

SUMMARY OF THE FIFTEENTH SESSION OF THE UNCCD COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: 18-20 OCTOBER 2016

The fifteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 15) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) convened in Nairobi, Kenya, from 18-20 October 2016. Approximately 350 participants attended the special intersessional meeting, which convened to discuss items relating to a follow-up strategy to guide the implementation of the Convention once the current Ten-year Strategic Plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (the Strategy) concludes in 2018, together with its corresponding monitoring and reporting framework.

Delegates provided inputs to a draft report presented by the Intergovernmental Working Group on a future strategic framework for the Convention, containing a proposed new strategy for the period 2018-2030, in order to coincide with, and encourage alignment with, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The discussions highlighted, among other elements of the proposed strategy: the strategic objectives and expected impacts; the implementation framework, including funding for the strategy; the roles of the Convention's subsidiary bodies (the CRIC and the Committee on Science and Technology), as well as the UNCCD Secretariat and Global Mechanism; and monitoring, reporting and evaluation arrangements.

The session also convened two interactive dialogue sessions. The first provided for an exchange of experiences from the voluntary country reporting exercise for the period 2014-2015. The second discussed progress in developing national targets to measure progress towards land degradation neutrality, which the 2030 Agenda calls on all countries to strive to achieve by 2030 and the UNCCD's Conference of the Parties recognized could be a strong vehicle for driving implementation of the UNCCD.

At the close of the session, delegates adopted the CRIC 15 report containing their recommendations on these topics. The recommendations will be forwarded for further consideration at the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13), which is expected to take place in Ordos, China, in September 2017.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNCCD AND CRIC

The UNCCD is the centerpiece in the international community's efforts to combat desertification and land degradation in the drylands. The Convention was adopted on 17

June 1994, entered into force on 26 December 1996, and currently has 195 parties. The UNCCD recognizes the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification, the importance of redirecting technology transfer to be demand-driven, and the importance of involving local communities in combating desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). The core of the UNCCD is the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes by national governments, in cooperation with UN agencies, donors, local communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

NEGOTIATION OF THE CONVENTION: In 1992, the UN General Assembly, as requested by the UN Conference on Environment and Development, adopted resolution 47/188 calling for the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification (INCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa. The INCD met five times between May 1993 and June 1994 and drafted the UNCCD and four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean.

COPs 1-12: The Conference of the Parties (COP) met annually from 1997-2001. During these meetings, delegates, *inter alia*: selected Bonn, Germany, as the location for the UNCCD's Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the organization to administer the Global

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Mechanism (GM), which works with countries on financing strategies for sustainable land management (SLM); approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding the GM; established an *ad hoc* working group to review and analyze reports on national, subregional and regional action programmes; adopted a fifth regional annex for Central and Eastern Europe; established the CRIC; and supported a proposal by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to designate land degradation as a focal area for funding.

COP 6 met in 2003 in Havana, Cuba. Delegates, *inter alia*, designated the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, decided that a comprehensive review of the Secretariat's activities would be undertaken by the UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), and requested the Secretariat to facilitate a costed feasibility study on all aspects of regional coordination. COP 7 took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2005. Delegates reviewed the implementation of the Convention and developed an MoU between the UNCCD and the GEF. An intergovernmental intersessional working group was established to review the JIU report and to develop a draft Strategy.

COP 8 convened in Madrid, Spain, in 2007 and, *inter alia*, adopted a decision on the Strategy. Delegates also requested the JIU to conduct an assessment of the GM for presentation to COP 9. Delegates did not reach agreement on the programme and budget, and an extraordinary session of the COP convened at UN Headquarters in New York on 26 November 2007 to conclude this item.

COP 9 convened in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2009. Delegates focused on a number of items called for by the Strategy and adopted 36 decisions on topics including: four-year work plans and two-year work programmes of the CRIC, Committee on Science and Technology (CST), GM and Secretariat; the JIU assessment of the GM; the terms of reference of the CRIC; arrangements for regional coordination mechanisms; the communication strategy; and the programme and budget.

COP 10 convened in 2011, in Changwon City, Republic of Korea. Delegates adopted 40 decisions, addressing, *inter alia*, the governance structure for the GM, by which parties agreed that the accountability and legal representation of the GM shall be transferred from IFAD to the UNCCD Secretariat.

COP 11 convened in 2013, in Windhoek, Namibia. Delegates adopted 41 decisions, *inter alia*, to: approve new housing arrangements of the GM; initiate follow-up of the outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20); establish a Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to enhance the UNCCD as a global authority on DLDD and SLM; and endorse the establishment of the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal (SKBP).

COP 12 took place in Ankara, Turkey, in October 2015, immediately following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Delegates adopted 35 decisions, including how to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target calling for actors at all levels to strive to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) and how to align the UNCCD's goals and Parties' action programmes with the SDGs. During the meeting, the GEF and Turkey, through its Ankara Initiative, announced that funding would be available to support affected countries to establish voluntary national LDN targets. Delegates also agreed to convene a special intersessional meeting of the CRIC in 2016 to provide further guidance on the Convention's reporting and review structure prior to COP 13.

CRIC: The CRIC held its first session in Rome, Italy, in 2002, during which delegates considered presentations from the five UNCCD regions, and considered information on financial mechanisms in support of the UNCCD's implementation and advice provided by the CST and the GM.

CRIC 2 (2003) reviewed implementation of the UNCCD, its institutional arrangements, and financing of UNCCD implementation by multilateral agencies and institutions. CRIC 3 (2005) reviewed the implementation of the Convention in Africa and considered issues relating to implementation at the global level. CRIC 4 (2005) considered strengthening the Convention's implementation in Africa, improving communication and reporting procedures, mobilizing resources for implementation, and collaborating with the GEF.

CRIC 5 (2007) reviewed implementation of the Convention in regions other than Africa, how to improve information communication and national reporting, and the 2006 International Year for Deserts and Desertification. CRIC 6 (2007) reviewed the roles developed and developing country parties should play in resource mobilization, and collaboration with the GEF. CRIC 7 (2008) considered: the work plans and programmes for the Convention's bodies; the format of future meetings of the CRIC; indicators and monitoring the Strategy; and principles for improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports submitted to the COP.

CRIC 8 (2009) reviewed the workplans of the institutions and subsidiary bodies of the Convention and reporting guidelines and indicators. Delegates also recommended adoption of the proposal for an online Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS). CRIC 9 (2011) considered, among other items, preliminary analyses of information contained in the PRAIS reports.

CRIC 10 (2011) discussed the strategic orientation of the Convention's institutions and subsidiary bodies, adopted four operational objectives to assess the implementation of the Convention against performance indicators, and approved an iterative process on reporting procedures and the refinement of methodologies for the review and compilation of best practices. CRIC 11 (2013) reviewed progress in alignment of National Action Programmes (NAPs) with the Strategy. Delegates also considered input from the Intersessional Working Group for the Mid-term Evaluation of the Strategy and the *Ad Hoc* Advisory Group of Technical Experts on "operationally delineating affected areas," and took note of the input from the third special session of the CST (CST S-3) on how best to measure progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

CRIC 12 (2013) approved 12 decisions, including on: best practices in the implementation of the Convention; UNCCD's interaction with the GEF; multi-year workplans of the Convention's institutions and subsidiary bodies; assessment of financial flows for implementation; assessment of the implementation of the Convention against strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3, and against the operational objectives of the Strategy; and performance and progress indicators, methodology, and reporting procedures.

CRIC 13 (2015) assessed the implementation of the Convention against its five operational objectives: advocacy, awareness raising and education; policy framework; science, technology and knowledge; capacity building; and financing and technology transfer. The CRIC also reviewed financial support

for the implementation of the Convention, and the formulation, revision and implementation of action programmes in view of the post-2015 sustainable development framework.

CRIC 14 (2015) convened in parallel to COP 12 and developed eight decisions, regarding, *inter alia*: collaboration with the GEF; establishment of national-level voluntary LDN targets within NAPs and national reports, including funding to support national target-setting towards achieving LDN; actions to achieve the Strategy; procedures for communication of information to be submitted to the COP, including on progress indicators for trends in land cover, land productivity and carbon stocks; and a results framework with which the CST, CRIC, GM and Secretariat will organize their work for the period 2016-2019.

