

ADVOCACY BRIEF FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS

From Quito to Ulaanbaatar

Latin America advocacy brief on Grasslands and Savannas

UNCCD COP17 · Mongolia, August 2026

This Advocacy Brief for the Negotiations consolidates the messages and strategic priorities generated during the Latin American Preparatory Event on Savannas and Grasslands on the Road to UNCCD COP17, held in Quito, Ecuador, on 17 and 18 June 2026. The process brought together national focal points to the Convention and key stakeholders from 11 Latin American countries. The meeting was supported by the UNCCD Regional Liaison Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Chair of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), and the representative of the UNCCD Civil Society Organizations Panel (CSO Panel). This document does not constitute an official position; rather, it is a regional technical and political input intended to guide Latin America's advocacy efforts.

IN-ROOM SUMMARY — COP17 ULAANBAATAR

Message	Regional position (summary)
MESSAGE 1	Dedicated financing for open biomes: scale up dedicated financing for pastoralism and the region's grasslands and savannas through the Flagship Initiative.
MESSAGE 2	Latin America's investment case: investing in the region offers the Western Hemisphere's most strategic climate return, delivering adaptation and mitigation benefits at planetary scale.
MESSAGE 3	Additional financing: mobilize resources for conservation, restoration and sustainable production through mechanisms under the Rio Conventions and through multilateral, public and private channels, using non-debt-generating approaches.
MESSAGE 4	Regenerative practices: recognize regenerative and sustainable practices in grasslands and savannas as part of resilient food systems and as part of the IYRP 2026 policy legacy.
MESSAGE 5	No promotion of conversion: recognize pastoralism and regenerative livestock production as valid restoration and adaptation strategies, without promoting ecosystem conversion.
MESSAGE 6	Water–Land Nexus: apply nature-based solutions and local knowledge to integrated management, drought resilience, water security and ecosystem service conservation, making them eligible for climate and biodiversity finance.
MESSAGE 7	Governance and rights: implement Decision 29/COP.16 through medium-term solutions that recognize the tenure rights of grassland-dependent people.
MESSAGE 8	Equity and inclusion across gender, age and mobility status: Promote gender equity and the inclusion of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and persons with disabilities in territorial planning and governance, while recognizing youth migration as a resilience factor.

MESSAGE 9	Monitoring and indicators for herbaceous biomes: Expand and strengthen research, monitoring and knowledge-management systems to support evidence-based decisions, demonstrate the benefits of these ecosystems and facilitate access to finance.
MESSAGE 10	Triple COP 2026: Latin America as the region that jointly implements the Cali (GBF), Belém (NDCs) and Mongolia (LDN) commitments and advances implementation of the mandate for synergies among the Rio Conventions.

Six negotiation priorities for Latin America in Mongolia

1. **Latin America as a priority region in the Flagship Initiative:** dedicated financing for pastoralism and the region's grasslands and savannas.
2. **Operationalize Decision 29/COP.16:** resources and methodological guidance for the legal protection of rangelands.
3. **Effective synergies across NAPs–NDCs–GBF:** integrated interministerial governance — leverage the Triple COP 2026.
4. **Include Latin American grasslands in the Steppe Action Agenda:** the COP17 legacy framework should explicitly mention Latin America's open biomes.
5. **Nature-based solutions:** recognition in the integrated management of grasslands and savannas.
6. **Production without promoting grassland and savanna conversion:** sustainable regenerative practices in food systems.

Executive summary and strategic context

2026 is the Triple COP Year: UNCCD COP17 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, opens an unprecedented sequence that continues with CBD COP17 in Yerevan, Armenia, and concludes with UNFCCC COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye. This alignment represents the decade's greatest political opportunity to integrate the three Rio Conventions, and Latin America must arrive in Mongolia with that ambition clearly articulated.

