



## Rio Conventions Joint Capacity-building Programme

# Synergies between Rio conventions: Context and key concepts

## INFOBRIEF 1

### Disclaimer

This infobrief is intended solely to provide readers with foundational information on the topic discussed. It is not an exhaustive knowledge source, nor does it claim to represent the latest or comprehensive scientific discoveries, findings, or perspectives in the field. The contents serve as a general reference and are not intended to establish the authors or the publishers as the sole authority on these subjects. Readers are encouraged to consult additional sources and experts for more detailed and up-to-date insights.

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## What are the 3 Rio Conventions?

The Rio Conventions, established during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, comprise three major international treaties aimed at sustainable development:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) seeks to preserve biological diversity, promote sustainable use of its components, and ensure fair sharing of genetic resources benefits. Under this convention, the world now disposes of a Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) comprised of 23 targets.
- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) addresses desertification, land degradation, and drought, particularly in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas, with the goal of promoting effective action through innovative local programs and supportive international partnerships. The SDG target 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality is one of the key goal of the UNCCD.
- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) focuses on stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent hazardous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. It facilitated the development of global agreements like the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

Collectively, these conventions play a crucial role in global efforts to tackle climate change, conserve biodiversity, promote sustainable land management, and advance sustainable development goals.

# 1. What are synergies and why are they important?

Synergies refer to the combined or cooperative effects that occur when two or more actions interact in a way that produces a result greater than the sum of their individual contributions.[i] The essence of synergies lies in grasping the inter-linkages of diverse challenges, breaking down operational silos, and embracing integrated approaches to fulfill both individual and common goals efficiently and cohesively. Various approaches can be employed to foster or enhance synergies, including integrated planning of the national strategies, institutional coordination of implementation, joint data and information sharing, joint monitoring, reporting and evaluation, as well as collaborative financing and capacity-building mechanisms.

Synergies can play a vital role in effectively implementing different multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), such as the Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD & UNCCD), and the sustainable development goals (SDGs).



First, integrated planning serves to break the sectoral silos, preventing overlaps in target setting and the pursuit of one ambition from undermining progress in another. For instance, a reforestation plan focusing solely on emission reduction without considering ecosystem services may inadvertently exacerbate biodiversity loss and land degradation. Conversely, a synergistic plan that integrates climate, biodiversity and land protection objectives yield better outcomes and co-benefits.

Second, co-benefits resulting from synergistic actions can increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness, which can not only reduce the costs of implementation but also offer an opportunity to incentivize more funding and investment.



Third, synergies lay the groundwork for mobilizing multiple stakeholders, harmonizing diverse sectors and goals. The engagement of stakeholders, particularly indigenous peoples and communities can in turn enrich implementation efforts with innovative knowledge and approaches.



## **2. Synergies of the Rio Conventions and sustainable development: A historical perspective**

The secretariats of the Rio Conventions have long been emphasizing the importance of collaboration on different occasions and documents. In 1998 already, the UNCCD Secretariat issued a document entitled “Promotion and Strengthening of Relationships with Other Relevant Conventions”, explaining the rationale to enhance synergies among the Rio “sustainable development” Conventions, notably their common sustainable development approach and the inter-linkages between them based on multiple scientific and institutional aspects.

In 2004, the CBD Secretariat mapped out the complementary provisions among the Conventions (Table 1) in preparation for a workshop on strengthening synergies between the Rio conventions and other biodiversity-related conventions in Africa. In the same year, the UNFCCC Secretariat identified eleven “Options for Enhanced Cooperation among the Three Rio Conventions”, such as joint planning of national strategies under the three Conventions, collaboration among national focal points, collaboration among the scientific subsidiary bodies to the Conventions, and the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) among the three Rio Conventions.

	<b>UNFCCC</b>	<b>CBD</b>	<b>UNCCD</b>
<b>National Inventories / Identification and Monitoring</b>	Article 4.1(a)	Article 7	Article 16
<b>National &amp; Regional Plans</b>	Article 4.1(b)	Article 6(a)(b)	Article 9,10
<b>Legislation</b>	Preamble	Article 8(k)	Article 5(e)
<b>Research</b>	Article 5	Article 12(b)	Article 17,19 (b)
<b>Public Education</b>	Article 6	Article 13	Article 5(d),19,6
<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b>	Article 4.2(d)	Article 14	
<b>Clearinghouse for exchange of technical information</b>	Article 7	Article 17, 18	Article 16
<b>Public Participation</b>	Article 6 (a)(iii)	Article 14.1 (a)	Article 19(3)
<b>COP/ assess implementation</b>	Article 7	Article 23	Article 22
<b>Training</b>	Article 6	Article 12(a)	Article 19
<b>Reporting</b>	Article 12	Article 26	Article 26
<b>Examine obligations- assess implementation</b>	Article 7 (e)	Article 23	
<b>Financial resources and financial mechanism</b>	Article 11	Article 20, 21	Article 20
<b>Technology transfer and cooperation</b>	Article 4	Article 16, 18	Article 12, 18

Table 1: Indicative list of complementary provisions in the Rio Agreements [ii]

Following this spirit, the latest milestones of the three Rio Conventions also emphasize coordination and collaboration with other international frameworks, such as Article 5 (sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases), Article 4.1 (sustainable land use) and Article 7 (climate adaptation) of the Paris

Agreement; Target 2 (ecosystem restoration), Target 8 (minimize climate change impacts), Target 10 (sustainable land use), and Target 22 (indigenous participation) of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; as well as the elements of land degradation neutrality, drought risk management and climate resilience, and ecosystem restoration and carbon sequestration within the UNCCD 2015–2030 Strategic Framework.