CRIC 15 REPORT

CRIC Vice-Chair Raymond Baptiste (Grenada) welcomed delegates on Tuesday morning, 18 October, and noted the importance of the special intersessional meeting for UNCCD's future implementation, due to the focus on the UNCCD's mandate to promote LDN under the SDGs.

Charles Sunkuli, Principal Secretary, State Department of Environment and Regional Development Authorities, Kenya, welcomed delegates and highlighted the "New African Initiative for Combating Desertification to Strengthen Resilience to Climate Change in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa" that was launched during the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which convened in August 2016 in Nairobi. He welcomed efforts to advance the LDN target-setting programme and noted parties' expectations that the meeting would contribute to a "regular and frequent" reporting cycle and a strengthened mandate for the CRIC.

Pan Yingzhen, Director-General, National Bureau to Combat Desertification, State Forestry Administration, and UNCCD National Focal Point, China, announced that her country would host COP 13 in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, in 2017. She presented a short film highlighting successful land restoration efforts in the region, which she described as the pearl of north China and "the epitome of our efforts to combat desertification."

Ali Riza Diniz, Deputy Undersecretary, Ministry for Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey, on behalf of the COP 12 President, applauded the rapid increase in the number of countries implementing LDN projects, from 14 to 102 during the past year alone, and noted that this reflected the collective determination to reverse land degradation and desertification. He stressed Turkey's commitment to put people at the center of decision-making processes in realizing the Ankara Initiative, and called for parties to commit themselves to achieve the LDN goals by 2030.

Alexander Barabanov, Director, Administrative Services, UN Office in Nairobi (UNON), delivered opening remarks on behalf of Sahle-Work Zewde, UNON Director-General. Welcoming all to the UNON complex, he said that hosting CRIC 15 in Nairobi is not only a testimony of confidence in Kenya, but in the whole continent of Africa, proving its role in global environmental matters.

Alluding to a Kenyan expression that "the quality of the ground determines the quality of the tree," UNCCD Executive Secretary Monique Barbut called on CRIC 15 delegates to prepare fertile soil for decisions at UNCCD COP 13. She said LDN should be reflected in the new UNCCD strategy, which will be considered for adoption at COP 13, and CRIC 15 should address outstanding issues on LDN. Assuring parties that LDN is not a distracting element and that progress is being made on

drought-related issues, she stressed that excluding the UNCCD from the SDGs process by ignoring the LDN target would be political suicide. Recognizing the need to reduce the Convention's reporting burden on national governments, she encouraged countries to consider the proposal for a four-year reporting interval. Informing parties that Canada has started the process of returning to the Convention, Barbut welcomed Canada as an observer to CRIC 15.

STATEMENTS BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION ANNEXES: Kenya, on behalf of Regional Implementation Annex I, voiced the expectation that the LDN concept would be anchored in strategy development undertaken by the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG). He emphasized the need for: creating a strong implementation framework; strengthening measures for technology transfer; developing robust LDN target-setting initiatives; and reviewing the modalities of the CRIC. He applauded the role of Africa in hosting the African Drought Conference on "Enhancing resilience to drought events on the African continent," which he noted had produced a Windhoek Declaration in August 2016, as well as the 22nd session of the COP to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will convene in Morocco in November 2016.

Bhutan, on behalf of Regional Implementation Annex II, reported on the outcome of the region's recent meeting in the Republic of Korea. She highlighted that, *inter alia*: countries need to be advised well in advance of optional reporting obligations; report preparation is an intensive process that should be funded through the Convention; the capacity of new focal points within countries needs to be enhanced; and a focus on mobilization of financial resources is more important than developing tools and policies.

Colombia, on behalf of Regional Implementation Annex III, expressed sympathy for the Caribbean region's recent losses due to Hurricane Matthew. He urged moving beyond "the diagnostic phase" of the UNCCD and its goals, and ensuring adequate funding to allow for effective implementation. Emphasizing his region's commitment to the CRIC as the main implementing mechanism of the Convention, he stressed that the challenge is not the methodology, but the quality of the reporting process. He urged identifying activities that strengthen synergies with the other two Rio Conventions (the UNFCCC and the Convention on Biological Diversity) and related instruments, such as through cooperation on research and optimizing financial resources.

Speaking on behalf of Regional Implementation Annex IV, Italy called for SDG target 15.3 on LDN to be a specific UNCCD target. She supported continuing the LDN target-setting exercise, noting this process would reinforce the Convention and its effectiveness at the national and local levels. Pointing to the considerable effort made by 26 countries in submitting their reports, Italy urged the Secretariat to consider the experience of the optional reporting exercise for the next reporting cycle.

Welcoming the interactive format envisaged at CRIC 15, Armenia, on behalf of Regional Implementation Annex V, highlighted the future strategy for implementation of the Convention as the key issue to be considered at this meeting. He emphasized the need for the new strategy to raise the implementation of the Convention to a higher level, while also taking into account the specificities of each region.

STATEMENTS BY REGIONAL AND INTEREST GROUPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES: Slovakia, representing the European Union (EU), recalled

decision 16/COP.12, in which the COP decided that CRIC 15 would focus on methodological issues and called on delegates to explore ways to “enhance synergies without neglecting our focus.”

Argentina, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China (G-77/China), stressed that striving to achieve a land degradation neutral world is also a strong vehicle for UNCCD implementation, and welcomed the efforts of the UNCCD GM to support countries in setting their voluntary LDN targets. He highlighted the role of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in developing a methodology and data options for monitoring SDG indicator 15.3.1. Noting that drought is one of the most economically disruptive weather events that leads to entrenched poverty and food insecurity, he welcomed the outputs of the recent Africa Drought Conference hosted by Namibia.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said the adoption of the SDGs offers a unique opportunity for close collaboration among environmental stakeholders to engage in active implementation of the SDGs, in particular target 15.3. She reported that during the recent second session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-2), resolutions on sand and dust storms and on combining DLDD with promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands were adopted as part of UNEP’s work programme. On the benefits of land rehabilitation, she reported an Asian study showing that land rehabilitation is seven times more cost effective than ignoring degradation and desertification.

A representative of civil society organizations (CSOs) welcomed the LDN target-setting process and urged parties to integrate indigenous peoples, women and other vulnerable groups’ needs in this process. Noting the need to integrate LDN in the new UNCCD strategy, she called for the involvement of CSOs in the development and implementation of the strategy. She also drew attention to the importance of securing human and land rights while financing large-scale projects, by involving land users and local CSOs through a bottom-up approach.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: CRIC 15 Chair Baptiste invited delegates to consider the provisional agenda (ICCD/CRIC(15)/1), which was adopted as drafted. Delegates appointed Yuriy Kolmaz, Ukraine, as Rapporteur.

IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES

OPEN DIALOGUE ON EXPERIENCE IN THE OPTIONAL REPORTING EXERCISE: On Tuesday afternoon, 18 October, the Secretariat presented a document containing a compilation of experiences by countries that participated in the optional reporting exercise (ICCD/CRIC(15)/INF.2), which she noted was agreed by decision 15/COP.12. She said 26 reports had been submitted: four from Africa, four from Asia, ten from Latin America and the Caribbean, seven from the Northern Mediterranean region and one from Central and Eastern Europe. Chair Baptiste then invited representatives of five countries to highlight achievements and lessons from their experience with UNCCD implementation.

Ramazan Ertuğrul Apaydin, Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey, highlighted key achievements since 2008, including the establishment of a General Directorate of Combating Desertification and Erosion, and a national desertification monitoring system. He said the country had achieved a success rate of 60-70% in its efforts, while also presenting some of the reporting bottlenecks encountered in relation to data collection, including institutions’ reluctance and their lack of coordination, and the complexity of the PRAIS.

Snežana Kuzmanovic, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Serbia, listed elements of progress since 2010, including increased public awareness on DLDD and integrated and sustainable land management, and strengthened institutional capacity. Among bottlenecks, she indicated the lack of national resources and competing priorities within the government.