Latin America will arrive at COP17 with a clear position: grasslands and savannas are not marginal lands, but ecological infrastructure that underpins water security, food sovereignty and climate stability for more than 30 million people. These biomes cover 18% of the region's territory — equivalent to more than one third of the continent's productive land — and store up to 90% of their carbon below ground. Yet only 10% of NDCs mention them, compared with 70% that include forests (WWF, 2025). This structural gap constrains financing, leaves the biome invisible in reporting systems and marginalizes the people who depend on it.

The political-legal basis for advocacy is solid: Decision 29/COP.16 from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, requires the formal protection of rangelands; Resolutions 019, 095 and 116 adopted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress (Marseille, 2021) call for halting the conversion of open ecosystems; the GRaSS Global Alliance, co-led by IUCN and WWF, serves as a vehicle for international negotiation; and the MOU signed between IUCN and the Government of Mongolia at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress opens a direct diplomatic channel with the COP17 Presidency that should be leveraged.

The region arrives in Mongolia with a concrete objective: to secure explicit mention of Latin America's grasslands and savannas in the *Steppe Action Agenda*, the COP17 legacy framework Mongolia is advancing to sustain political *momentum* beyond the conference. This objective is linked to the region's priorities of securing recognition in the *Flagship Initiative* with dedicated financing, operationalizing Decision 29/COP.16 with resources and methodological guidance, advancing effective synergies across NAPs, NDCs and the GBF within the Triple COP 2026 framework, promoting nature-based solutions in the integrated management of grasslands and savannas, and ensuring sustainable production without promoting the conversion of these ecosystems.

Methodological note: the UNCCD Global Land Outlook 2024 treats Mexico as part of North America; this document includes it as part of Latin America, consistent with the scope of the Quito Regional Meeting. The biomes covered include the Cerrado, the Llanos, the Pampas, the Chaco, the Caatinga, high-Andean ecosystems, and the arid and semi-arid grasslands of Mexico.

Regional importance of grasslands and savannas

Their strategic importance can be understood across four dimensions:

Biocultural livelihoods and food sovereignty More than 30 million people depend directly on rangelands. These lands sustain the ecological knowledge and traditional livelihoods of pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Extensive livestock systems account for more than 40% of regional agricultural GDP in countries with large areas of native herbaceous ecosystems.	Carbon reservoirs and climate stability They store up to 90% of their carbon below ground. This root-based carbon sink provides greater climate stability in the face of recurring fires than forest systems.
Regulation of major river basins Regional water security depends on grassland and savanna biomes. The Cerrado feeds 8 of Brazil's 12 major river basins, with implications for water security across the Southern Cone. High-Andean systems sustain the Amazon Basin's hydrological cycle, while the Orinoco Llanos regulate flows in the Orinoco River.	Engine of the rural economy These ecosystems drive local trade, reduce rural out-migration and support territorial development, which is often led by women. Native grasslands and savannas form the productive backbone of every country in the region.

Key challenges and opportunities

Structural challenges

- **Legal gap and regulatory invisibility:** classified as "vacant lands" and excluded from environmental safeguards. Only 10% of NDCs mention them, compared with 70% that include forests.
- **Policy leakage:** forest moratoria in the Amazon redirect agro-industrial pressure directly onto neighboring grasslands.
- **Water crisis and structural drought:** degradation intensifies drought cycles and reduces the water-regulation capacity of continental river basins.
- **Physical fragmentation and chemical degradation:** fencing disrupts biological corridors; agrochemicals and veterinary pharmaceuticals severely affect soil macrofauna.
- **Institutional isolation:** agricultural policies remain disconnected from climate and conservation commitments.

