

UNCCD COP 13 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2017

UNCCD COP 13 participants discussed agenda items in the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) during parallel morning and afternoon sessions, and met in contact groups to discuss draft decisions related to the COP, CRIC and CST agendas.

CRIC

CRIC Chair Aliyu Bananda (Nigeria) opened the meeting, with UNCCD Executive Secretary Monique Barbut delivering opening remarks. She noted the need for the CRIC to develop a sustainable reporting system to help reach the land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets, and highlighted that many parties will receive financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to this end.

THE AFRICAN GROUP welcomed the unified four-year reporting cycle, noting that reporting is a costly and complex exercise and land degradation is a long-term phenomenon. He stressed the importance of retaining the CRIC's oversight role as a subsidiary body of the Convention.

THE GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES (GRULAC) welcomed the conclusion of the new Strategic Framework, and stressed the need for increased financing, transfer of technology and capacity building to address the realities faced at national and regional level.

The EU stressed the CRIC is an integral part of the Convention, and welcomed work on gender, drought, and migration and stated that these achievements provide a solid base for the future.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) expressed concern that the new Strategic Framework does not mention CSOs, or incorporate the recommendations of the CSO panel.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Adoption of agenda and organization of work: The CRIC adopted the agenda and tentative schedule of work (ICCD/CRIC(16)/1). On election of officers other than the Chair of the CRIC, Bananda reported that Raymond Baptiste (Grenada) would serve as Rapporteur.

The CRIC established a contact group to consider all CRIC-related matters, chaired by Trevor Benn (Guyana). The Secretariat clarified that matters related to the workplan and budget would be referred to the Committee of the Whole contact group on the budget.

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AT NATIONAL, SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS: Multi-year workplan and performance of Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies: Pradeep Monga, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNCCD, introduced documents ICCD/COP(13)/8-ICCD/CRIC(16)/2 and ICCD/CRIC(16)/3.

SAUDI ARABIA asked why there were no quantified indicators, to which the Secretariat clarified that the workplan has been substantially shortened to streamline negotiations, but that

quantitative targets will be set internally. CSOs suggested they can help enhance the implementation of LDN targets through communication and awareness raising campaigns.

In response to a question on the mandate of the Global Mechanism (GM), Managing Director Markus Repnik highlighted four priorities for resource mobilization and project preparation: the LDN Fund; the project preparation facility co-managed with the other Rio Conventions that is being set up; support to selected parties in developing national LDN financing vehicles; and support to parties on project resource mobilization.

Review of the CRIC 15 Report: The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/CRIC(15)/7, noting that it was a special session of the CRIC. There was no discussion of this item.

Development and implementation of strategies through NAPs to achieve the objectives of the Convention in light of target 15.3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Repnik introduced document ICCD/COP(13)/2 and outlined the current status in national action programme (NAP) and LDN implementation. He invited four countries to present their respective experiences and lessons learned.

GUYANA highlighted the formation of a national multi-stakeholder working group and the Green State Strategy and Framework to integrate LDN policies in their work on the three Rio Conventions.

MADAGASCAR mentioned five major challenges in achieving LDN and highlighted climate-smart agriculture as a strategy for enhancing synergies with the UNFCCC, while observing that the country needs an integrative initiative to achieve LDN.

LEBANON listed major challenges, including climate change, forest fire, diseases and pressures caused by the over two million refugees from Syria and Iraq. On institutional measures to tackle the problems, he highlighted: the implementation of a land classification system; developing financial incentives for sustainable land management (SLM) practices; and developing partnerships with local, national and international organizations to promote SLM.

BELARUS reported that their NAP for 2016-2020 prioritizes the prevention of land and soil degradation and LDN, in synergy with the country's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC and other global frameworks.

In response to UKRAINE's question on specific LDN targets, MADAGASCAR highlighted plans for 400,000 ha per year in landscape and forest restoration and green infrastructure. GUYANA said that despite very low deforestation rates the country aims to reforest eight square kilometers of forest annually to achieve zero net losses by 2030.

Responding to a question from SAUDI ARABIA on the sustainability of current initiatives, LEBANON reported that it ensures the involvement of specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities in all public-private partnerships.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO said the presentations had provided "excellent" clues on how they can develop their own LDN targets. GRENADA and CSOs asked

how the four countries had worked to promote synergies and avoid duplication among the Rio Conventions. GUYANA and BELARUS responded that the Rio Convention focal points are situated in the same office or ministry. BRAZIL announced their decision to opt into the LDN Target Setting Programme.

Concluding the session, Repnik highlighted the importance of: having a data-based quantified target; political commitments; ensuring multiple benefits; synergies among the Rio Conventions; and upholding the “no one size fits all” principle. He lauded Brazil’s decision to join the LDN Target Setting Programme as the 111th country in the initiative.

CST

ITEMS RESULTING FROM THE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE FOR THE BIENNIUM 2016-2017: The scientific conceptual framework for land degradation neutrality: Discussions on this item continued in the morning, and delegates addressed:

benchmarks for indicators; discrepancy between global and national data; degradation induced by salinization and natural shocks; assessment of land resilience; and additional reporting burdens for countries.

On capacity development, the GM noted that support is available to parties through national and regional LDN experts, and on resource mobilization, help is available to design fundable project ideas.

