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Desertification Day 2026 and the UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Report

17 June 2026

ENVIRONMENT

REPORTS & SCHEMES

GS3

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Desertification Day 2026 and the UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Report

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WHY IN NEWS

June 17 is observed as the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, with the 2026 theme “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.” Coinciding with the day, UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Report 2026 found that about 1.1 billion children globally face three or more overlapping climate hazards.

Two strands of the climate story converge on this date: the slow-onset crisis of land degradation and drought, and the acute, present-day vulnerability (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/vulnerability/>) of children to climate hazards. Together they offer a rich, multi-dimensional environment topic for UPSC.

WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

The Basics

The day has been observed since 1995, marked by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The 2026 theme is “**Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.**”, with **Kenya as host**, falling within the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026**.

| ELEMENT | DETAIL (2026) |
|----------------|--|
| Observed since | 1995 |
| Convention | UNCCD |
| 2026 theme | “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.” |
| Host country | Kenya |
| Special year | International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026 |

The UNCCD and the Rio Conventions

The UNCCD is one of the three **Rio Conventions** that emerged from the 1992 Earth Summit, alongside the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC (<https://ujivari.com/terms/unfccc/>)) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The UNCCD is the only legally binding international agreement linking environment, development and sustainable land management. Its central concept is **Land Degradation Neutrality**, aiming to balance land degraded with land restored.

India’s Engagement

India has been an active party to the UNCCD.

- India hosted **UNCCD COP14 in 2019** at Greater Noida, where the Delhi Declaration was adopted.
- Under the **Bonn Challenge**, India pledged to restore **26 million hectares** of degraded land by 2030.
- The **Aravalli Green Wall** project aims to create a green buffer along the Aravalli range to check desertification spreading from the Thar towards the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Why Rangelands?

Rangelands, which include grasslands, shrublands and pastures, cover a vast share of the earth’s land surface and support pastoral communities and livestock. They are often overlooked in conservation despite storing carbon, supporting biodiversity and sustaining pastoralist livelihoods. The 2026 focus seeks to correct this neglect.

UNICEF CHILDREN’S CLIMATE RISK REPORT 2026

Global Findings

About **1.1 billion children** worldwide face three or more overlapping climate hazards such as extreme heat, floods, cyclones, air pollution and water scarcity. Children are uniquely vulnerable because their bodies are still developing and they have fewer coping resources.

India in Focus

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| INDICATOR | INDIA |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Overall hazard score | 9.21 / 10 |
| Extreme heat sub-score | 10 / 10 |
| Air pollution sub-score | 9.94 / 10 |
| Children exposed to extreme heat | About 392 million (around 92%) |
| Children exposed to recurrent heatwaves | About 89 million |

India's neighbours scored similarly high, with Pakistan at 9.44 and Bangladesh at 9.38, underlining the South Asian heat and pollution crisis.

UPSC RELEVANCE

- **GS3 Environment:** Desertification, land degradation neutrality, the Rio Conventions, the Bonn Challenge and climate vulnerability.
- **GS2 Social Justice and International Relations:** Child rights, climate justice, India's treaty commitments and the role of international conventions.
- **Mains angle:** Connect land degradation to food security and migration; connect children's climate risk to heat action plans, the Right to Education and public health.
- **Prelims angle:** The three Rio Conventions, the host of COP14, the Bonn Challenge target and the Aravalli Green Wall are high-probability facts.

Way Forward

India needs scaled-up land restoration aligned with the 26 million hectare pledge, city and district heat action plans that specifically protect children, cleaner air to address the 9.94 pollution sub-score, and integration of pastoralist and rangeland conservation into national land-use planning.

FACTS CORNER

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Desertification Day: Observed since 1995; 2026 theme “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.”; host Kenya.

Three Rio Conventions (1992): UNCCD, UNFCCC, CBD.

India and UNCCD: Hosted COP14 in 2019 (Delhi Declaration); Bonn Challenge pledge of 26 million hectares by 2030; Aravalli Green Wall.

UNICEF report: 1.1 billion children face 3+ climate hazards; India hazard score 9.21/10.

India heat exposure: About 392 million children (around 92%) exposed to extreme heat; 89 million to recurrent heatwaves.

Land Degradation Neutrality is the central concept of the UNCCD.

Sources: *UNCCD* (<https://www.unccd.int>), *UNICEF* (<https://www.unicef.org>)

Source: Desertification Day 2026 and the UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Report — [Ujyari.com](https://ujyari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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