Strategic opportunities

- **Triple COP Year 2026:** exceptional alignment of the three Rio Conventions — a unique political window for regulatory integration and global environmental governance of grasslands and savannas.
- **Steppe Action Agenda:** the COP17 legacy framework is the instrument through which Latin America can secure explicit references with impact beyond the conference.
- **IUCN–Mongolia MOU:** a direct diplomatic channel with the COP17 Presidency to advance nature-based solutions and drought resilience.
- **IYRP 2026 as a policy window:** the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists creates space for a concrete policy legacy on pastoralists' rights and financing.
- **GRaSS (Global Rangelands and Savannas Alliance):** an international negotiation and cooperation platform co-led by IUCN and WWF, bringing together governments, multilateral agencies, pastoral communities and the private sector to build consensus and facilitate access to resources.
- **High estimated return on investment:** USD 4–35 for every dollar invested in grassland restoration (ELD Initiative, 2025), a compelling case for multilateral development banks.
- **Blended finance and markets:** LDN Fund, GEF-8 STAR System, GANSO/Carne del Pastizal certifications, high-integrity carbon markets and biodiversity credits.

Key advocacy messages for COP17

These messages are the result of the collective process undertaken at the Quito Regional Meeting and were endorsed by representatives from eleven Latin American countries. They are starting points that each delegation can adapt, combine or replace according to its national context.

MESSAGE 1 Dedicated financing for open biomes

Latin America calls for dedicated financing for pastoralism and the region's grasslands and savannas through the UNCCD Global Mechanism's Flagship Initiative. This commitment is underpinned by a strategic narrative that places local actors at the center, recognizes the intrinsic value of ecosystems, safeguards traditional livelihoods, and strengthens territorial governance as pillars of adaptation and mitigation.

Justification: The region has the institutional infrastructure, governance, scientific capacity, traditional practices and market structures needed to absorb climate finance efficiently. Investing in Latin America's open biomes delivers a triple impact: it protects the most stable carbon stock in the Western Hemisphere, safeguards major river basins and secures the productive engine underpinning global food sovereignty.

Use in: Finance Day (24 August 2026) · Business4Land Forum · UNCCD Global Mechanism · LDN Fund.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

"Latin America calls on the UNCCD Global Mechanism's Flagship Initiative to explicitly recognize the region's grasslands and savannas and to ensure dedicated, sustainable financing for pastoralism without creating debt."

MESSAGE 2 Latin America's investment case

Latin America offers the hemisphere's most strategic climate return by integrating adaptation and mitigation with national priorities and diverse biomes, while recognizing biodiversity and ecosystem services as a shared global responsibility for sustainable development.

Justification: Evidence from the UNCCD Economics of Land Degradation Initiative (ELD, 2025) shows returns of USD 4 to USD 35 for every dollar invested in restoration, positioning the region as one of the most cost-effective destinations for climate and development investment. In Argentina, restoring Pampas grasslands could generate up to USD 775 million annually in ecosystem services, confirming their strategic importance.

Use in: Heads of State Summit (23 August 2026) · Ministerial Segment · Riyadh–Ulaanbaatar Action Agenda · Steppe Action Agenda.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

"Latin America offers the Western Hemisphere's most strategic destination for climate investment. Our grasslands and savannas are the planet's carbon shield, water regulator and pillar of food security. We urge COP17 to reflect this distinction in the allocation of multilateral finance, with explicit mention of Latin America's grasslands and savannas in the Steppe Action Agenda."

MESSAGE 3 Additional financing for grasslands and savannas

Latin America calls for dedicated financing for pastoralism and grasslands through existing mechanisms under other conventions and across multilateral, public and private channels, using non-debt-generating approaches that mobilize resources for conservation, restoration and sustainable production.

Justification: The region can scale instruments such as blended finance and triple-benefit projects, including regenerative livestock production, agrivoltaics and solar grazing. It also has a differentiated presence in international markets through certifications such as GANSO, Carne del Pastizal, the Rainforest Alliance Agriculture Standard (RAS) and the Responsible Wool Standard (RWS), which can serve as eligibility standards.

Use in: Finance Day (24 August 2026) · Business4Land Forum · UNCCD Global Mechanism · LDN Fund.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

"The region calls for resources to be channeled toward conservation, restoration and resilient production, while raising the visibility of local actors and strengthening territorial governance as pillars of adaptation and mitigation. It calls for grasslands and savannas to be actively integrated into the mechanisms and funds of other environmental conventions, ensuring sustainable and complementary financing arrangements across the Rio Conventions."