Sustainable land management for addressing desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), climate change mitigation and adaptation: The Secretariat introduced documents (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/3 and ICCD/COP(13)/CST/5).

Jean-Luc Chotte, on behalf of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), presented a report on the potential of SLM to address DLDD, climate change mitigation and adaptation, emphasizing ongoing SLM practices and integration with SDGs and the Rio Conventions. Delegates asked questions regarding why reforestation and afforestation were grouped together, and the differences between SLM and LDN. Panelists clarified that LDN includes a response hierarchy to land degradation, of which SLM is one strategy.

Luca Montanarella, Global Soil Partnership Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (GSP-ITPS), reported on the outcomes of the Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon (SOC), held in March 2017, and its recommendations, including to: prevent SOC losses by maintaining current SOC stocks; prioritize soils with the highest carbon stocks in developing policies on soil conservation; and support land users through enhancing SOC under local conditions for long-term benefits.

Delegates posed questions on the depletion of SOC through mining activities, and the origin of the data that will be used to map the global SOC stocks. SOUTH AFRICA raised concerns over the capacity of some countries to accurately measure SOC, and VENEZUELA about managing the existing low levels of carbon in arid and semi-arid areas. Montanarella said most of the concerns raised will be considered by the GSP-ITPS meeting later in 2017, and urged the SPI to consider further research to explore management options for SOC depletion by mining.

Mariam Akhtar-Schuster, SPI, presented the cooperation with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the preparation of the IPCC Special Report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, SLM, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems (SRCCL), with an expected completion date of autumn 2019.

MOROCCO called for a greater collaboration with the CBD, and NIGERIA urged greater involvement of regional experts in the SRCCL. ARGENTINA suggested the CST formalize collaboration with the relevant policy and scientific platforms. IRAQ emphasized redirecting academic curricula and research activities on land degradation and LDN, while Akhtar-Schuster stressed the need to include land degradation in calls for research by funding agencies.

Rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands: The Secretariat introduced the documents (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/4, ICCD/COP(13)/CST/5

and ICCD/COP(13)/CST/INF.1). Anne Larigauderie, Executive Secretary, and Robert Scholes, Co-Chair on thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration (LDRA), IPBES, presented on the LDRA to be completed for assessment by UNCCD COP 14. Scholes, noting the assessments extensive consultation process, pointed to preliminary findings, including: the pervasiveness of land degradation; the challenge it adds to feeding the world; and the cyclical relationship between land degradation and climate change. Delegates posed questions on how findings will be translated to reach small-scale farmers, and how the report will tackle future expectations in response to climate change. Scholes responded that great effort was made to ensure that language was accessible and free of jargon, and that governments were crucial to disseminate IPBES findings to their countries.

Jeff Herrick, US, presented progress on the UN Environment International Resource Panel (IRP) report on land restoration, ecosystem resilience and their contribution to poverty eradication.

SWITZERLAND supported further cooperation between SPI and IRP on the report, noting that it would reduce duplication of efforts within the UN system.

BRAZIL stressed the need to keep the focus on the original sustainable development approach of the UNCCD.

ARGENTINA queried on ways to scale up good land stewardship practices and on examples of policy options for effective action on the ground. SERBIA urged keeping in mind the impact of erosion on land degradation.

Graciela Metternicht, SPI, presented on the actions undertaken by the SPI related to the implementation of objective 3 of the SPI work programme for 2016-2017, highlighting its contributions to IPBES assessments, and the credibility of SPI synthesis and quality of evidence. She pointed to SPI recommendations, including to continue cooperation with other groups such as UN Environment. The EU applauded the SPI as an example of the interface of science and policy in practice, and COLOMBIA asked to clarify if biodiversity was included in the concept of desertification. Metternicht stated that biodiversity was implicit in land degradation based on the definition of land use, and Herrick encouraged feedback on the reports in order to ensure that language was clear to all audiences.

CONTACT GROUPS

CRIC-related matters: In the evening, the Secretariat introduced the six draft decisions that the group will consider, namely: review of the CRIC 15 report; development and implementation of strategies through NAPs to achieve the objectives of the Convention in light of target 15.3 of the 2030 Agenda; collaboration with the GEF; improving procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP; programme of work for CRIC 17; and date and venue of CRIC 17. The group began consideration of text on NAPs and the 2030 Agenda.

Programme and Budget: The contact group on programme and budget met briefly in the afternoon but could not delve into substantive matters due to lack of a group facilitator.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the second day of the COP began, so too did the contact groups where, traditionally, much of the negotiations have taken place. The first out of the box was the program and budget contact group, but it quickly ground to a halt as no parties volunteered to take on the crucial role as facilitator, without which the negotiations cannot continue. One seasoned delegate chuckled that “it’s hard to volunteer for such a role because the seat can get very hot!”

Meanwhile, the CST blitzed through highly technical presentations, but throughout delegates were heard grumbling under their breath about the applicability of the findings, questioning “the ability of scientists to reach small-scale farmers.” After a slow start, CRIC went smoothly, with parties sharing lessons from the NAP and LDN target setting. It ended with the warmly welcomed announcement that Brazil will join the LDN target-setting club, increasing the number of countries to 111.