Bongani Masuku, Ministry of Agriculture, Swaziland, reported that efforts had been made to integrate the NAP into national planning processes, but implementation was hampered by limited resource mobilization. He emphasized the need to develop a “costed strategy” to ensure that resources are available for implementation, as well as a clear and accessible template, support for comprehensive reporting and improved linkages to the reporting processes of other conventions.

Mishari Al-Kandari, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait, highlighted the improvements to the reporting process since 2008, including efforts to solicit inputs to the report from various stakeholders. Among challenges, he noted the limited time for the reporting process, the lack of relevance of some of the information required to Kuwait’s situation, and language difficulties.

Dominga Polanco, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Dominican Republic, highlighted some concrete achievements of the country’s NAP, including the development of a national strategy for sustainable land use, extensive awareness raising, and the incorporation of DLDD issues in broader development planning processes, such as the national strategic plan for science, technology and innovation. She noted the need to involve stakeholders at the highest levels, and to develop concrete and strategic goals with a corresponding budget, especially for working with local groups.

Speaking on behalf of the CSO constituency, Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim expressed concern that only 16% of 195 parties have submitted reports. Voicing the need for inclusive, participatory and multi-sectoral reports, available to all stakeholders, particularly vulnerable populations, indigenous peoples, women and youth, she called for capacity building for future reporting.

During the ensuing question and answer session, Panama recommended the use of a common methodology to allow all countries to present their national reports in an aligned, coherent manner. Brazil noted that the low reporting rate was due to its voluntary nature only, and cautioned against a reporting period of four years, warning that this would negatively affect the CRIC’s ability to review implementation of the Convention. The Dominican Republic said reporting can be done pragmatically in synergy with other international conventions. Swaziland stressed that the information for national reporting is already available at the national level, regardless of the UNCCD reporting obligation. Responding to a question by China on the use of progress indicators, Serbia pointed to the associated cost challenge. Acknowledging the financial burden of data collection, Argentina emphasized that the data collected through the reporting exercise eventually benefits the country above all, more than the UN, including by allowing for more informed national decision making.

INTERACTIVE SESSION ON THE LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY TARGET-SETTING EXERCISE: Panel Presentations: Discussions on this topic began on Tuesday afternoon, 18 October, and continued through Wednesday morning, 19 October. The CRIC contact group chaired by Jones Muleso Kharika (South Africa) and Ludo

Rochette (Belgium) also met on Tuesday and Wednesday to develop language on the voluntary LDN targeting-setting exercise for inclusion in the final CRIC 15 report.

In his opening remarks, Markus Repnik, Managing Director, Global Mechanism, mentioned key LDN-related decisions at COP 12, including: integrating LDN into the UNCCD's implementation process; inviting parties to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN; requesting the Global Mechanism to develop guidance for formulating national LDN targets; and calling for a review of the LDN target setting exercise at CRIC 15. He stated that the GM's report on the voluntary national LDN target-setting exercise (ICCD/CRIC(15)/3) could be summarized in one word—opportunity—and he outlined how the process could help countries and partners to move from: global commitments to national action; theory to practice; pilot projects to scale; fragmentation to synergies; and niche to mainstream. Repnik announced the launch of three publications to support this transition process: “Land in Balance,” a science-policy brief setting out the scientific conceptual framework for LDN; “Scaling up LDN Target Setting,” containing some of the lessons learned and recommendations from the 14-country LDN target setting pilot phase; and “Achieving LDN at the country level: Building blocks for LDN target setting,” which explains the four steps in the LDN target-setting process, based on the experience of the 14-country LDN pilot.

Opening the panel discussion, Moderator Pamela Chasek, Associate, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and Professor, Manhattan College, said the session would help to identify future opportunities, priorities, capacity-building requirements, partnerships and innovative actions that are needed for effective implementation and mainstreaming of LDN target setting. She invited delegates to reflect on some of the opportunities that the LDN process provides for: fostering coherence of national policies, actions and commitments; moving from pilots to scale; and raising funds through blended financing packages.

Barron Orr, UNCCD SPI, explained that the previous COP had tasked the SPI with establishing a scientific base for LDN. He described the SPI's process to develop a conceptual framework for LDN, noting this included: reviewing the definition of LDN formulated by the UNCCD IWG subsequent to the Rio+20 outcome document, “to see if it lends itself to a scientific approach and whether it has a goal-oriented basis”; examining the frame of reference for comparing LDN in the future; and creating a set of solutions and further organizing them into a response hierarchy. Orr also highlighted efforts to ensure the relevance of the response framework to affected communities, through the identification of a set of 19 principles “to prevent unintended impacts” during implementation and monitoring of LDN.

Kebede Yimam Dawd, State Minister, Ministry of Environment, and UNCCD National Focal Point, Ethiopia, described the multi-stakeholder process undertaken to compile LDN data and set baselines and targets, scale up investments in land restoration, and identify new hotspots for transformative LDN projects that also contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation. He reported that the Ethiopian Government has committed resources to this process from its annual budget and that millions of citizens are involved in land restoration efforts at the community level.

Dominga Polanco, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Dominican Republic, described the country's positive experiences in the target-setting process, including to: find

synergies in the implementation of the Rio Conventions; include the SDGs in their national development plan; develop practical tools to meet the goals as a country; establish national voluntary targets for soil; create a working group among the focal points of the different mechanisms; encourage leadership development of government officials; and strengthen governmental programmes that integrate the various processes.

Ulrich Apel, GEF, lauded the progress made with the target-setting process, and remarked that the UNCCD is the first Convention to address the SDGs and provide guidance to the GEF on LDN. He said this provides opportunities for the three Conventions to collaborate. He offered countries the support of the GEF in addressing environmental concerns and upscaling sound practices, saying the GEF is about addressing SLM and land degradation at multiscale, thus creating opportunities for providing multiple benefits.

Anne Juepner, Director, Global Policy Centre on Resilience Ecosystems and Desertification, UN Development Programme (UNDP), said LDN has become a guiding principle for SLM and land restoration, and an accelerator for meeting SDG 15 and related goals and targets, including on poverty, food security, and agriculture. Discussing the role of UNDP in capacity building and financial support, she highlighted a project in Lebanon to restore a degraded mountain landscape, saying it is one of the first initiatives of this kind. Juepner also noted UNDP's technical expertise in adaptation, saying it enables the organization to work with countries to “pipeline” GEF projects across the broad spectrum of restoration and land rehabilitation projects.

Interactive Discussion: In the ensuing discussion, the EU, with several others, lauded the increase in countries expressing an interest in participating in the target-setting support programme one year after adopting the SDGs, and encouraged countries to meet their voluntary contributions. Kenya, on behalf of the African Group, noted the lack of datasets available at country level and reminded delegates that efforts to address this challenge would require financial support. Colombia reported that inclusion of the LDN target was among its national priorities, and urged “moving from promises on paper to actions on the ground.”

Turkey cautioned that commitments need to translate into more than “just biophysical improvements,” but rather towards more sustainable agriculture and pastoral practices. Kyrgyzstan urged strong political leadership and knowledge sharing, and Argentina, with Senegal, noted the need for greater commitment from developed countries in sharing the financial burden.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) emphasized the global need for the right soil quantity and quality to produce food, and the need to embrace and integrate not only LDN and report to the UNCCD and SDG 15, but also other targets and conventions. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) offered continued support to countries in building synergies among the Rio Conventions and the SDGs, and in identifying the right tools and assessments to implement these agreements.

Brazil stressed the importance of ensuring that UNCCD programmes reflect the Convention's focus on drylands and improving the livelihoods of the populations living on them. He expressed concern about the creation of new obligations for developing country parties and urged developed countries to live up to their treaty obligations by providing substantial financial resources.

China called for more funding and technology for SDG implementation. Stressing that LDN is not only a goal, but also a scientific method related to land productivity, she encouraged the Secretariat to reach out to other UN agencies for more scientific guidance.

The US inquired whether any country has identified and committed to a target formally.