MESSAGE 4 Regenerative practices

Latin America recognizes regenerative and sustainable practices in grasslands and savannas as an essential part of resilient food systems that ensure soil and ecosystem health, secure clean water, improve rural livelihoods, and strengthen food security and climate adaptation.

Justification: IYRP 2026 — proclaimed by the UN General Assembly and led by Mongolia — provides the political opportunity to ensure that this recognition becomes part of COP17’s policy legacy.

Use in: Food Systems and Soil Health Day (27 August 2026) · IYRP 2026 Legacy Events · Special Ministerial Event

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America urges the conclusions of Food Systems Day to recognize regenerative and sustainable practices in grasslands and savannas as an essential part of resilient food systems that safeguard soil health, clean water and food security. We also call for the IYRP 2026 legacy events to translate this recognition into concrete financing and rights commitments for pastoralists.”

MESSAGE 5 No promotion of grassland and savanna conversion

Latin America recognizes pastoralism and regenerative livestock production as valid restoration and adaptation strategies, supported by scientific evidence and regional experience, without promoting ecosystem conversion, within the mandate for synergies among the Rio Conventions.

Justification: The region has extensive evidence from regenerative livestock production at different scales, assurance systems and family farming. Established experiences in the Pampas (Argentina and Uruguay), the Cerrado (Brazil), the Llanos (Colombia), and the arid and semi-arid grasslands of Mexico demonstrate that productivity can be maintained while avoiding the conversion of open ecosystems, offering solutions with strong potential for replication.

Use in: Food Systems and Soil Health Day (27 August 2026) · IYRP 2026 Legacy Events · Special Ministerial Event.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America urges the Conference of the Parties to formally recognize pastoralism and regenerative livestock production as valid and effective strategies for ecological restoration and climate adaptation, supported by scientific evidence and regional experience, without promoting ecosystem conversion, within the mandate for synergies among the Rio Conventions.”

MESSAGE 6 Water-Land Nexus

Latin America promotes nature-based solutions and the integration of local knowledge for the management of savannas and grasslands, strengthening proactive drought resilience, continental water security and the conservation of ecosystem services, while ensuring their eligibility under climate and biodiversity finance mechanisms.

Justification: Grasslands are the region's most undervalued water infrastructure: their degradation dries out river basins and intensifies drought. Continental water security depends on these biomes, including the Cerrado, which feeds eight of Brazil's twelve major river basins and affects the Southern Cone; high-Andean systems, which sustain the Amazon Basin's hydrological cycle; and the Orinoco Llanos, which regulate flows in the Orinoco River.

Use in: Water Day (25 August 2026) · Ministerial Dialogue on Drought.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America urges the Conference of the Parties to recognize that the integrated management of savannas and grasslands, grounded in nature-based solutions and local knowledge, is essential to strengthen drought resilience, ensure continental water security and conserve ecosystem services. We call for these biomes to receive priority eligibility under climate and biodiversity finance mechanisms.”

MESSAGE 7 Governance and rights

Latin America promotes implementation of Decision 29/COP.16, with a global commitment to medium-term solutions that recognize and protect the legitimate tenure rights and livelihoods of more than 30 million people who depend on grasslands, advancing land tenure formalization, integrated landscape management, the participation of pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and conflict-management mechanisms.

Justification: The conversion of grasslands and savannas marginalizes traditional populations and erodes ancestral knowledge. Because Decision 29/COP.16 adopted in Riyadh is a binding mandate, COP17 should focus on enabling the financial mechanisms and institutional support required for its direct implementation on the ground.

Use in: Land and People Day (26 August 2026) · Special Event on Indigenous Peoples · Gender Caucus · UNCCD Land Governance Initiative · Youth Forum.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America urges COP17 to operationalize Decision 29/COP.16 through concrete resources and medium-term solutions that protect the tenure rights and livelihoods of the more than 30 million people who depend on grasslands. We call for the conclusions of Land and People Day to establish firm political commitments on land tenure formalization, integrated landscape management, resolution of territorial conflicts, and the active participation of pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.”