### **3. Subsidiary bodies, science policy interfaces, capacity-building portals: opportunities to build synergies**

As mentioned in the previous section, collaboration between the scientific subsidiary bodies of the Rio Conventions is one of the options for enhancing synergies. These subsidiary bodies are respectively:

- The [Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice \(SBSTTA\)](#) and the [Subsidiary Body on Implementation \(SBI\)](#) to the CBD,
- The [Committee for Science and Technology \(CST\)](#) and the [Committee for the Review of the Implementation \(CRIC\) of the Convention to the UNCCD](#), and
- The [Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice \(SBSTA\)](#) and [Subsidiary Body for Implementation \(SBI\)](#) to UNFCCC.

Besides subsidiary bodies, each convention has a science-policy interface aiming to increase scientific evidence that support the Rio conventions work, respectively:

- The [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#) for the CBD
- The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) for the UNFCCC
- The [UNCCD Science Policy Interface \(SPI\)](#).

In addition to the subsidiary bodies and science-policy interfaces, the capacity-building and resource sharing portals or platforms of each secretariat also play a significant role in collecting and disseminating good practices of different scales and regions, including the [Capacity-building Portal to UNFCCC](#), [Biodiversity E-Learning Platform to CBD](#), and the [Data & Knowledge resources webpage of UNCCD](#).



**United Nations**  
Framework Convention on  
Climate Change

**SBSTA (Art. 9); SBI (Art. 10)**

**UNFCCC Capacity-building Portal**





Figure 1: Subsidiary bodies, Science-policy interface & Capacity-building Portals of the three Rio Conventions

## 4. Critical role of national focal points to build synergies

Apart from the subsidiary bodies or platforms relevant to the secretariats, the National Focal Points (NFPs) are indispensable for implementing the Rio Conventions at the national level. The role of NFPs include but are not limited to coordination and communication, policy integration and mainstreaming, facilitation of national reporting, and capacity-building and awareness raising, which have great potentials to create and enhance synergies between the national development goals and the Rio Conventions' agenda.

This is further facilitated by the fact that many NFPs belong to the same government ministry or department. By March 2024, 153 out of the 198 Parties of the Conventions have established their NFPs of two or all three Conventions under the same ministry. Furthermore, 53 Parties even have the same individual representing the NFP of two or three Conventions. The ministries of foreign affairs, environment and sustainability, agriculture, forestry and fisheries are the common government departments where NFPs are established. Despite this trend, effective communications and coordination between NFPs remain a challenge in many countries, and more efforts have to be done to encourage and support NFPs to work closer together at the benefit of all three Rio conventions' objectives.



## 5. Capacity-building for enhancing synergies: why now and what to expect?

Efforts have been made to overcome the silos and departmentalization which exist not only between the Rio Conventions but across the global environmental governance. One of the most significant endeavor was the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) of UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD established by the three secretariats in 2001. The JLG is mainly mandated to share information and encourage coordination among the national focal points and stakeholder groups of the three Rio Conventions. However, the lack of coherence proved that information-sharing alone is not enough to fill up the gaps and needs of synergistic actions.

Luckily, there's a trend of emphasizing and promoting synergies in recent years, which provides opportunities to push forward a Joint Rio Conventions Capacity-building Program. In 2023, the presidents of UNCCD COP15, CBD COP15 and UNFCCC COP27 published a [joint statement](#) to highlight the importance of joint actions of different levels to maximize the delivery of the interlinked objectives of UNCCD, CBD and UNFCCC. In the recently concluded 6th session of United Nations Environment Assembly, a resolution entitled "[Promoting synergies, cooperation or collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant environmental instruments](#)" again emphasized the growing concerns and expectations of synergy gap. In short, we are now facing a valuable window opportunity to take more ambitious actions to overcome the shortcomings of the past and substantially enhance the synergies between Rio Conventions and sustainable development. The present Joint Capacity-Building Program thus contributes to the vision for synergies forged in the context of the JLG.

The Joint Capacity-building programme by the secretariats of the three Rio Conventions aims to improve the coordination and coherence in implementing the three Rio Conventions and the SDGs. In addition to providing training on what the three conventions and their synergies entail, the Programme also aims to strengthen individual, institutional, and systemic capacities, including the capacities of domestic policymakers and practitioners to integrate and foster synergies between the Rio Conventions and the SDGs. It will also structurally engage with relevant partners and provide high-quality resource material on a set of themes, under which dedicated modules and other knowledge products will be developed. The Programme would also provide insights to national stakeholders on how different projects can improve the wider implementation of the Conventions' objectives and SDGs.

# How to synergize? Key entry points to explore

Following this introductory infobrief, the Joint Capacity-Building Program has identified the following entry points to enhance synergies of the Rio Conventions and sustainable development.





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## References

[i] UN DESA (2023). Synergy Solutions for a World in Crisis: Tackling Climate and SDG Action Together

[ii] UNEP/CBD, Opportunities for Synergy in Implementing the Three Rio Conventions, 2004.

[iii] Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions, “Report of the Eighth meeting\_Joint Liaison Group of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,” 2007.

## Rio Conventions Joint Capacity-building Programme



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