CSOs proposed the establishment of an institutionalized dialogue mechanism at the national level between UNCCD focal points and CSOs.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) underlined the relevance of the LDN process to the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. He observed that, in establishing and operationalizing implementation of LDN targets, parties can both build on the experiences and related work already undertaken in the context of the CBD, and noted opportunities for building more synergies through monitoring and reporting processes linked to sustainable land use and land management.

On Wednesday, in response to the US query, Ethiopia said all targets undertaken are aligned with their national plan. Emphasizing limited resources, Armenia declared its readiness to participate in the second phase of the project, on confirmation of the LDN targets.

Grenada said that the LDN-related targets will get endorsed if they are part of the NAP. Belarus stated that LDN has been included in their national strategy on combatting desertification, while noting that this process is only in a nascent stage and will need to be further refined.

As the interactive discussion continued, Uganda described opportunities created through the target-setting process, including adding value to national planning, providing datasets to support decision making, stimulating integrated development initiatives, and contributing to quantitative data on current land use. He stressed that, without supporting transformational investment, LDN target setting will not go very far for countries struggling with other poverty-related challenges.

Bangladesh asked what will happen to existing NAPs once LDN targets have been set.

Referring to the work burden involved with ensuring effective participation of a wide range of stakeholders in policy planning and NAPs processes, including local communities and women, Peru stressed the importance of evaluating countries' progress on updating their NAPs. Noting that his country had established an integrated financial strategy to support the fight against desertification, he highlighted the need for more reliable quantitative data and continued support from specialized agencies such as the FAO for the development of methodologies.

Chad called for the GM and the GEF to provide support to countries involved in the LDN pilot phase to prepare concrete investment projects. Georgia highlighted the need to mobilize both internal and external resources.

Cameroon elaborated on national plans, including raising awareness at the highest political levels, creating synergies between LDN and other national planning exercises, and communicating on LDN with international partners, CSOs and academia.

Costa Rica noted that the country's decision to participate in the LDN target-setting process was taken at the highest political level. While stressing the importance of aligning work on LDN with the existing NAP, as well as overall SDG implementation, he expressed "methodological doubts" about the proposed target-setting process, noting its high measurement cost and the need

for further refinement of the framework at the national level. He proposed focusing on implementation, rather than target setting, by looking at good practices and appropriate resource allocation. He further expressed concern about the emphasis on private financing for transformative LDN projects, noting that most LDN activities on the ground will be primarily relevant for smallholder farmers who lack access to credit.

Nigeria welcomed the experience gained through the LDN target-setting process, noting the need for careful land-use planning as the country seeks to diversify its economy from oil extraction to increased agricultural production. Among some early transformative LDN projects, he mentioned the ongoing public-private partnership involving a major cement company that aims to restore a degraded forest reserve.

Ukraine explained that the concept of LDN is primarily about raising the priority of land degradation and desertification on the political agenda. He outlined the country's LDN target-setting process, saying it started with the identification of priority areas of intervention, followed by an LDN implementation plan and the launch of a series of national and sub-national consultations to raise awareness on the LDN concept.

Guinea noted that his country has recently embarked on the LDN target-setting process and stressed the importance of raising awareness on this new concept and approach among national stakeholders. He suggested providing more information packages on LDN to national focal points, to enable them to engage effectively with policy makers and other actors, and to sensitize them on the importance of LDN.

Iraq highlighted the role of the target-setting process, as a multiple-partner initiative, in enhancing linkages among the three Rio Conventions, and as a practical tool to move from theory to practice. She emphasized the need to address knowledge gaps and build capacities to establish concrete multi-stakeholder projects.

Remarking that it is pointless to invest money in an unsustainable process, Swaziland emphasized the need to connect the target-setting process with ongoing work by the Intergovernmental Working Group on a Future Strategic Framework for the Convention (IWG-FSF). He cautioned against the current trend of funding numerous small and uncoordinated projects, saying that GEF funding can best be used to "create one cake and let each country come and cut a piece."

Guatemala called for an effective funding strategy that is adapted to the needs of each region.

Thailand highlighted challenges with raising awareness on the LDN concept and underscored the need for improved regional and international cooperation and support to scale up SLM.

Ghana pointed to government funding allocations for the LDN target-setting process as an example of successful integration of UNCCD programmes at the national level. He expressed concern about the "meagre" allocation for land degradation in the GEF budget, and the GEF's continued focus on forest restoration as the entry point for synergies across the three Rio Conventions. Cautioning that this approach would force smallholder farmers to encroach on restored forests and river banks, he urged partners to consider funding the restoration of degraded areas adjacent to forests and conservation areas to create buffer zones where smallholders can continue to make a living from the land.

During a final round of responses from the panel on the role of the NAP, the GM stressed that it should be more than "just a document," it needs to create focus, and it should be closely linked to the SDGs and national and regional plans. To specific questions, the GM clarified: on the approach to reporting and

target setting, national data forms the primary source for reporting while international data sets will only provide a back-up source where data are unreliable or missing and will be used at the discretion of the country; on the reporting burden, no further additional requirements are foreseen under a new strategy; on the role of the LDN Fund, it is regarded as one financial vehicle, with a clear need for mobilizing additional private-sector financial sources; and on developing a policy document for decision makers, a high-level concise profile for each country will be developed, outlining different information sources that clarify the process. The GEF committed to addressing countries' concerns regarding prioritizing food security, maximizing investments through building on each other, and sharing success stories of such programmes.

Noting that LDN represents a paradigm shift with new opportunities for the Convention, Chasek summarized the main issues highlighted during the session. She said there was general agreement that LDN can contribute to improved implementation of the Convention, but to make this happen the following is needed: political leadership; technical competence; baseline data; joint learning and capacity building; strengthening of partnerships; and financial support. She reiterated that LDN provides an opportunity for greater synergies at the national level between the three Rio Conventions and implementation of the SDGs and Aichi Biodiversity targets, and stressed the need to: integrate LDN targets into NAPs; identify new and innovative sources of finance; and mainstream the LDN concept.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The section in the final report on this agenda item "Voluntary national land degradation neutrality target setting exercise" (ICCD/CRIC(15)/L.2) includes 11 paragraphs that indicate that the CRIC, *inter alia*:

- welcomed the efforts made by the GM to operationalize the voluntary LDN target-setting programme, and called for its continued implementation;
- acknowledged the work of the SPI in developing the LDN conceptual framework and response hierarchy, thus providing a sound scientific basis for parties wishing to adopt LDN targets;
- recognized the importance of linking the voluntary LDN target-setting process with LDN implementation, taking into account the national action programmes as a new opportunity to promote effective action, particularly in affected areas;
- encouraged the GEF and the GM to provide support in providing opportunities to promote synergies and policy coherence across sectors and at all levels, particularly within national agendas relating to the SDGs; and
- recognized the need to mobilize additional financial resources for voluntary LDN target setting and implementation from multiple sources.

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

INITIAL FINDINGS FROM THE IWG-FSF: Delegates provided inputs on the draft future strategic framework on Wednesday afternoon, 19 October. The CRIC contact group subsequently met to further refine recommendations for consideration by the IWG-FSF in finalizing the report.

Opening the session, Moderator Ahmet Şenyaz, IWG-FSF Co-Chair, Turkey, briefed delegates on the process to develop a follow up strategic framework to guide the implementation of the Convention until 2030, and encouraged them to engage in "a lively debate about our joint future." He outlined the type of guidance that the IWG-FSF was seeking from CRIC 15 in order to complete its task, including: whether the IWG had focused on the right priorities for the next decade; whether linkages to

the SDG process, and especially the goal of achieving a land degradation neutral world, had been sufficiently elaborated, while bearing in mind that some parties had called for continuing to focus on the original scope of the Convention. He advised against "overburdening ourselves with more objectives and outputs," stating this will complicate the work of COP 13. The IWG-FSF rapporteur, Samuel Contreras (Philippines) presented the document with the initial findings of the IWG-FSF (UNCCD/CRIC(15)/2).

Brazil congratulated the IWG-FSF Co-Chairs and Rapporteur for the draft report and noted that part of the rationale for maintaining most of the structure of the first strategy was that "the diagnostics were well done," with a lot of resources already directed to the NAPs and NAP alignment. Noting that the main challenge continues to be implementation, he said this should be the starting point for the next strategy, while allowing those who want to set LDN targets to have a basis to start with.

