

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	10993
Project Name:	Strengthening Civil Society Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality
Countr(ies):	Global
Implementing Agency:	IUCN

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Strengthening Civil Society Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality

Country

Global

GEF ID

10993

Implementing Agency

IUCN

Executing Entity

Both ENDS; IUCN

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

MSP

PIR Submission

9/15/2026

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2026 , 2nd PIR

Objective

This project is designed to increase the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in delivering Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), and in promoting adherence to LDN principles, including environmental and social safeguards, in public and private investments. The project has a global scope and will strengthen the capacity and the level of engagement of CSOs in the regions. The project objective is: “Increased capacities and recognition of the CSOs to contribute to the adherence of LDN principles in policies, programs and investments”. This will be delivered through capacities and support to CSOs to ensure that LDN is better aligned with established principles and practices and to lead investments in LDN. The project will consist of 2 components: 1) Influencing LDN and 2) Leveraging LDN. Component 1 focuses on increasing the recognition of CSOs at the political level, as well as increasing opportunities to be involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating LDN transformative projects. This is further extended to increasing the visibility of CSOs efforts towards achieving LDN. This will be done through a variety of mechanisms, namely knowledge development and exchange, mentoring, advocacy towards policy makers, awareness raising events and mobilisation of CSO community. Component 2 seeks to answer this demand, by building CSOs capacities and providing technical support to CSOs to leverage funds and convening fund raising meetings with donors and private investors. It is centred around a single outcome: CSOs’ capacities to leverage funds for LDN are increased. This will be achieved through knowledge development and exchange, and increased engagement with donors

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress Moderately Satisfactory	Development Objective Satisfactory
Overall risk Low Risk	
Project Financing 2,180,000.00	Cumulative Disbursement 437,890.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval 6/1/2023	Agency Approval 6/1/2023
Implementation Start 4/10/2025	First Disbursement 4/10/2025
Expected MTR	Actual MTR
Expected Completion 12/31/2026	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

Since project inception, the CS4LDN project has made substantial progress towards its objective of strengthening civil society capacity to contribute to the implementation of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and to engage effectively in UNCCD processes. A comprehensive knowledge and learning strategy has been implemented through a series of six online webinars reaching more than 1,000 participants, regular newsletters, and the launch of a revamped Drynet website^[1] that serves as a central repository for project resources, webinar recordings and knowledge products. These outputs have significantly expanded access to practical information on the UNCCD, LDN implementation, monitoring approaches and responsible land governance.

The project has also strengthened the advocacy and engagement capacity of civil society organisations through a structured mentorship programme. Following strong demand, with over 90 applications received for the first cohort and more than 180 for the second, **17 mentees from UNCCD-accredited CSOs have been selected** and paired with experienced mentors using a dedicated mentorship framework and curriculum. The first cohort successfully developed individual mentorship plans and gained practical experience through participation in international policy

processes, including **UNCCD CRIC 23** and **Desertif'Actions 2026**, strengthening the next generation of CSO advocates.

Preparatory workshops are equipping the CSOs for effective participation in UNCCD and related processes, while Drynet members showcased civil society perspectives through side events at the IUCN World Conservation Congress and supported multi-stakeholder engagement during Desertif'Actions 2026. These activities have strengthened partnerships, increased the visibility of community-based approaches to LDN and enhanced collaboration with the UNCCD CSO Panel and other stakeholders.

During the reporting period, implementation focused on consolidating these achievements while expanding knowledge products and capacity-building opportunities. Two additional webinars were delivered on applying the UNCCD in practice and on gender-responsive LDN implementation, complemented by the launch of a dedicated communications webinar series. Two further newsletters were published, documenting lessons from CRIC 23 and Desertif'Actions 2026, while the Drynet website as knowledge platform continued to be updated with new resources.

Progress was also made under the financing component of the project. A global survey of 226 CSOs informed the development of a multilingual guidance report on accessing finance for LDN initiatives, supported by a donor landscape analysis and accompanying communications materials. This provides an important evidence base for improving CSO access to finance. Under Component Two preparatory work was also completed for further in-person regional webinars, training workshops and donor engagement activities that will be implemented in the coming months, positioning the project to further strengthen civil society capacity to mobilise resources for LDN action.

[1] <https://dry-net.org/>

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

The mentorship programme generated substantially greater interest than anticipated, with more than 90 applications received for the first cohort and over 180 for the second. While this reflects the strong demand for capacity strengthening among civil society organisations and demonstrates the relevance of the initiative, it also made the selection process considerably more resource-intensive. To ensure a transparent and equitable process, the project developed clear selection criteria and invested significant time in reviewing applications. The overwhelming response also highlights the potential for scaling up this component in future, in line with the growing demand for strengthened CSO engagement in the UNCCD.

A second challenge has been the continued **increase in global travel costs**, which has placed pressure on the project's travel budget. In response, the project has prioritised maintaining support for participation at **UNCCD COP17 in 2026**, recognising this as the most valuable learning and networking opportunity for mentees. While this approach is expected to safeguard the project's core objectives, it may require a reduction in travel-supported activities during 2027. In addition, the weakening of the US dollar has reduced the purchasing power of the project budget, with potential implications for the scale of in-person events, including those organised around the donor roundtable by IUCN.

