

UNCCD CRIC 5 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 15 MARCH 2007

The fifth session of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 5) continued on Thursday, 15 March 2007. During the morning, participants finished the previous day's discussion on financial resources. They then spent the rest of the day sharing information and discussing measures for the rehabilitation of degraded lands, including the promotion of new and renewable energy sources, and sustainable land management (SLM) particularly of water, soils and vegetation in affected areas.

FINANCIAL RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Chair Moore opened the floor to finalize the discussion on resource mobilization and coordination left over from the previous day. BELGIUM said that the Global Mechanism (GM) is now on the right track, commented that the GEF reform process is very important and suggested that national focal points attend GEF meetings in their countries in preparation for GEF Council meetings.

COLOMBIA requested the equitable distribution of GEF resources and called for the increase of OP 15 funds. The GEF stated that its funding for land degradation is allocated on a first-come-first-serve basis but that efforts are made to achieve an equitable balance. He added that only land degradation projects addressing NAP activities are funded under OP 15.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA asked whether the GM is overstepping its mandate, and BELIZE voiced concern about the GM's new role, including capacity building. COLOMBIA highlighted the usefulness of GM support, but with SAINT LUCIA, lamented the low level of GM support to the GRULAC region. ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA asked how the GM will mobilize funds at the national level.

The GM responded that their new strategy and enhanced role was endorsed at COP 7 and work is underway to determine modalities for its implementation. He said that their mandate is to mobilize substantive resources, rather than very small amounts, adding that the GM is not a mere fundraising body, but also works to support capacity building of country parties. He also indicated that human resources available for the GRULAC region have more than doubled recently.

BELIZE announced the Central American subregion's intention to develop a subregional action programme and a regional coordination mechanism. LESOTHO encouraged development partners to increase resource allocation for

combating desertification. ACICAFOC, representing a network of grassroots and indigenous organizations in Central America, advocated better use of existing funds, as well as investment in communities rather than mere donations that can create dependence.

REHABILITATION OF DEGRADED LAND

Chair Moore introduced the panel thematic topic on measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land. The Secretariat recalled that under the Bonn Declaration, seven areas of action were identified, three of which were discussed at previous CRICs, and the remaining four of which will be discussed at this session. He reported that most country parties have struggled to link the promotion of new and renewable energies to the prevention of land degradation.

NEW AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PANEL: Anneke

Trux, GTZ, presented case studies of GTZ's experiences in linking the promotion of renewable energies to combating desertification, focusing in particular on the pros and cons of biofuels. She described the UNCCD as the international authority on sustainable land management, and urged it to intervene in the debate on renewable energies and to advocate the assessment of the risks and benefits of renewable energies for sustainable land management. She suggested that the IIWG give guidance on the strategic link between combating desertification and using renewable energies, and encouraged the exploration of appropriate political frameworks for public-private partnerships to promote renewable energies.

Discussion: INDIA asked Trux to elaborate on the ecological aspects of biofuels and species that work best for drylands, and ALGERIA asked how to incorporate community and small farmers' needs within biofuel promotion policies. Trux responded that both positive and negative aspects of a species introduction need to be considered prior to introducing it, and highlighted the need for a participatory approach to ensure that the interests of agricultural producers are taken into account.

DOMINICA outlined his country's experimentation with geothermal energy, and LESOTHO noted the challenges of selecting appropriate species in areas with communal land management. BRAZIL emphasized the importance of enhancing complementarity among different conventions, and advocated developing biofuel production in a socially-inclusive way. BURKINA FASO asked how to ensure the sustainability of renewable energy use, while INDONESIA noted the need to develop uniform biofuel crop varieties in order to reduce the costs of harvest and compete with other fuels. Trux added that cooperation can support innovation and dissemination of

a technology, but in the end, large-scale biofuel production viability will depend on market prices and regulations. BURUNDI noted that her country is trying to promote renewable energy sources, including by abolishing a tax on solar energy. BARBADOS reported on efforts to use solar power and sugarcane bagasse as sources of energy in his country. ERITREA sought assistance on biodiesel crop production in drylands.

Pakistan, for G77/CHINA, called for on-ground action to improve UNCCD implementation, including: initiatives to promote secure livelihoods in rural areas; national land resource management information systems that include local and indigenous knowledge; and an emphasis on new and renewable energy sources, including biofuels, to reduce pressure on forests as energy sources.

ECUADOR sought assistance in establishing solar energy as a replacement for firewood in rural dryland areas. He further warned that clearing forests to plant crops for biodiesel also causes deforestation and land degradation. EL SALVADOR agreed, and shared his country's experiences in developing hydroelectric and geothermal sources of energy, and research in wind, solar and tidal power.

The UNDP highlighted four debates in the global arena regarding biofuels: whether biofuel production is carried out on a commercial or community scale; the tension between land use for food versus for biofuel production; the impacts of biofuel production on land ownership; and the loss of healthy grasslands to biofuel production. She reported that the Global Bioenergy Partnership is developing a sustainability guideline on bioenergies, which will be made available at the fifteenth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in May 2007.

PERU outlined his country's experience with solar, wind, geothermal and tidal energy. He noted that his country is trying to use deforested land for biofuel production and has chosen to involve the private sector in biofuel production. The HOLY SEE cautioned that biofuel production should be for local use and not for export. KAZAKHSTAN said that although his country possesses extensive hydrocarbon resources, the government has been developing a renewable energy strategy, which includes the production of bioethanol for export to Sweden.

The FAO outlined the International Bioenergy Platform, and noted its willingness to help parties learn about bioenergy. He warned that competition between land uses will increase over time and suggested that the UNCCD could be instrumental in addressing regulatory reform for land-derived goods and services.

PANEL ON SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT:

The Secretariat introduced the topic of sustainable management of land use, particularly of water, soils and vegetation, in affected areas.

Mevlut Duzgun, Turkey, presented on the causes and impacts of land degradation, Turkey's experiences in addressing the issue, and criteria for sustainable land use and rehabilitation of degraded lands in the Northern Mediterranean Region. He outlined major causes of land degradation in the region, including: the fragility of natural vegetation; unsustainable land-use patterns; inappropriate soil and water management practices; and deforestation and forest fires. He also discussed the relationship between land rehabilitation and watershed management and described major tools and mechanisms used in SLM in his country such as: regulations; NGO and other stakeholder involvement; forest rehabilitation and afforestation; erosion control measures; and rangeland improvement.

Ramón Cardoza, Mexico, noted that 40% of his country's 200 million hectares of land has been degraded. He presented Mexico's SLM efforts, including: developing 11 federal programmes; organizing training courses for rural people;

adopting integrated watershed management; promoting rainfall capture; transferring best practices; using traditional knowledge; producing and distributing an SLM manual; and including SLM in the academic curriculum. He also said that his country has integrated SLM with poverty eradication and national development programmes.

Uladzimir Sauchanka, Belarus, presented on his country's six-year programme for the restoration and development of rural areas, noting the need for territorial development and planning, and keeping the interests of the population in mind, especially when a fundamental change in agricultural practice is required. He noted that 21% of Belarus' territory remains unusable due to the Chernobyl nuclear accident, with 1.3 million people living in partially-contaminated lands. He suggested the GEF's small grant programme as a valid tool to help communities remove barriers to SLM.

Jack Wilkinson, International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), made an emotional appeal for delegates to consider farmers' profit margins as the main driver for SLM, and to engage farmers in the process of achieving the fundamental change in agricultural practices needed to address desertification and the impact of climate change. Calling for "more crop per drop" in dryland farming, he welcomed the prospects of new opportunities such as no-tillage technologies and biofuel production.

Discussion: BOTSWANA noted that poor African communities lack the means rather than the will to undertake land rehabilitation, and sought advice on realistic short-term initiatives that can kick-start rehabilitation in very poor areas. PAKISTAN reported on a joint UNDP/GEF project to combat desertification in his country through use of drought-resistant crops, livestock management, soil and water conservation and reforestation. GUATEMALA underlined the need for harmonized policies between environmental, agricultural and forestry institutions. BRAZIL stated that growing biofuel crops helps keep food prices stable and provides the opportunity to raise income in rural areas.

CHILE suggested a possible link between land rehabilitation and reversing rainfall decline, and suggested that IFAP incorporate combating desertification and drought into its strategies and goals, such as through an agreement with the UNCCD. Responding to a question from the European Community on the proportion of farmers worldwide who get their products onto the global market, Wilkinson said that trade reforms alone will not increase market access, but that issues such as transportation and infrastructure must also be addressed.

SWITZERLAND commented that farmers are front-line managers of natural resources and noted the linkages between income generation from agricultural production, farmers' ability to invest in natural resources, and desertification.

IN THE CORRIDORS

In the hallways of La Rural, several delegates were heard echoing the Executive Secretary's opening-day call for moving the UNCCD from assessment to action, pointing out that 10 years of awareness-raising, NAP development and NCB establishment have rolled by, and it is now time for substantive work to address land degradation "on the ground". In this regard, some delegates wondered whether CRIC 5 was only performing half of its job. While plenary spent the day addressing two strategic areas for action, which several delegates found very interesting, others questioned how much review of implementation is actually taking place, and whether the panels are diverting attention from CRIC's main task of assessing UNCCD implementation by parties.