South Africa welcomed the report, noting that the reference to "present and future generations" in the title remained in brackets and called for its removal. She called for the preamble to refer to SDG 15.3 and the ongoing LDN target-setting process, and proposed retaining the original order of Strategic Objectives, noting that "people-related objectives" should come first. She further stressed that the role of women and youth should be clearly articulated, and, recalling that the mandate of the Convention is to address DLDD, called for the inclusion of an indicator on drought under the expected impacts.

Namibia suggested that the framework developed at the recent African Drought Conference could be used to inform such an indicator. She also noted the need to strengthen the Programme of Work of the CST to guide the new Strategy.

Swaziland drew attention to the terms of reference of the IWG-FSF, noting part of its mandate was to assess implementation of the current strategy and asked for more information on the outcome of this analysis.

On integrating LDN in the strategy, the Republic of Korea highlighted the instrumental role played by the Changwon Initiative in promoting the LDN concept and the pilot target-setting process, which he said culminated with the adoption of decision 2/COP.12 on LDN. He expressed concern that the IWG-FSF draft report gave little consideration to LDN, despite its contribution to mitigating the impacts of DLDD. Asking "how can we implement the Convention without clear objectives," he said the new strategy "should declare that the UNCCD is the custodian of LDN and will ensure its achievement by 2030."

Italy, for the EU, highlighted the importance of a strategic framework in helping countries make sense of lessons learned and understand the challenges they face, stressing that achieving LDN should be one of the key objectives of the new strategy. While echoing calls to build on the existing Strategic Objectives, she called for the proposed narrative format to be further substantiated, with revised reporting guidelines that include clear formats, reporting categories and associated criteria to ensure meaningful reporting.

Turkey commented that SDG target 15.3 represents a turning point for the UNCCD. Swaziland highlighted the interest shown by the 102 countries that have embarked on LDN target setting, stressing that this should be included as part of the analysis of UNCCD implementation.

Tunisia proposed including the LDN target under Strategic Objective 1 and reformulating the objective accordingly, while Brazil maintained that such a reference should be qualified by including the language “within the scope of the Convention.”

Stressing that the LDN target has already been adopted under the SDGs, Tunisia further called for it to be obligatory for countries, and noted the need to specify resource mobilization for LDN under proposed financing arrangements.

Switzerland said it could not support language that does not respect agreed language at the last COP, especially with regard to LDN and the SDGs.

Eritrea emphasized that discussions are still ongoing on how to link the LDN target to the existing strategy, and raised a question on how the proposed reporting format would be integrated with the existing PRAIS system.

Turkey said that the strategy should: include guidance for concrete activities on the ground; be clear and brief; include a new impact indicator to reflect the contribution of land-based adaptation to combating climate change; specify monitoring criteria for other Strategic Objectives, not just those tracked using biophysical indicators; and add a glossary so as to “speak the same language.”

With regard to the proposed reordering of Strategic Objectives 1 (to improve the living conditions of affected populations) and 2 (to improve the condition of affected ecosystems, promote SLM), Peru favored retaining the existing order, in order to reaffirm that affected populations should be at the center of UNCCD implementation. Peru also called for the new strategy to explicitly recognize that NAPs and the CRIC are key instruments of the Convention, as well as the inclusion of a progress indicator for Strategic Objective 4 (to mobilize financial and non-financial resources to support the implementation of the Convention). Swaziland called for the strategy to clearly state how the proposed actions will be funded.

Recalling decision 2/COP.12, which clarified the mandate and scope of the Convention regarding land degradation and the legal aspects for its implementation in territories not related to arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas, the Russian Federation stressed that the specific circumstances of Annex V countries should be reflected in the new strategy, including by using language from the SDGs.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The section in the final report on this agenda item ‘Initial findings from the IWG’ (ICCD/CRIC(15)/L.6) includes 49 paragraphs and contains parties’ comments on the IWG report. This session addresses general and specific comments on the overall content and structure of the new draft strategy. General comments included, *inter alia*:

- aligning the new strategy with the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG target 15.3 and other interrelated SDGs;
- building on the Strategy, focusing on implementation and including LDN as the main element of innovation; and
- differing views on whether LDN targets should: remain voluntary; be made obligatory; not be the only focus of the new strategy; be considered also as scientific guidance for combating desertification; and be seen as only one of many ways of achieving SDG target 15.3.

The section also notes that specific comments on the new draft strategy addressed the title, vision, strategic objectives, implementation framework, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, among other suggestions.

OVERALL REPORTING PROCEDURES AND MODALITIES FOR REPORTING BY PARTIES: The Secretariat introduced proposals for revisions to future reporting procedures and modalities, including possible changes to the mandate and functions of the CRIC (ICCD/CRIC(15)/4) as well as a preliminary reporting template (ICCD/CRIC(15)/INF.3). She noted that the proposals are tentative and will need to be aligned with the final report of the IWG-FSF.

The EU, with Serbia and Libya, agreed with the proposal to change the reporting cycle to four years, and proposed that COP 13 revise the terms of reference accordingly. On reporting tools, she agreed that the focus should remain on the Strategic Objectives, as well as indicators that help to improve synergistic implementation of the Rio Conventions. With the US, she called for further clarification on proposals to replace reporting on performance indicators.

Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, the US, Uganda, South Africa, Turkey, El Salvador, Namibia, Swaziland, Ghana and Bhutan supported maintaining a two-year reporting cycle. Several countries highlighted the importance of frequent reporting in promoting accountability, as well as facilitating the exchange of experiences and developing a common understanding. South Africa said they take reporting very seriously as it helps with monitoring implementation on the ground.

The US queried some “misrepresentations” of the role of the CRIC and the IWG-FSF, noting the CRIC already has a four-year cycle in place for some reporting activities. She suggested that a long delay in reporting may inadvertently hurt the process by making it more difficult for parties to correct their course, while not changing the overall reporting burden. She welcomed the introduction of narrative information relating to best practices, and proposed making links to other global databases that capture SLM actions. On the role of intersessional CRIC meetings, she suggested that they could be used to review what parties are doing in order to avoid overlaps with the COP.

Serbia noted that moving to a four-year cycle for reporting on progress indicators and LDN would require building countries’ institutional capacity to maintain monitoring during intersessional periods. Colombia highlighted the role of the CRIC in helping the Convention respond to emerging challenges and trends, including alignment with the SDGs.

Swaziland pointed out that moving to a four-year cycle would mean that UNCCD parties would only have three opportunities to review their progress between 2018 and 2030. Questioning whether this is sufficient to launch a new process and ensure appropriate tracking of implementation on the ground, he proposed exploring efficient avenues to maintain reporting every two years.

China noted that there should ideally be a two-year cycle for performance indicators and a four-year cycle for progress indicators, but recalled that the proposal to move to a four-year cycle was partly necessitated by the lack of funding for the CRIC, in line with the four-year GEF funding cycle. She suggested that it may be necessary to explore alternative platforms to facilitate an exchange of experiences during the intersessional period.

Brazil, with Uruguay and Argentina, favored introducing reporting on Strategic Objective 4 on financing. Bhutan requested more financial and technical support for reporting.

Turkey supported a simplification of the reporting system, and noted that regular reporting should not just be about reporting to the UNCCD, but is also useful for planning within countries.

Uganda called for strengthening the role of the CRIC to facilitate exchange of information on best practices, and stressed that reducing the CRIC meetings to three days undermines this role. Ghana noted that countries have already built up their reporting capacity and called for the new reporting format to be made available as quickly as possible. Namibia proposed moving away from general reporting to reporting on scientific and quantitative data.

Supporting a four-year cycle, CSOs said it helps countries to undertake more comprehensive and well-planned reporting, enabling them to gather more useful and credible data. He emphasized the importance of public participation in this process, and called for the UNCCD Secretariat to put in place a communication structure to inform CSOs of upcoming reporting requirements. CSOs further recommended that the CRIC request the COP to set up a knowledge management system to capture experiences and lessons to “inspire and energize” implementation.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The section in the final report on this agenda item “Overall reporting procedures and modalities for reporting by parties” (ICCD/CRIC(15)/L.5) includes 21 paragraphs.