As expected in a network comprising organisations with diverse capacities and contexts, differences in organisational capacity have occasionally affected the pace and distribution of work within some thematic working groups. While these differences are inherent to a project that seeks to strengthen civil society capacity, they have required greater coordination than initially anticipated. To address this, the project is considering a modest budget reallocation to increase communications support team, enabling the communications focal point to assume responsibility for activities that partner organisations have had limited capacity to deliver. These proposals will be discussed with IUCN to determine the most appropriate way forward.

During the initial phase of implementation, the Steering Committee met less frequently than originally envisaged. However, this did not adversely affect project delivery, as implementation progressed effectively through regular coordination among partners. A successful Steering Committee meeting was held in March 2026, confirming that the project remains on track and providing strategic guidance for the next implementation phase. A further Steering Committee meeting is planned during UNCCD COP17 to continue providing oversight and strategic direction.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Local governments

While this has not happened yet a lot in the first year, the intention is still to engage national focal points through outreach around regional capacity-building activities and preparations for training events.

Civil society organisations

Civil society engagement is obviously central to this project and has in some ways even exceeded expectations, particularly through the mentorship programme, webinar series and newsletters. The exceptionally high demand for mentorship opportunities demonstrates as well the large participation in the webinars has proven both the relevance of the project and the growing interest among CSOs to strengthen their engagement in UNCCD processes.

Local communities (disaggregate where relevant, e.g. by gender, vulnerable groups, etc)

These groups remain central indirect beneficiaries of the project through their representation by participating CSOs and targeted capacity development activities. Gender considerations have been mainstreamed throughout implementation, while community experiences continue to inform project knowledge products, advocacy messages and policy engagement. Youth has been a focal point throughout the Mentee programme, however we intend a greater focus on them in the second part of the programme also for the communicational work,

Indigenous Peoples

N/A

Private sector

N/A

UNCCD Secretariat, CSO Panel and Science-Policy Interface (SPI)

Engagement with UNCCD bodies has been strong throughout implementation. The project has worked closely with the CSO Panel in preparing civil society participation in UNCCD processes, while webinars, knowledge products and international events have strengthened links between CSOs and the Convention.

Research institutions and knowledge partners

Knowledge institutions WOCAT and BSSS have contributed technical expertise to project resources and learning materials, supporting evidence-based capacity development. The project has also strengthened connections between researchers and CSOs through knowledge-sharing platforms and thematic webinars.

International donors and financing institutions

Donors and financing institutions have been engaged primarily through the preparation of the Access to Finance report and donor landscape assessment. This engagement has laid the foundation for future dialogue through planned regional webinars and the Donor-CSO Roundtable

D. Gender Equality

The project is global and will primarily strengthen the CSOs in engaging with policy makers and donors on supporting locally-led LDN initiatives, which includes supportive measures for secure land tenure rights for women through the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of land, Fisheries and Forests and for agroecological practices by women. Gender will be addressed through advocacy for inclusive policies and funding mechanisms by CSOs that support local communities, pastoralists groups, Indigenous Peoples, youth groups or women organisations.

The Terms of Reference for specific activities incorporate requirements for gender responsiveness. Targets have been set to ensure gender balance across all capacity development and mentorship activities. The project not only promotes equal participation but also actively champions advocacy efforts to embed gender-responsive policies and measures within the context of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), including a specific webinar dedicated to the topic of Gender in LDN.

Gender responsiveness has been integrated across all project activities as a core implementation principle of the implementing organisations. Gender considerations inform the selection of mentees, the choice of webinar topics, the composition of speakers and panellist, and the stories highlighted through project communications and newsletters. The project also actively promotes gender-responsive advocacy within UNCCD processes. To ensure equitable participation, the project maintains a minimum target of 51% representation of women

across capacity development, mentorship and knowledge-sharing activities. The available gender disaggregated data so far shows that the target percentage is surpassed. The percentage of female mentees is 58% (target set 51%). Other detailed data will follow later in the project. Progress to date demonstrates that gender equality is being mainstreamed throughout project implementation rather than addressed through standalone activities.

E. Knowledge Management

As agreed ahead on the project start it was decided not to create separate strategies or platforms and instead use existing Drynet strategies and embed content into the existing Drynet website as a most efficient way ahead.

Please refer to attached document: Drynet Communication and Knowledge Management Strategies in the context of the “Strengthening Civil Society Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality” Project (CS4LDN).

Furthermore, the [Drynet website](#) serves as the project’s knowledge hub as it shares the newsletter articles, upcoming and past events (webinars, COP side events, etc.).

The project follows the Drynet communication strategy (also please refer to the attached document mentioned above).

In terms of communications successes, all activities have been delivered consistently. Following highlights can be reported on for the reporting period:

- The website is continuously maintained and updated to reflect projects outputs. A notable improvement is the updated events page featuring upcoming and past events, making it easier for visitors to access project activities.
- Both webinar series have attracted a consistent high number of attendees with an average attendance of around 40% of registered participants (a strong figure for online events in this sector). Attendees overall seem very satisfied with the quality of information which is shared given the many return visitors to the webinars.
- The newsletter is published regularly and serves as valued source of information, covering relevant events, news, funding opportunities, local stories and topical cartoons.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	

Financial Management	
Implementation Schedule	
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	
Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	
Location of Project Activity	
others	

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category
M and E Document

Title
GEFID10993_CSO4LDN_PIR 2026