MESSAGE 8 Equity and inclusion across gender, age and mobility status

Latin America promotes equity and inclusion across gender, age and mobility status, explicitly including persons with disabilities and ensuring the social participation of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, while recognizing youth migration as part of social resilience and adaptation.

Justification: Rural women play a central role in territorial development and the rural economy in grassland landscapes, and safeguarding their role while reducing the out-migration of rural youth is essential to ensure generational renewal and food security.

Use in: Land and People Day (26 August 2026) · Special Event on Indigenous Peoples · Gender Caucus · UNCCD Land Governance Initiative · Youth Forum.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America urges COP17 decisions to recognize gender equity, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and the social participation of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities at every stage of territorial planning and governance, while recognizing rural youth migration as a critical factor in resilience and social adaptation strategies in rural areas.”

MESSAGE 9 Monitoring and LDN indicators for herbaceous biomes

Latin America calls for the expansion and strengthening of research, monitoring and knowledge-management systems to support evidence-based decisions, demonstrate the benefits of herbaceous ecosystems and facilitate access to finance.

Justification: Grasslands and savannas cover 18% of the region's territory and store up to 90% of their carbon below ground. The technical entry point at COP17 is the PRAIS4 Grassland Module, currently under discussion in the CRIC. NDCs and national LDN targets should include specific indicators for native herbaceous vegetation and deep-soil carbon.

Use in: Land and People Day (26 August 2026) · CRIC Technical Week (16–22 August 2026) · PRAIS4 Working Group · IUCN SUR side events.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America calls for COP17 decisions to expand and strengthen research, monitoring and knowledge-management systems to support evidence-based decisions, demonstrate the benefits of herbaceous ecosystems and facilitate access to finance.”

MESSAGE 10 Triple COP 2026: synergies among the Rio Conventions

Latin America calls for implementation of the mandate on synergies among the Rio Conventions by managing grasslands and savannas in a complementary and integrated manner and positioning regional experience as a coherent evidence base for conservation, production and adaptation.

Justification: 2026 is the first year in which the three Rio Conventions meet within the same calendar year. Latin America has an opportunity to capitalize politically on this historic alignment by carrying forward the biodiversity commitments made in Cali (CBD) and the climate commitments made in Belém (UNFCCC), linking them directly to the mandates that will emerge from Ulaanbaatar under the UNCCD. This synergy will demonstrate strong regional leadership in implementing agreements on open ecosystems, paving the way toward the future COPs in Armenia (CBD) and Türkiye (UNFCCC), while ensuring the strategic visibility of grasslands and savannas on the global environmental agenda

Use in: High-Level Segment · Opening and closing plenaries · Joint IUCN SUR side events · Presidencies of the three Conventions.

Suggested language for Mongolia:

“Latin America is the region where the Cali and Belém commitments were adopted, and it now links them with the Ulaanbaatar commitments, reaffirming its leadership in joint implementation. We urge COP17 to include explicit language in its final document to advance implementation of the mandate for synergies among the three Rio Conventions, integrating NAPs, NDCs and the GBF and recognizing grasslands and savannas as a carbon shield, water regulator and pillar of food security, managed in an integrated manner through a coherent evidence base spanning conservation, production and adaptation.”

Advocacy Timeline for Delegations at COP17

As negotiations unfold, the use of key messages in the room should follow the timeline below: from 16 to 22 August, during CRIC Technical Week, **Message 9** (Monitoring and LDN indicators) should be prioritized. On 24 August, during Finance Day, **Messages 1, 2 and 3** (Dedicated and additional financing) should be advanced. On 25 August, during Water Day, **Message 6** (Water–Land Nexus) should be used. On 26 August, during Land and People Day, **Messages 7** (Governance and rights), **Message 8** (Inclusion and equity) should be advanced together, with **Message 9** used on technical matters. On 27 August, during Food Systems and Soil Health Day, **Message 4** (Regenerative practices) and **Message 5** (No conversion) should be advanced. Finally, **Message 10** (Triple COP synergies) should remain a cross-cutting advocacy line in plenaries and high-level segments throughout the conference.

