusion

The local and regional governments of ICLEI South America and Mercocities reaffirm their commitment to actively contribute to the implementation of the UNCCD and call upon the Parties and the international community to recognize and strengthen their role as strategic partners in building resilient, inclusive and sustainable territories.

ANNEX I

Inspiring experiences of ICLEI and Mercocities members that contribute to combating desertification in the territories:

- Northeast Consortium, Brazil | [Caatinga Fund](#), [Recaatingamento Law](#) and [Ecological Transition Plan](#):** The Consortium's strategic and integrated approach led the Brazilian government to accept the proposal to create the Caatinga Fund, with resources raised and managed by the BNDES (Brazilian Development Bank), earmarked for the prevention, monitoring, and restoration of degraded areas of the biome. It also played a strategic role in advocating for the Brazilian Recaatingamento Law (Law 15.430/2026), which establishes the national policy for recovering and conserving the Caatinga biome and combating desertification. Furthermore, its Northeast Brazil Ecological Transformation Plan (PTE-NE) focuses on valuing, preserving, and restoring the biome; strengthening family farming and agroecology; implementing resilient water harvesting and desalination infrastructure; and expanding access to rural cisterns, aligning with the strategy of recaatingamento.
- Montevideo, Uruguay | [SIDEAP](#) and the Water Care Plan:** The Departmental System of Priority Areas (SIDEAP) is a tool for identifying and managing areas of special environmental importance within the department, contributing to biodiversity conservation, ecosystem protection, and territorial planning based on sustainability criteria. Meanwhile, the Water Care Plan develops a specific strategy aimed at strengthening water protection and security through actions related to water quality monitoring, pollution prevention and reduction, information generation for decision-making, and the strengthening of institutional capacities. Both initiatives reflect the role that local governments can play in protecting natural resources and building more resilient territories in the face of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, droughts, and climate change, by integrating conservation, territorial planning, water management, and knowledge generation.
- Azuay Province, Ecuador | Ecological and Participatory Restoration of Wetlands and Reforestation of One Million Native Trees:** The first project interacts with the inhabitants of the micro-basins for the maintenance and restoration of water sources based on joint, sustainable management – fostered through community participation, training, and organization – as well as the improvement of agro-productive systems and eco-tourism. The second restores degraded terrestrial ecosystems and riverbanks through native plants, seeking the conservation of

biodiversity, the protection of the soil and the promotion of culture and natural heritage, benefiting local communities with resources such as wood, fruits and medicinal plants and strengthening local adaptation, genetic diversity and the participation and empowerment of the local community.

- **São Paulo, Brazil | [PlanClima SP](#):** The municipality's Climate Action Plan integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, incorporating actions related to sustainable land management, the protection and restoration of green spaces and water resources, climate risk reduction, and the implementation of nature-based solutions. Among the planned initiatives are the production of native plant species more resilient to the impacts of climate change, which contributes to the recovery and conservation of vegetation and the strengthening of biodiversity, and Payment for Environmental Services (PSA), which promotes the conservation and restoration of environmentally important areas. The Plan seeks to strengthen urban resilience to extreme events such as droughts, heat waves, and heavy rainfall, promoting integrated land management and coordinating different areas of the municipal government. Finally, it also establishes as one of its goals the development and publication of a Contingency Plan for Meteorological Droughts, with initial actions planned for 2028 and a maximum deadline of 2032.
- **Santiago, Chile | Green Infrastructure and NbS:** Santiago is making progress in deploying green infrastructure and nature-based solutions aimed at revitalizing public spaces and strengthening their capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change. These interventions seek to increase soil permeability and infiltration capacity, strengthen and connect existing green areas through biological corridors, and contribute to regulating urban temperatures. This transformation is complemented by efficient water management focused on reuse, promoting the recovery and reuse of water from municipal facilities, optimizing irrigation, and using the resource more efficiently, thus helping to reduce pressure on water sources. Under this vision, Santiago is moving toward a city model capable of infiltrating, retaining, and utilizing water; strengthening and connecting its green infrastructure; promoting ecosystem services in a highly urbanized area; and consolidating resilient public spaces.
- **Montería, Bucaramanga, Pereira, Yopal, Villavicencio, Pasto, Colombia | [Nature-Based Resilient Cities \(NaBa\)](#):** The project aimed to address the synergies between climate change and biodiversity loss, seeking to strengthen the resilience of the territory through Ecosystem-based Adaptation solutions.

- **Niterói, Brazil | [Encosta Verde Program](#):** Initiative to recover native vegetation in degraded areas of hillsides and mountains of the city, as well as in protected areas with the aim of ensuring biodiversity and improving the soil and climate quality of the city.
- **Tierra del Fuego, Argentina | [AcBio](#)** (Action for Biodiversity): seeks to strengthen the capacities of subnational governments to design and implement climate actions for the prevention, protection and restoration of forests and wetlands.
- **Bahia, Brazil | [Pró-Semiárido](#):** This project, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), has already benefited 70,000 families in 32 municipalities of the state. Targeting family farmers, Quilombola communities, Indigenous peoples, settlers of agrarian reform, and communities of farms and pastures, the program promotes training and technical assistance with an agroecological approach. Its results encompass topics such as crop restoration, food security, and productive resilience to climate change.
- **Federal District, Brazil | AdaptaCidades and strengthening of planning for climate adaptation:** It participates in the federal AdaptaCidades initiative, which strengthens institutional and technical capacities for climate adaptation planning. At the local level, it is coordinated with the Federal District's Policy on Addressing Climate Change and territorial planning instruments, through a Local Commission that brings together organizations from the environmental, climate, territorial, and research and information production agendas, thus promoting multilevel governance, technical cooperation, and the use of scientific information to identify risks and vulnerabilities and support the definition of adaptation measures. It is an example of the integration of territorial planning, environmental management, and green infrastructure in a Cerrado region marked by droughts, fires, and high temperatures.
- **Ceará, Brazil | [State Action Plan to Combat Desertification and Mitigate the Effects of Drought \(PAE-CE\)](#):** Updated in 2026, it integrates conservation, restoration and climate adaptation actions, with the active participation of local communities, researchers and other actors involved in the subject.