On reporting frequency, this section notes that, *inter alia*: some parties supported maintaining the two-year cycle as useful for the CRIC to analyze and review the implementation of the Convention, while others welcomed the proposed four-year frequency, considering that reporting is a complex, time-consuming and costly exercise; some other parties suggested aligning with The Strategy reporting cycles, and others with the corresponding SDGs reporting process; most noted the importance of securing sufficient funding and capacity-building measures from the GEF; and the majority acknowledged the importance of maintaining the CRIC as a standing subsidiary body of the COP and emphasized its importance as a platform for exchanging information and sharing experiences.

On frequency of CRIC sessions, the section states that: most parties expressed an interest in maintaining the current two-year frequency, including those held between ordinary sessions of the COP; and CSOs welcomed the four-year reporting cycle, noting it creates opportunities for parties to institutionalize a means to involve them.

On experiences in the optional reporting exercise, this section notes, that, *inter alia*: the simplification of the reporting system and tools has helped parties comply with the obligation to submit report; and data collection has been an important learning process at the national level.

FINANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED FINANCING AND OPTIONS FOR TRACKING:

On Wednesday afternoon, 19 October, Chair Baptiste invited delegates to begin consideration of this agenda item.

Markus Repnik, Managing Director, GM, introduced the report (ICCD/CRIC(15)/5), summarizing its findings in a call for four actions. On using LDN to tap into new financing opportunities, he pointed at the rapidly growing climate finance and LDN action creating multiple benefits, including climate benefits, thus stressing that using LDN as a vehicle to scale-up land-based climate action will create additional funding opportunities for UNCCD implementation. On demystifying reporting on finance, making it more efficient, effective and meaningful, he emphasized the need to have clarity on why finance should be tracked and reported.

On taking advantage of existing global data sets and tracking initiatives for sustainable development, Repnik recommended that the GM, for each UNCCD reporting cycle, undertake an in-depth analysis of global data sets and assess financing flows and patterns for the implementation of the Convention, primarily capturing public flows from developed to developing countries, albeit taking into consideration the catalytic role of international public flows in crowding in private sector resources. On undertaking in-depth analyses of selected countries on resource mobilization, public spending, and the economic and social benefits of increased spending for the implementation of the Convention, he said the GM would work, on a voluntary basis, with a number of champion countries and in collaboration with selected international organizations active in these countries, and this would bring benefits for all parties at reasonable costs.

Noting that his statement reflected the view of the Secretariat and the GM, Repnik concluded by requesting countries, regardless of their decision, to consider if they could comply with it, and how it would help them mobilize the resources needed to implement the Convention in their country in light of the paradigm shift needed.

Delegates then engaged in a general discussion on this agenda item. Bosnia and Herzegovina, on behalf of Annex V region, expressed concern regarding financing for the implementation of the Convention. Noting that a review of public expenditures would be beneficial for all countries, he requested the GM to initiate a programme similar to the joint World Bank/UNDP project titled, “Public Climate Expenditure and Institutional Review.” Warning against the GM limiting its work to “champion countries,” he stressed that the selection should be based on a transparent process and criteria, and a preliminary assessment of financial flows of all countries should be undertaken.

Turkey underlined the need for a paradigm shift in a “bold new strategy,” and adopting a “more realistic and country-tailored approach” on financing.

The EU highlighted that the implementation of the truly transformative 2030 Agenda and its 17 ambitious SDGs requires a multi-sectoral, coherent and holistic approach. Stressing the role of partnerships and multi-stakeholder approaches as a vehicle for reaching a land degradation neutral world, she listed existing financial tools such as the GEF, the Green Climate Fund or innovative MoUs, as helpful tools for the effective implementation of the Convention. Finally, she underlined the need for an enhanced discussion and stronger advocacy for UNCCD goals among other relevant stakeholders in order to meet the overall ambition and potential captured by the report.

Recalling document ICCD/CRIC(13)/7 on financial support to the implementation of the Convention for the 2012-2013 biennium, Brazil lamented insufficient progress compared to the “significant amount” of US\$133.9 billion reported. With Argentina, he stressed the need for increased funding from developing countries, noting their commitment of US\$5.6 billion for the said biennium; and called for a two-year reporting period. Acknowledging the importance of accessing and understanding the use of data, the US said the GM should identify resources to support the Secretariat to undertake necessary analyses, and warned against confusing the GM and Secretariat mandates, transforming the GM into a data analysis entity or duplicating efforts.

Switzerland stated that the document presented does not reflect decision 15/COP.12, but instead provides a report on a different topic. She stated that reporting on financing does not

require harmonizing the definition of desertification and LDN finance. Noting that reporting needs to be fully consistent with the scope of the Convention and the new strategic framework, she pointed to option 1 (reporting on the implementation framework proposed in the new strategy by sharing experiences derived from the narrative sections of the reports every two years), with the limitation to be focused on public finance, as the most appropriate option for reporting. She concluded expressing disagreement with “many things” in the report conclusions and recommendations.

Inquiring about costs of restoration compared to those of preventing degradation, the Russian Federation pointed to the Convention’s role in coordinating international efforts to combat degradation and called for more precise and comprehensive information in this regard.

Iraq agreed that learning from others would make reporting more meaningful, but urged standardizing data collection procedures. Colombia supported option 1, and noted that option 2 (reporting on progress indicators every four years) can be considered in the future as a complementary tool. The CSO representative urged: synergies with other conventions; mobilizing financial resources; prioritizing most exposed populations such as small-scale and women farmers whenever new financial resources become available; involving small-scale farmers and local communities; and allowing for land-use changes when designing interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The section in the final report on this agenda item “Financing the implementation of the Convention: opportunities for increased financing and options for tracking” (ICCD/CRIC(15)/L.3) includes six paragraphs. This section, *inter alia*:

- welcomes the efforts of the Secretariat and the GM for mobilizing resources for the implementation of the Convention, and preparing a comprehensive report on opportunities for increased financing;
- recognizes the need for a paradigm shift to halt the alarming rate of land degradation, and the urgency to increase financing for the implementation of the Convention, with most parties highlighting that SDG target 15.3 and LDN represent an opportunity to tap into new sources of financing, including climate finance;
- notes that several parties highlight the need for increased funding from developed countries consistent with their obligations under the Convention; and
- notes that many parties support the adoption of option 1 (implementing Decision 15/COP.12) as the most appropriate for reporting with a slight modification in line with the 2018–2030 strategy, with other parties in favor of combining option 2 (analysis of global datasets) and option 3 (in-depth country analysis).

CONSIDERATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION ON BEST PRACTICES THROUGH THE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE BROKERING PORTAL (SKBP) AND THE CAPACITY BUILDING MARKETPLACE (CBM): On Wednesday afternoon, 19 October, the Secretariat introduced the report on cooperation with the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), the development of the SKBP into a fully-fledged UNCCD knowledge hub, and integration with the CBM (ICCD/CRIC(15)/6).

Brazil, with the US, Switzerland and most delegates, lauded the initiative, saying sharing experiences and best practices ensures learning towards the successful implementation of the strategy. He requested a demonstration of the website, while the US suggested renaming the SKBP and integrating it even further with the CBM. Ukraine requested dissemination into all UN languages, and Côte d’Ivoire, with Argentina, asked how national information sources will be linked to that of the Convention. Eritrea, Timor Leste and Nigeria, among others, called for the further dissemination of the information available online to poor farmers, preferably through accessible audio-visual materials, in order to enhance the transfer of knowledge.

In its response, the Secretariat noted that: the SKBP renaming is underway as part of the new UNCCD knowledge hub development; country information sites will be linked to the knowledge base, and country parties are requested to report these information sites through the PRAIS; and information will be made available in all UN languages.

The interactive session continued on Thursday morning, 21 October, with the Philippines sharing experience on the dissemination of and accessibility to SLM technologies and best practices via the Philippine Conservation Approaches and Technologies (PhilCAT) platform. With several other speakers, he reiterated the call for processing the SKBP information into simpler, layperson terms, and potentially local languages and dialects for local farmer communities.