Message	COP17 thematic day	Mechanism / Venue	Suggested negotiating position	Target audience
		Governance Initiative • Youth Forum	management, conflict resolution and participation of pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.	Organizations (CSOs) • Gender Caucus • Youth Forum
MESSAGE 8 Equity and inclusion across gender, age and mobility status	Land and People Day (26 August)	Land and People Day • Special Event on Indigenous Peoples • Gender Caucus • UNCCD Land Governance Initiative • Youth Forum	Promote recognition of gender equity, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and the participation of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in territorial planning, while recognizing rural youth migration as a critical factor in resilience and social adaptation.	• UNCCD Presidency • Ministers of Environment and Agriculture • UNCCD Focal Points • Indigenous organizations • Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) • Gender Caucus • Youth Forum
MESSAGE 9 Monitoring and LDN indicators for herbaceous biomes	Land and People Day (26 August) CRIC Technical Week (16–22 August)	Land and People Day • CRIC Technical Week (16–22 August 2026) • PRAIS4 Grassland Module Working Group • IUCN SUR side events	Advance the expansion and strengthening of research, monitoring and knowledge-management systems to support evidence-based decisions, demonstrate the benefits of herbaceous ecosystems and facilitate access to finance.	• UNCCD Secretariat • Focal Points • Technical teams
MESSAGE 10 Cali–Belém–Ulaanbaatar Synergies: Triple COP	Cross-cutting — all thematic days	Cross-cutting (all thematic days) • High-Level Segment • Joint IUCN SUR side events • Opening and closing plenaries	Position Latin America as the region that jointly implements the Cali (GBF), Belém (NDCs) and Mongolia (LDN) commitments, and urge the Parties to ensure that the COP17 final document includes explicit language advancing implementation of the mandate for synergies among the three Rio Conventions, integrating NAPs, NDCs and the GBF across grasslands and savannas.	• Presidencies of the three Conventions • Ministers of Environment and Agriculture • Focal Points to the UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD • UNCCD Secretariat

Practical recommendations for key actors

Actor	Operational recommendation	COP17 venues
UNCCD Focal Points	• Coordinate unified positions and voting blocs within GRULAC. • Use the GRaSS framework (IUCN–WWF) to negotiate equitable safeguards. • Call for the operationalization of Decision 29/COP.16. • Leverage the IUCN–Mongolia MOU to open diplomatic channels with the Presidency.	• Ministerial Dialogues • CRIC • Steppe Action Agenda • GRULAC sessions • IUCN SUR side events • GRaSS
Ministries of Agriculture and Environment	• Align NAPs with NDCs and the GBF. • Present integrated progress during the Triple COP 2026. • Co-design restoration plans for native herbaceous vegetation. • Use BIOFIN/UNDP as a technical tool to facilitate subsidy reform and promote regenerative livestock production.	• Ministerial Segment • Food Systems Day • Land and People Day • NDCs and NAPs
Development Banks and the Private Sector	• Strengthen green credit lines and blended finance for triple-benefit projects such as regenerative livestock production, agrivoltaics and solar grazing. • Incorporate voluntary standards (GANSO, Carne del Pastizal, RAS, RWS). • Link portfolios to the Green Climate Fund, LDN Fund and STAR/GEF-8. • Participate in the Business4Land Forum as a regional investment platform.	• Business4Land Forum • Finance Day • UNCCD Global Mechanism • LDN Fund
CSOs, Indigenous Peoples and Youth	• Position OECMs in livestock landscapes under GBF Target 3. • Document traditional grazing systems and ancestral knowledge as replicable models. • Ensure the inclusion of rural women and young pastoralists in IYRP 2026. • Connect with IYRP policy-legacy events.	• Gender Caucus • Special Event on Indigenous Peoples • Youth Forum • IYRP Legacy Events

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