The EU and a CSO representative called for reaching marginalized and vulnerable user groups when disseminating information, and for the material to be gender responsive and to include the youth.

The Secretariat welcomed the suggestions to improve the knowledge hub and concluded with a demonstration of the web portal’s various functions.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The section in the final report on this agenda item “Consideration of best practices in the implementation of the Convention: Accessibility of information on best practices through the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal (SKBP) and the Capacity Building Marketplace (CBM)” (ICCD/CRIC(15)/L.4) includes seven paragraphs. This section, *inter alia*:

- recognizes the importance of sharing best practices and information among parties and other stakeholders to support the implementation of the UNCCD;
- notes with appreciation the work done by the Secretariat in improving the UNCCD knowledge sharing services, particularly the development of the SKBP and the CBM, and in integrating various knowledge tools under one UNCCD knowledge hub;
- welcomes the best practices database established by WOCAT, which provides access to all best practice cases submitted through the PRAIS portal and is linked with the SKBP; and
- encourages the Secretariat to continue making available links to relevant existing national online knowledge repositories through the UNCCD knowledge hub.

CLOSING SESSION

On Thursday evening, 21 October, CRIC 15 Rapporteur Kolmaz presented the six chapters of the meeting report, titled “Draft report of the fifteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention” (ICCD/CRIC(15)/L.1-L.6). The CRIC adopted these decisions without comment, after considering each chapter.

In his concluding remarks, CRIC 15 Chair Baptiste commended parties for contributing engagingly to the session and presented them with a “take-home” message: “Can we truly achieve LDN on a global scale if the setting of national targets remains voluntary?” He expressed sadness in informing parties that this was his last CRIC as focal point of his country, and assured all that he would continue to engage on efforts to scale up interventions on the ground.

Speakers from other countries delivered closing statements, all thanking Chair Baptiste, the UNCCD Secretariat, Executive Secretary Barbut, Kenya for hosting the meeting, and China for offering to host COP 13.

Bhutan, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, noted the need for, among others: LDN to be highlighted as the strategic objective of the future strategy; appropriate funding; and maintaining the current frequency of CRIC meetings.

Armenia, on behalf of Central and Eastern Europe, praised the interactive nature of the meeting and called for identifying a scientific approach for reporting that takes into account the necessity for geophysical indicators.

Turkey thanked Executive Secretary Barbut for her “inspiring enthusiasm to succeed” and her “attempt to take us to a new level.”

Colombia, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, welcomed the work, constructive dialogue and “balanced result” achieved at this session.

The EU said the “good results” achieved over the CRIC’s three “very intense days” will provide input to the Secretariat’s and the IWG’s upcoming work.

Kenya, on behalf of the African Group, stressed that the CRIC’s productivity and efficiency is “seriously constrained” by the two-to-three-day duration of its meetings. Noting drought issues have not received proper consideration under the UNCCD notwithstanding the Convention’s mandate, he pointed to the African Drought Conference held in Windhoek, Namibia, in August 2016, and called for its outcomes to be taken into consideration by the UNCCD.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Barbut noted the progress achieved during CRIC 15 in refining the future strategic direction of the Convention and assured participants that the Secretariat would put all its energy into preparing for COP 13. She called for the many countries that have established LDN targets to “make them a reality, when we meet again!” Chair Baptiste closed the meeting at 7:23 pm.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF CRIC 15

In many ways, the decision to convene CRIC 15 as a special intersessional meeting focusing on methodological issues was taken as a stop-gap measure—a compromise reached to buy more time because delegates at CRIC 14 were unable to reach agreement on the way forward in the transition from the current UNCCD implementation framework to a future strategy. While there was general agreement that the Convention had to find a “reset button,” as well as agreement that the SDG process offered an important opportunity in this regard, the difficult discussions at COP 12 on proposed changes to reporting modalities and the role of the CRIC highlighted that the Convention also needs to clarify the monitoring process as well as the reporting framework that will contribute to effective implementation and monitoring of a future UNCCD strategy.

The question on the minds of many as they left CRIC 15 was whether the three-day “methodological” meeting had done enough

to lay the foundation for a meaningful outcome on these issues at COP 13. This brief analysis examines the outcome of the CRIC 15 discussions on these questions to gauge what a future path for the Convention might look like in terms of the vision, process and means of implementation.

DEFINING THE VISION

Freed from the institutional disagreements that once plagued sessions of the COP, the last two meetings of the COP were able to focus on how to scale up the implementation of the Convention. But with just half of Annex 1 (African) and fewer than one-quarter of affected Annex II (Asian) countries managing to align their NAPs with the current Strategy by June 2015, it was clear that two decades after its ratification, the Convention remains in desperate need of momentum. At the same time, the inclusion of calls for the global community to achieve land-degradation neutrality in both the outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCCD, or Rio+20), in 2012, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the identification of a land-based indicator that would also be relevant to monitor targets under the CBD and UNFCCC, has helped to reinvigorate the Convention and its status *vis-à-vis* the other Rio Conventions.

This new lease on life was also remarked on at CRIC 15, with one delegate attributing the uncharacteristically well-attended session to “the LDN effect,” brought on by the large number of countries—102 at the latest count—that have already embarked on voluntary national processes to develop their LDN targets. Hence, many observed, the Convention now had a clear goal around which it could rally. Presenting their feedback on the preliminary findings of the Intergovernmental Working Group on a future strategic framework (IWG-FSF), one of the main issues on the CRIC 15 agenda, several countries suggested that LDN offers “the main element of innovation” that could give impetus to the implementation of the UNCCD and efforts to mitigate DLDD. Others, however, pointed out that the future strategy “must be broader than LDN” if it is to reflect the full mandate of the Convention and the interests of all parties, further noting that LDN target-setting will remain voluntary and that LDN targets are not the only means to achieve SDG target 15.3. This debate is likely to continue at COP 13, along with the new energy for addressing DLDD issues that was evident at CRIC 15.

CLARIFYING THE PROCESS

While the rationale for linking the Convention more closely to SDG outcomes, as well as the CBD’s Aichi Targets and UNFCCC’s nationally determined contributions, was broadly supported, the “how” was less clear. The discussions on the IWG-FSF proposals resulted in a long list of additional issues and debate on which areas of the Convention should be prioritized. For example, views relating to the proposed reordering of Strategic Objectives 1 and 2 at times seemed to echo the old “development” vs “environment” debates.

However, there was also increasing consensus that it is time to move beyond “diagnostics” and to focus on implementation. This approach was particularly evident in the strong calls for scaling up funding for implementation on the ground, and the recognition that focusing on LDN and SDG target 15.3 could help tap new sources of financing. While no clear consensus emerged among the three options for reporting on financial flows for the Convention, there were clear calls to increase funding for implementation and to develop additional indicators to track progress on this front. The discussions on financing

also welcomed the strong role played by the GM in not only mobilizing additional funding, but in mapping the overall financing landscape and identifying options to track finance as part of future UNCCD reporting.

Another core issue on the agenda of CRIC 15 was proposed changes to the mandate—and possibly the very existence—of the CRIC as a subsidiary body. While the Secretariat's proposals, first tabled in the form of a “non-paper” at CRIC 13, emphasized that COP 9 had called for a review of the functions of the CRIC, some felt that any revisions to the CRIC terms of reference should be a party-driven process. The discussions on this issue revealed support for both maintaining the status quo (a two-year reporting cycle), as well as for moving to a four-year cycle. While this means that there will be considerable work to arrive at consensus at COP 13, many delegates were confident that the value of the CRIC as both a mechanism for reviewing implementation, as well as promoting accountability, information exchange, and joint learning, had been clearly demonstrated.

These views were confirmed by the positive response by many at CRIC 15 to the presentation of the new UNCCD Knowledge Hub, which integrates the previous SKBP and CBM, as well as the WOCAT best practices database. When the agenda item was first introduced, delegates asked for a practical demonstration of the online portal and observed its potential to not only facilitate learning, but also enhance efficiency in tracking implementation and preparing for future CRIC sessions.

GEARING UP FOR IMPLEMENTATION

In recent years, some have regretted that former “champions” of the UNCCD—either country groups or individuals—had moved on to other issues or retirement. But at the same time, some have noted the emerging role of country hosts of the COP in pushing forward the UNCCD agenda. While UNFCCC country hosts have played visible roles in managing the COP negotiation process, the emerging UNCCD model has been for the host country to take on leadership related to implementation. Through the Changwon Initiative, for example, the Republic of Korea, host of COP 10 in 2011, was instrumental promoting a SDG target on LDN, as well as funding the 14-country pilot LDN target-setting exercise. Namibia, the host of COP 11 in 2013, announced its commitment to promote actions to enhance drought mitigation and went on to host the Africa Drought Conference in 2016, which discussed an overarching strategic framework to enhance resilience to the impact of drought events. Similarly, Turkey, through its Ankara Initiative, has provided funding and capacity-building support to expand the LDN target setting since COP 12 in 2015.

With this track record, China is likely to play an important role in pushing for improved implementation of the Convention in the lead up to COP 13 and beyond. Some noted that it was interesting to preview China's engagement at CRIC 15, where they thought the Chinese delegate strode a fine line in the debate on the CRIC reporting cycle, highlighting that while regular meetings would be ideal, the Secretariat's proposals for a longer reporting cycle reflected funding constraints and the four-year funding cycle of the GEF, which is the main contributor to the review process.

This measured approach will likely be echoed by others in negotiations on the future UNCCD strategic framework, which will be one of the main outcomes of COP 13. Many observers noted that despite the insistence by some delegates on retaining references to the scope of the Convention, or the voluntary nature of the LDN target setting exercise, the exchanges were surprisingly amiable and conducted in a spirit of compromise.

The interactive sessions on implementation experiences also provided numerous examples of policy initiatives and success stories to inspire further action, ranging from efforts to enhance stakeholder coordination at the national level to innovative ideas on how to implement LDN projects at the farm level. Explaining the next steps in the LDN target-setting process, the GM Managing Director highlighted numerous opportunities to build on LDN experiences, such as tapping into new financing opportunities and making use of global data sets and tracking initiatives for sustainable development.

In its policy brief, ‘Land in Balance,’ launched at CRIC 15, the SPI also highlighted “what policy makers can do now” to get the ball rolling on LDN action, listing specific actions to: ensure an enabling environment; set voluntary targets; integrate and leverage existing strategies and policies; and initiate preliminary assessments. Taken together with repeated calls at CRIC 15 to move beyond “diagnostics” and demonstrate results, these recommendations reveal the wealth of ideas, technical guidelines and best practice already available to parties to move on with implementation.

As the Secretariat reminded CRIC 15 delegates, there is no time to lose. The first review of progress indicators relating to the new strategy to be adopted at COP 13, including information on voluntary LDN target setting “should be undertaken at the intersessional session of CRIC that will take place in 2018.” This means that COP 13 will not only need to approve a strategy that can drive action on the ground, but also establish the reporting process that will reveal whether countries are indeed ready to take implementation seriously.

LOOKING AHEAD TO COP 13

So what will it take to have a successful COP 13? CRIC 15 revealed broad consensus that there is value in aligning the Convention more closely to the SDG process. Many also recognized that the Convention needs to use available resources more efficiently and ease the reporting burden for countries. The discussions, however, reiterated that implementation, not a lack of vision, continues to be the key bottleneck to the Convention's success on the ground. While delegates to the CRIC offered a broad range of views on how to move the Convention forward, it will be up to COP 13 to get the Convention into full implementation mode. The decision on future financing and tracking options will be an important prerequisite for this, but the discussions at CRIC 15 also revealed that a positive attitude and political commitment to move the Convention forward will perhaps be even more important. As some delegates commented after viewing the introductory video by the COP 13 hosts, the remarkable progress made towards “greening” Inner Mongolia could inspire parties at COP 13 to attempt the same in their own countries.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

51st Meeting of the GEF Council: The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council meets twice a year to approve new projects with global environmental benefits in the GEF's focal areas of biodiversity, climate change mitigation, chemicals and waste, international waters, land degradation, and sustainable forest management; and in the GEF's integrated approach programs on sustainable cities, taking deforestation out of commodity chains, and sustainability and resilience for food security in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Council meeting will be preceded, on 24 October, by a consultation with civil society

organizations (CSOs) at the same location. On 27 October, the Council will convene as the 21st meeting of the Council of the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), also at the same location. **dates:** 24-27 October 2016 **location:** Washington DC, US **contact:** GEF Secretariat **phone:** +1-202-473-0508 **fax:** +1-202-522-3240 **email:** secretariat@thegef.org **www:** <http://www.thegef.org/council-meetings/gef-51st-council-meeting>

UNFCCC COP 22: The Paris Agreement on climate change will enter into force on 4 November 2016. As a result, the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 1) will take place in conjunction with COP 22 and the twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 12). **dates:** 7-18 November 2016 **location:** Marrakech, Morocco **contact:** UNFCCC Secretariat **phone:** +49-228-815-1000 **fax:** +49-228-815-1999 **email:** secretariat@unfccc.int **www:** http://unfccc.int/meetings/marrakech_nov_2016/meeting/9567.php

Ecosystem Services Partnership Africa Conference: The first Conference of the Regional Africa chapter of the Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) will convene under the theme, "Ecosystem Services for SDGs in Africa." Discussions will focus on Africa's contribution towards evidence on best practices for the management and restoration of ecosystem services for decision making, particularly towards the realization of sustainable development goals **dates:** 21-25 November 2016 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **contact:** Peter Minang, Coordinator **email:** p.minang@cgiar.org **www:** <http://www.esconference.org/africa2016/>

16th Meeting of Congo Basin Forest Partnership: The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) coordinates efforts to sustain forest resources, enhance natural resource management and improve the standard of living in the Congo Basin. Partnership members convene biannually to coordinate priority activities, propose action on emerging issues and share information with others that are active in the Congo Basin. The CBFP, which brings together 70 partners, including African countries, donor agencies, governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, scientific institutions and the private sector, was launched at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa. It works closely with the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC). **dates:** 21-26 November 2016 **location:** Kigali, Rwanda **contact:** Dany Dogmo Pokem **email:** dany.pokem@pfbc-cbfp.org **www:** <http://ccr-rac.pfbc-cbfp.org>

CBD COP 13, COP/MOP 8 to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and COP/MOP 2 to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing: The thirteenth meeting of the CBD COP, the eighth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP/MOP 8), and the second meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing (COP/MOP 2) will be held concurrently. The CBD COP will address, *inter alia*, ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), marine spatial planning, biodiversity and acidification in cold-water areas, marine debris and underwater noise, and biodiversity mainstreaming, including in the fisheries sector. **dates:** 2-17 December 2016 **location:** Cancún, Mexico

contact: CBD Secretariat **phone:** +1-514-288-2220 **fax:** +1-514-288-6588 **email:** secretariat@cbd.int **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/>

IPBES-5: The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Plenary will to review progress on the work programme. **dates:** 7-10 March 2017 **location:** Bonn, Germany **contact:** IPBES Secretariat **phone:** +49-228-815-0570 **email:** secretariat@ipbes.net **www:** <http://www.ipbes.net/plenary/ipbes-5>

UNCCD COP 13: The 13th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD will be hosted by the Government of China. **dates:** September 2017 **location:** Ordos, Inner Mongolia, China **contact:** UNCCD Secretariat **phone:** +49-228-815-2800 **fax:** +49-228-815-2898/99 **email:** secretariat@unccd.int **www:** <http://www.unccd.int/>

For additional meetings, see <http://nr.iisd.org/>

GLOSSARY

CBD	Convention of Biological Diversity
CBM	Capacity Building Marketplace
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
CSOs	Civil society organizations
DLDD	Desertification, land degradation and drought
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GM	Global Mechanism
IWG-FSF	Intergovernmental Working Group on a Future Strategic Framework for the Convention
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
NAP	National Action Programme
PRAIS	Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLM	Sustainable land management
SKBP	Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal
SPI	Science-Policy Interface
The Strategy	Ten-year Strategic Plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008-2018)
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies