

Summary of the Seventeenth Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 28-30 January 2019

The seventeenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 17) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) convened from 28-30 January 2019 at the Arthur Chung International Conference Centre in Georgetown, Guyana. Approximately 200 participants attended the session.

CRIC 17 marked the first review meeting to take place since the adoption of the new UNCCD Strategic Framework (2018-2030) and revised CRIC terms of reference by the 13th session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP 13) in September 2017. A significant part of the meeting was therefore devoted to reviewing the Secretariat's preliminary analysis of reports submitted by parties and other entities, and harnessing delegates' views and perspectives with respect to the monitoring and reporting process for the five Strategic Objectives of the UNCCD.

Delegates engaged in three interactive dialogues exploring:

- progress in implementing voluntary Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and insights on how to translate UNCCD progress indicators into action;
- initial experiences in the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) adopted at COP 13; and
- emerging innovative financing opportunities to combat land degradation.

During the closing plenary on Wednesday afternoon, the Committee adopted three draft documents containing conclusions and recommendations from the meeting to be forwarded to COP 14. The documents summarize CRIC 17 proposals relating to the following themes:

- further implementation of the five Strategic Objectives;
- LDN;
- the UNCCD Gender Action Plan;
- emerging innovative financing opportunities to combat land degradation; and
- improving communication and reporting procedures.

For the first time, the CRIC report also included a dedicated section highlighting recommendations made by civil society organizations.

A Brief History of the UNCCD

The UNCCD is the centerpiece of the international community's efforts to combat desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) in the drylands. The Convention, called

for by the UN Conference on Environment and Development's "Agenda 21" in 1992, was adopted on 17 June 1994. The Convention entered into force on 26 December 1996 and currently has 197 parties. The UNCCD recognizes the physical, biological, and socio-economic aspects of desertification and the importance of involving local communities in combating DLDD. The core of the UNCCD is the development of national, sub-regional, and regional action programmes by national governments, in cooperation with UN agencies, donors, local communities, and non-governmental organizations. At its adoption, the UNCCD contained four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean. A fifth regional annex, for Central and Eastern Europe, was added in 2001.

The CRIC first convened in Rome, Italy, in 2002. During COP 9, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2009, parties adopted new terms of reference for the review body, making it one of the two subsidiary bodies of the Convention, alongside the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). In addition to conducting regular reviews of implementation of the Convention's 10-Year Strategy (2008-2018), the CRIC was tasked with assessing the status of the Convention's institutional and financing arrangements, communication and reporting procedures, and collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Progress reports by country parties and other reporting entities are submitted through the UNCCD's Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS) online portal.

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Key Turning Points

COP 12 and CRIC 14: With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNCCD-related LDN target, a key focus at COP 12 (2015) was how to align the UNCCD's goals and parties' action programmes with the global framework. Held concurrently with COP 12, CRIC 14 held extensive discussions on how to adapt both the substance, as well as process, of future reporting, with a focus on how to establish and monitor national-level voluntary LDN targets. The meeting agreed that future reporting should focus on three biophysical indicators: trends in land cover, land productivity, and carbon stocks. Delegates also discussed related metrics to measure progress. Among decisions forwarded to the COP for approval, the CRIC called on parties to formulate data-based, quantifiable, and time-bound voluntary targets to achieve LDN "in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities," and use the concept of LDN as one of the means to foster coherence among national policies, actions, and commitments.

CRIC 15 and 16: CRIC 15 (2016) and 16 (2017) held extensive consultations on how to improve the procedures for communication as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP. In addition to adopting the new UNCCD Strategic Framework (2018-2030), including its five Strategic Objectives, COP 13 (2017) approved the CRIC's recommendation to ease the reporting burden for countries by moving to a four-year reporting cycle. It further requested the Secretariat to consider further simplifying the reporting templates and other reporting tools, including through making the PRAIS platform more user friendly. The COP decision also requested the UNCCD Secretariat and its financial arm, the Global Mechanism (GM), in coordination with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), to harmonize their respective capacity-building support for reporting processes at the global, regional, and national level through the Global Support Programme (GSP II) and related umbrella projects financed by the GEF.

Ahead of CRIC 17, the UNCCD Secretariat and the GM, in collaboration with the European Space Agency, the International Soil Reference and Information Centre and the EU Joint Research Centre, "preloaded" the PRAIS portal with default national data for each of the three UNCCD progress indicators, based on available data sources. The objective was to help parties prepare their first-ever reports under Strategic Objective 1 (improving the condition of affected ecosystems, combating DLDD, promoting sustainable land management, and contributing to LDN).

CRIC 17 Report

CRIC Chair Samuel Contreras (Philippines) opened the session on Monday, 28 January, and highlighted the importance of CRIC 17 to discuss opportunities associated with the harmonization of data and reporting.

In his welcome remarks, Joseph Harmon, Minister of State, Guyana, emphasized the importance of Guyana's rainforest for the climatic wellbeing of the planet. He outlined Guyana's commitment to environmental protection and becoming a Green State through its Vision 2040 National Development Policy. He further stated that Guyana has finalized its LDN target-setting programme and established a national action plan to combat land degradation. He expressed confidence that the discussions of CRIC 17 will set the tone for COP 14 in India in October 2019.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Monique Barbut highlighted positive trends from the 2017-2018 reporting process and recent global assessments, including a decline of overall rural poverty by 27% and a growing interest by the private sector to invest

in sustainable land management. She noted, however, that response to the growing threat of droughts remains inadequate and critically-endangered species are suffering significant losses, partly due to changes in land use. Barbut called for concrete recommendations from CRIC 17 in four areas:

- ensuring a rapid transition from target setting to the elaboration of transformative LDN projects;
- mobilizing and systematically tracking all financial resources;
- identifying the most effective entry points for promoting gender equality; and
- enhancing robust data gathering without increasing the reporting burden for countries.

Statements by Representatives of the Regional Implementation Annexes and Interest Groups: Angola, on behalf of Annex I (Africa), noted the high value placed on the Convention's implementation by African countries, stating that 48 of 54 countries from the region—the highest ever number—had submitted their national reports ahead of the deadline.

Saudi Arabia, on behalf of Annex II (Asia and the Pacific), referred to the many disasters occurring in his region due to the susceptibility to soil degradation, dust storms, and landslides, among others. He described how the widespread mismanagement of land and watersheds is exacerbating poverty, with people abandoning their land and migrating to urban areas. He highlighted challenges faced by countries in preparing progress reports, including the low level of confidence in the data, limited time to collect and analyze the data, and the use of global databases rather than more specific national datasets.

Brazil, on behalf of Annex III (Latin America and the Caribbean), outlined the diversity of ecosystems and landscapes of the region and emphasized the need for adequate technology transfer, capacity building, and finance to step up monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Convention. He called for designing processes and definitions that will lead to greater ownership of the tools, and urged improvement of data sets and greater capacity building in updating national data sets.

Malta, on behalf of Annex IV (Northern Mediterranean), outlined that establishing baselines will help fight land degradation and progress implementation of the Convention, and expressed appreciation for the interactive approach adopted at CRIC 17.

Belarus, on behalf of Annex V (Central and Eastern Europe), highlighted that available reporting tools need further improvement to be user friendly and that several countries have used global instead of national data sets, making reporting incomplete. He said without financial support, momentum to upscale national policies towards achieving LDN could be lost.

Romania, on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States, expressed satisfaction that the participation in the target-setting programme had exceeded expectations. He said challenges lie in implementing LDN targets and that doing so is not only a question of funds but of political will to address local drivers of land degradation.

The Caribbean Youth Environment Network, on behalf of civil society organizations (CSOs), underscored the impact of climate-related natural disasters on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities and called for increased ambition and accelerated action on land degradation. She highlighted some CSO priorities for CRIC 17, including: achieving greater recognition and funding for community-led LDN initiatives and advancing land tenure security, especially for women and young people.

As UNCCD COP 14 host, India invited delegates to attend the session in New Delhi in October 2019. He highlighted India's leadership in forest restoration projects that are jointly managed

with local communities, and noted that COP 14 will provide further impetus for mainstreaming such efforts in national policies and programmes.

Organizational Matters: The Committee then adopted the agenda and organization of work (ICCD/CRIC(17)/1).

Chair Contreras informed delegates that a contact group on CRIC matters, co-chaired by Trevor Benn and Durwin Humphrey (Guyana), would begin consideration of agenda items following initial consultations with regional groups. The Chair recalled that COP 13 had appointed the CRIC Chair and four Vice Chairs and reported that the Bureau had subsequently recommended the appointment of Anna Luise (Italy) as Rapporteur of the Committee for its 17th and 18th sessions.

Assessment of Implementation

Preliminary Analysis by the Secretariat: On Monday morning, Barron Orr, UNCCD Lead Scientist, introduced a set of reports containing preliminary analyses of information submitted relating to the five UNCCD Strategic Objectives (SOs).

Regarding SO1 (improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification/land degradation, promote sustainable land management (SLM), and contribute to LDN) (ICCD/CRIC(17)/2), Orr reported that national-level verification of default data on the three standardized indicators (land cover, land productivity, and carbon stocks above and below ground) was conducted in collaboration with Conservation International. He highlighted findings indicating the extent of global losses of cropland and declining land productivity, noting that grasslands experienced the largest negative trends.

Under SO2 (improve the living conditions of affected populations) (ICCD/CRIC(17)/4), Orr noted that countries were not provided with national estimates of the relevant metrics, but were encouraged to use available data sources, including the UN Statistics Division's SDG indicators database and the World Bank estimate of the Gini index (gauge of economic inequality). Orr explained that a direct comparison of income inequality trends was problematic due to the large variations in the time periods used by different countries, but said it was possible to draw conclusions about the rate and the direction of change. He further noted that of the parties that reported multiple year Gini index values, 70% (23 countries) reported trends towards greater equality.

Describing results under SO3 (mitigate, adapt to, and manage the effects of drought in order to enhance resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems) (ICCD/CRIC (17)/5), Orr stated that, due to the lack of standardized indicators, the report contained a compilation of more than 400 drought-related indicators in use at the national level. He further noted that a qualitative assessment of trends reported by parties revealed that over half of the submitted indicators are currently exhibiting increasing drought trends. He highlighted recommendations for increased collaboration between the UNCCD's Science-Policy Interface (SPI), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and other UN specialized agencies, to develop guidance on drought vulnerability and impact assessment methods.

On SO4 (generate global environmental benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD) (ICCD/CRIC (17)/6), Orr explained that the analysis was largely based on global trends in abundance and distribution of selected species. He stated that the majority (82%) of reporting parties reported slight downward trends in the Red List Index, with only one country reporting upward trends.

Regarding SO5 (mobilize substantial and additional financial and non-financial resources) (ICCD/CRIC (17)/7), Orr said that analysis based on the four progress indicators revealed that development assistance for UNCCD implementation, as well as the number of co-financing partners, had remained largely stable. He noted, however, that a high number of parties had not reported on innovative sources of financing.

Orr concluded by highlighting some recommendations for improving measurement indicators across the SOs, as well as the overall reporting process. He outlined suggestions for:

- achieving greater global benefits through synergistic target setting and implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Targets, and LDN;
- ensuring that the recording and reporting of "hotspots and brightspots" is geographically based to allow locations and areas to be assessed in conjunction with indicator data; and
- focusing on domains that received less attention, such as rural-urban linkages and synergies with other SDG indicators.

Feedback from Parties: Uruguay noted the need to ensure that indicators reflect national and regional diversity and proposed the establishment of a working group to consider new reporting mechanisms that take into account such differences.

Switzerland asked whether discussing the SOs individually is the best way forward as it could promote silos and requested deeper analysis of the data received due to identified errors.

China highlighted that meeting the SOs will require enhanced political will and called for making the reporting methodologies more open and transparent.

Regarding countries' inability to complete the LDN Target-Setting Process (TSP), Juan Carlos Mendoza, Managing Director, GM, noted that the GM will ensure available resources. On capacity building, Orr said that there is now a clear goal to work towards, which can help provide targeted capacity-building interventions.

The Cook Islands highlighted challenges for small countries in accessing high resolution data.

Bosnia and Herzegovina raised concerns about delayed financial support, which did not allow sufficient time allocation for data analysis by national experts. He called for:

- harmonization of diverse land classification systems;
- combining and verifying global data through "ground-truthing," particularly if the countries utilized non-spatially-explicit data such as aggregated official statistics for land-use change estimates; and
- further development of products to allow for higher spatial resolution.

El Salvador emphasized the need to further refine data collection and explore opportunities to enhance linkages with existing biodiversity indicators, such as the Red List Index.

The EU and Namibia encouraged more efforts to develop drought early warning systems and endorsed recommendations to explore a global indicator to harmonize reporting under SO3.

With regard to SO2, several speakers proposed adopting a similar process as used for SO1 through prefilled reporting templates with UNCCD-recognized indicator and metric data from international sources. Kenya expressed concern about the mix of data from different sources and time scales, noting it makes it difficult to correlate data.

The EU welcomed increased synergies in reporting across the three Rio Conventions, highlighting soil organic carbon as a useful common indicator. He also emphasized the need for regular

stocktaking of LDN strategies, taking into account lessons learned from the other Rio Conventions.

India called for more nuanced analysis of land ownership data to better understand drivers of land use changes and how to reduce their negative impacts.

WMO and FAO highlighted their support to parties to develop robust measurement tools and methods.

While broadly welcoming the preliminary analysis, Environment and Development Action (ENDA) Senegal, on behalf of CSOs, called for a more meaningful and inclusive reporting process that can support affected communities to increase their knowledge and enhance resilience. He also emphasized the need for increased funding to support local efforts to combat DLDD.

Responding to the points raised, Orr welcomed calls for a deeper analysis of existing data sets and enhancing the quality of data gathering. He concurred that increased availability of spatially explicit information could enhance national and local planning processes and welcomed the work of partners in developing relevant technical tools. On linkages with biodiversity indicators, he noted that one challenge is their location-specific nature. With regard to calls for continuous updating of targets, he highlighted an initiative to work more closely with the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative on scenario development building on the LDN TSP. On drought, he welcomed enhanced collaboration with the WMO and FAO and called on parties to provide feedback to inform this work.

UNCCD reporting and review process: On Tuesday afternoon, Chair Contreras introduced the Secretariat reports (ICCD/CRIC(17)/8 and ICCD/CRIC(17)/INF.2). Summarizing the report, Orr said it seeks to provide preliminary insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by parties during the 2017-2018 reporting process, which was launched immediately after COP 13 and officially concluded on 31 August 2018.

Georgia, on behalf of Annex V, supported by Saudi Arabia, provided comments on data gathered in relation to the five SOs. Among other issues, she highlighted the need to:

- sustain and improve on global data flows and make them available to eligible countries;
 - make better use of existing tools, methods, and databases; and
 - further develop national monitoring systems and indicators.
- On the reporting template and PRAIS portal, she highlighted:
- technical problems with the format of the report;
 - functionality on data retrieving by any set of attributes should be added;
 - some descriptive sections of reporting is irrelevant to the topic; and
 - the usefulness of having a printable and readable format of the report, which would facilitate its distribution and use as an information tool for decision makers.

The EU, with Zimbabwe, urged better timelines on funding and reporting cycles, welcomed future capacity-building activities, asked for verification of default data and replacement by national data as soon as possible, and welcomed establishment of minimum data requisites, improved resolution, and time series.

Ecuador, supported by Brazil, called for revision of the Trends Earth tool to allow direct transfer of data, suggested the template should provide links to maps and graphics, highlighted the difficulty of attaching annexes in the PRAIS portal, and said in planning for training sessions greater attention should be given to national methodological adjustments.

Switzerland recommended WOCAT (World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies) as an ideal tool to report on SLM practices. Brazil noted the need to evaluate

previous quality assurance as a continuous process closely linked to capacity building. UN Women urged including gender dimensions across the board in the reporting templates. The UNCCD CSO Panel drew attention to the technical expertise found in its members and noted that their inclusion in all processes would help ensure greater synergies among the Rio Conventions.

Interactive Dialogue Sessions

Progress made in setting LDN targets and advancing towards implementation: On Monday afternoon, Juan Carlos Mendoza, Managing Director, GM, introduced the Secretariat report (ICCD/CRIC(17)/3). Summarizing the report, Sven Walter, GM, said the document reports on the results of the LDN TSP and provides relevant elements for consideration in the pursuit of LDN implementation and the achievement of the voluntary LDN targets set by parties. He highlighted that 77 countries have established LDN targets and associated measures.

Jean-Marc Sinnassamy, GEF, presented activities in the Land Degradation Focal Area under the sixth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-6) and outlined plans for GEF-7.

Jungyo Lee, Republic of Korea, shared lessons on translating countries' LDN visions into implementation, especially through the Changwon Initiative. He stated that in its new phase the Initiative intends to build on previous activities undertaken in support of the 2008-2018 UNCCD strategy and in accordance with COP 10 decisions.

Nino Chikovani, Georgia, shared experiences on implementing national LDN targets at the municipal level. She highlighted the GEF 6 project, "Generating economic and environmental benefits from sustainable land management for vulnerable rural communities of Georgia," which works with four municipalities.

Nyuma Mughogho, Malawi, outlined their LDN TSP and efforts related to landscape restoration in the country. She emphasized measures taken in accordance with the National Forest Landscape Restoration Strategy and noted it forms part of the Bonn Challenge.

Jigmet Takpa, India, presented on national efforts to address DLDD, focusing on steps taken to plan transformative projects, including: understanding the status of land degradation, processes, and drivers; stakeholder mapping; proposed interventions; planning and shortlisting interventions; and developing a logical framework approach.

During the ensuing discussion, many delegates described countries' efforts to identify LDN targets and establishing baselines. The discussions highlighted:

- the importance of political will to implement and measure LDN strategies, alongside legal frameworks, advisory services, and land tenure security;
- the need to align National Action Programmes to combat desertification and LDN targets;
- methodological challenges in measuring and comparing soil organic carbon data;
- the importance of integrating and aligning targets across different national sectors such as agriculture, environment, and forestry, and with national development plans;
- resource constraints to sustainably monitor and evaluate implementation;
- the importance of capitalizing on synergies between the Rio Conventions; and
- the need for resources to tap opportunities to learn from other countries.

Many speakers also requested clarity on the LDN Fund and its future plans and ways of operating.

UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP): This interactive dialogue session took place on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning and explored early experiences from implementation of the GAP, which was adopted at COP 13 in 2017.

Skumza Mancotywa, South Africa, reported that following COP 13, the GAP has been incorporated into the country's programmes to combat DLDD. She called for increased attention to joint gender planning across the three Rio Conventions since women play a key role in SLM and restoring ecosystem services.

Jigmet Takpa, India, discussed benefits of gender responsive implementation of the Convention, with a focus on the use of gender statistics. He underscored the need to address fragmentation of data across different statistical organizations and make better use of gender-sensitive indicators, such as the Human Development Index and Gender Development Index, to reflect gender differences in income and land ownership.

Janine Cocker, Canada, remarked that reducing gender inequality is one of the most effective ways of achieving the SDGs. She highlighted some lessons learned from Canada's domestic as well as international programmes, including:

- the importance of country ownership in gender equality interventions;
- basing gender interventions on solid evidence and analysis of gender roles and power imbalances;
- being explicit by earmarking sources specifically for gender interventions; and
- managing for results.

Ansumana Tamba, The Gambia, highlighted messages from the UNCCD gender training workshop immediately prior to CRIC 17. He stressed the importance of incorporating gender in LDN target setting and implementation, removing structural barriers to women's empowerment, and reflecting gender in UNCCD progress reporting.

Verona Collantes-Lebale, UN Women, lauded the SPI for emphasizing gender principles in the LDN conceptual framework, but noted that national reporting templates do not currently facilitate gender-disaggregated reporting. She called for CRIC 17 to consider forwarding a draft decision on targeted capacity building for LDN implementation, focusing on gender, to COP 14.

Nathalie van Haren, UNCCD CSO Panel, discussed case studies from Colombia, Mali, and Kenya where women were actively involved in participatory land use planning projects. She called for UNCCD to recognize such initiatives by adopting a COP 14 decision to advance land tenure security for women through implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs).

In the ensuing discussion, Finland, on behalf of the EU, echoed calls for mainstreaming gender in LDN implementation and outlined some practical policy guidance and tools that could facilitate such actions.

Switzerland stressed the need to go beyond gender planning to incorporate gender principles in UNCCD implementation and monitoring. Bhutan emphasized the need for global solidarity to remove gender obstacles in line with the "one out all out" principle.

FAO welcomed the recognition that women and girls are important agents of change and drew attention to its work to develop robust data collection tools, as well as policy frameworks such as the VGGTs. Antigua and Barbuda underscored the importance of local ownership in land management programmes.

Responding to questions from delegates, panelists highlighted, among other issues:

- the importance of dedicated gender focal points in all sector ministries to build capacities in all key institutions;
- ensuring that women fully benefit from their investments in land stewardship; and
- the importance of changing attitudes and cultural practices that perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

Identifying emerging innovative financing opportunities to combat land degradation: This interactive dialogue took place on Tuesday. Introducing the session, Juan Carlos Mendoza, Managing Director, GM, presented the findings of the global analysis of financial flows for implementing the UNCCD (ICCD/CRIC(17)/INF.3) and highlighted that the financial ecosystem that relates to the Convention is highly complex.

Ulrich Apel, GEF, provided an overview of funding plans for GEF-7 related to supporting LDN and said that allocations for the land degradation focal area has increased by 10% compared to GEF-6.

Demetrio Innocenti, Green Climate Fund (GCF), presented on linkages between climate finance and land use and outlined that the GCF has already provided over USD170 million to ecosystem management and USD160 million for forestry and land use.

Boris Spassky, Mirova, presented an update on the LDN Fund saying capitalization has reached USD60 million from both public and private entities. He highlighted that private interest in funding SLM is limited and that changing perceptions of investing in SLM as risky is necessary.

Asher Nkegbe, Ghana, provided lessons learned from an innovative microfinance project, which he said provides easy access to credit for smallholder farms.

Alex Zvoleff, Conservation International (CI), shared insights related to two projects on: data provisioning and support for planning and monitoring of LDN and SLM; and CI Ventures, an investment fund, which deploys non-grant instruments that support projects in key conservation areas.

Walter Engelberg, Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), outlined the financial flows of bilateral German development cooperation for UNCCD implementation, which he said has steadily increased since 2012. He highlighted some innovative elements of this funding, such as the "One World-No Hunger" initiative focusing on investments in rural areas.

In the subsequent discussion, several parties outlined national efforts to fund UNCCD implementation and LDN, especially related to private sector involvement, capacity building, and partnerships with CSOs with respect to SLM.

eSwatini cautioned against financing mechanisms that encourage "survival of the fittest" where those that run the fastest prevail. He suggested that parties should revisit the design of the LDN Fund, stating it is currently run "like a bank."

Argentina welcomed increased funding for LDN projects under GEF-7, but asked for further financial support so that projects can start bearing fruit. He invited more developed countries to submit reports on their development cooperation trends to ensure information on whether financial obligations are met is needed.

The EU expressed satisfaction with the operationalization of the LDN Fund and highlighted the EU External Investment Plan, which promotes investments in Africa and the European neighborhood for the sum of EUR4.1 billion, with expected leverage of EUR44 billion. She said the Plan aims to reduce risks for private investors in difficult environments and invited countries to submit more proposals under the sustainable agriculture, rural entrepreneurs, and agribusiness investment window.

While welcoming the interest from the private sector, Japan cautioned that DLDD projects are not attractive for many investors and asked whether a strategy is in place to continually engage the sector.

The Gambia commended the GCF and GEF for “wearing gender lenses” when developing transformative programmes and projects. He called for more support for gender mainstreaming in LDN implementation.

FAO highlighted its work as Lead Agency for the GEF-7 Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes, noting the programme aims to deliver transformational change through, *inter alia*, strengthening land governance systems, leveraging public funding, and promoting knowledge sharing.

UNEP highlighted its collaboration with the UNCCD through the GEF-funded GSP projects. He reiterated the need to use LDN funding to kick start resource mobilization and multi-stakeholder consultations at the national level.

The GEF Small Grants Programme highlighted the importance of recognizing the contribution of local communities, and stressed that the commitment and dedication of local stakeholders “is pushing things forward even with little money.”

The International Network for Bamboo and Rattan said bamboo is an effective and strategic tool for LDN as it can help restore degraded land and reverse desertification.

Guinea highlighted difficulties faced with accessing GCF funding and called for streamlining and simplification of the Fund’s procedures. In response, Innocenti outlined some of the capacity-building modalities of the GCF.

CSOs said private sector funding is motivated by profit, while SLM often has low or negative returns on investment.

With respect to deepening relations with existing financial instruments, Mendoza responded that the GM has stepped up links with the GEF through its LDN Transformative Programmes Project. He further noted the potential role of Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes such as REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries) and said they would explore the potential for such processes for additional mobilization of resources to the Convention.

Spassky clarified that the LDN Fund is not a traditional bank as it provides funding for projects that banks do not invest in by providing long-term financing for smallholders on concessional terms.

Closing Plenary

On Wednesday afternoon, CRIC 17 delegates adopted the report of the meeting that will be forwarded to UNCCD COP 14.

Rapporteur Anna Luise informed delegates that the CRIC contact group had finalized three documents (ICCD/CRIC(17)/L.1-3). She explained that, taken together, the documents represent a comprehensive overview of the meeting and will be forwarded to COP 14 as one integrated report after its finalization by the CRIC Bureau, and that it would reflect views expressed during the closing plenary.

The Committee adopted the three draft documents as orally revised, which included a request to ensure that the draft text consistently refers to “some parties” in all sections to reflect that diverse views were expressed during the negotiations.

CRIC 17 Outcome: ICCD/CRIC(17)/L.1 contains a brief narrative account of the opening of the session and organizational matters. Once finalized, the third section of the report will present

the conclusions and recommendations forwarded by the CRIC contact group, as contained in ICCD/CRIC(17)/L.2 and L.3.

Conclusions and recommendations relating to SO1-4, LDN, and the GAP (ICCD/CRIC(17)/L.2): With respect to SOs1-4, CRIC 17 requested the UNCCD Secretariat to provide oversight on the reporting process in relation to multiple strategic objectives. In other requests, parties called on the Secretariat to:

- ensure adequate time for data analysis, quality control, and interpretation at both national and global levels;
- conduct a quality control audit on data presented for all SOs;
- review the text of reports to ensure adherence to the mandate and scope of the Convention and past COP decisions;
- involve the CST and SPI, as appropriate, in questions related to the development of methodologies for the indicators and deepening the preliminary analysis of data received from parties;
- develop an interactive geospatial data management platform that is compatible with Trends.Earth and PRAIS, ensures transparency and interoperability among datasets, and improves and sustains data and information flows;
- expand the scope of analysis beyond individual indicators to enable better understanding of their interactions and correlations; and
- expand the current categorization used in party reporting to distinguish between “not reported” and “not required to report.”

With regard to LDN monitoring, parties further call on the Secretariat and GM to:

- ensure that LDN target-setting implementation and monitoring at all levels is a continuous process and includes regular stocktakes of LDN targets and their implementation;
- identify, generate, and make available high spatial resolution datasets, and associated scale-specific methodologies, particularly for small island developing states and areas characterized by high variability such as mountain regions;
- provide technical support and capacity building to ensure harmonization between data reported to the UNCCD and that used by national statistics offices; and
- work with other partners to promote coherence and joint Rio Conventions work on reporting.

In other recommendations, parties call on the Secretariat and technical partners to:

- provide clear guidelines on the methodologies used to calculate land productivity dynamics and to facilitate the enhancement of Trends.Earth to enable direct inputs of key datasets; and
- develop the means to incorporate land ownership information corresponding to land cover classes in order to obtain a clearer picture of problems related to land-use conversions and land cover changes.

With reference to SO1, the draft document calls on the COP to request the Secretariat and GM, in collaboration with technical partners and parties, to:

- enhance efforts to ensure harmonization of national, regional, and global data, including land cover classification systems;
- develop and help identify resources for ground-truthing and other forms of data verification at the national level;
- invest in building national capacity to assess each indicator, including through strengthening partnerships within and beyond the Group on Earth Observations’ LDN Initiative in order to capitalize on synergies; and
- continue their efforts in supporting countries in the integration of voluntary LDN targets into National Action Programmes and other strategic national documents.

With reference to SO3, CRIC 17 recommends that the COP request the Secretariat and GM to:

- leverage efforts on the Drought Initiative in support of enhanced drought monitoring at the country level; and
- collaborate with appropriate technical partners in the development of a globally relevant drought indicator and the harmonization of drought monitoring approaches and systems.

With reference to SO4, CRIC 17 recommends that the COP request the Secretariat to:

- reevaluate the current biodiversity metric for SO2 (Red List Index) exploring ways to enhance its utility to the UNCCD with consideration of alternative metrics, in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- correct the mismatch in the reporting template for SO4 and the subsequent analysis of drivers under the Red List metric.

With respect to LDN, the CRIC:

- emphasizes the role that LDN plays in maintaining and restoring land-based natural capital;
- acknowledges that the LDN TSP provided an opportunity for countries to promote synergies and policy coherence across sectors and at all levels;
- welcomes the achievements of the LDN TSP in support of the strong political momentum created by country parties to achieve LDN and the importance of maintaining this momentum;
- emphasizes the importance of further strengthening the integration of the LDN concept and targets into relevant national policies and planning frameworks, as well as establishing sustainable monitoring systems at national and higher levels to ensure the regular and systematic review of progress made towards achieving LDN targets;
- emphasizes the need to increase capacity-building efforts in the areas of LDN data management, monitoring, and the development of transformative projects and programmes (TPPs); and
- invites financing partners, including the GEF and GM, to further support countries' activities towards the achievement of LDN targets.

With specific regard to the LDN Fund, the CRIC notes recommendations by some parties for more detailed information on the selection of projects and the definition of priorities by the Fund, and reiterating that the TPP Checklist should be viewed as a voluntary tool, and efforts of parties should remain focused on the scope of the Convention.

In a final section focusing on implementation of the GAP, the CRIC proposes to:

- apply the principle of “one out all out” to the four priority areas of the GAP in order to empower women with regard to land and land-based resources;
- include specific activities with a clear road map and decouple actions relating to women and youth;
- strengthen gender mainstreaming through, *inter alia*, promoting collaboration between DLDD and gender experts, engaging national gender equality mechanisms and securing political support;
- enhance capacity building for gender-responsive LDN programmes, including through providing dedicated staff and the capacity to manage results, developing practical policy guidance and tools, and providing ongoing technical support for the integration of gender in the TPPs;
- strengthen gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation building on existing good practices and guidelines, including through the development of a gender development index

for LDN projects, gathering gender-disaggregated data, and reviewing UNCCD reporting templates to ensure integration of GAP indicators and allow for more structured submissions with clear guidelines and standards.

Conclusions and recommendations relating to innovative financing opportunities, SO5, communication and reporting procedures, and contributions from civil society (ICCD/CRIC(17)/L.3):

On innovative financing opportunities to combat land degradation, the CRIC, among other issues:

- emphasizes the need to mobilize all sources of finance in support of the Convention;
- welcomes continued support from the GEF and bilateral donors for UNCCD implementation;
- requests the GM to strengthen its links with the GEF for facilitating countries' processes to access the GEF-7 resource allocation and enabling activities to support countries' obligations to the Convention;
- requests the GM to broaden its outreach to non-traditional funding resources;
- appreciates the role of the GCF in supporting parties on land issues and invites the GCF to provide capacity building to national stakeholders and National Focal Points on GCF financing instruments; and
- notes the operationalization and progress made by the LDN Fund and invites Mirova to provide regular updates and provide support and capacity building for accessing the Fund.

On SO5, the draft document highlights proposals to the COP to request the GM to:

- explore options to strengthen coordination with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to provide meaningful and quantitative information from reporting on SO5 and continue to develop a more integrated financial monitoring framework for tracking and better monitoring the resources for interventions; and
- consider options to improve the reporting template by including additional quantitative data for SO5 reporting.

On improving communication and reporting procedures, the CRIC notes parties' calls to the Secretariat to, among other actions:

- in collaboration with Conservation International, work to ensure that Trends.Earth can function autonomously, and that reporting functions be expanded to aid in the generation of reports that would serve national policy and management needs;
- commission a study to improve the methodology to obtain the aggregate indicator for SDG 15.3.1 and to allow its interpretation to the magnitude of degradation;
- improve the reporting mechanisms and the PRAIS platform and template, updating the functionality of the template and improving its usability, including through the capacity to accommodate spatial data, incorporate maps and other graphics, and have a printable and readable format of the report in order to ensure outputs are useful for decision makers;
- improve the PRAIS portal so that information can be readily updated, providing countries with the capability of amending already submitted national reports, if necessary;
- initiate development of a more efficient reporting cycle that ensures all information is available on time, taking into full consideration not only the time necessary for data collection, processing, analysis, and report compilation, but also the time necessary for the technical and methodological adjustments to the reporting process; and
- invite all relevant technical and financial partners to ensure that the financial resources for the continuation of financial

support by the GEF GSP, and in particular the next umbrella programme, reach countries in a timely manner.

On civil society positions, parties take note that CSOs:

- regarding SOs1-5, expressed the importance of the participation of civil society and especially women's groups that support community-led initiatives throughout the decision-making processes related to LDN targets and National Drought Plans;
- expressed the important role that policy makers play in creating an enabling environment for upscaling and replicating SLM and ask parties to consider the implementation of the VGGTs as a COP 14 decision;
- highlighted the relevance of the UNCCD GAP and called for its prompt, effective, and participatory implementation throughout the procedures of the UNCCD;
- expressed the importance of ensuring access to appropriate sources of finance to CSOs that support transformative community-based initiatives to achieve LDN targets; and
- recommended that reports reflect gender-disaggregated data, especially on land tenure rights of women, and that national reports reflect CSO achievements regarding SLM, restoration, and LDN.

Closing Statements: In their statements, representatives of regional and other interest groups paid tribute to the outgoing UNCCD Executive Secretary, Monique Barbut, with several speakers noting that she has played an instrumental role in raising the public profile of the UNCCD and the LDN target.

The EU observed that there is need for improvements in the work of the contact group and lamented the lack of clear guidance to delegates on the procedure for developing draft recommendations. Noting the "visible" progress towards meeting the SOs, the EU added that it is important to improve monitoring and assessment of progress in meeting the Convention's objectives. She welcomed the interactive dialogues for providing insights on suitable pathways to achieve LDN and called for a continuation of this approach in the future.

Cuba, for Latin America and the Caribbean, noted the diversity of the region and called for additional support to countries to generate their own data with more detailed spatial information. He called for direct access by countries to GEF-7 funds and improvements to the PRAIS portal to improve the quality of reporting, including through greater flexibility for parties to upload nationally relevant information.

Speaking on behalf of the Northern Mediterranean region, Malta welcomed the interactive approach at the CRIC, saying it provided an opportunity to share and learn from both positive and negative experiences.

Belarus, for Central and Eastern Europe, noted that despite the tight schedule, delegates from the region were able to exchange views and would continue to improve information gathering based on the experience gained from this first generation of reports. He added that the very specific nature of recommendations forwarded to the COP highlighted the evolution of the Convention, noting "the way to achieve our goals is becoming clearer."

Cook Islands, speaking for the Asia Pacific region, highlighted some challenges faced by countries in submitting their reports and expressed appreciation that the CRIC has incorporated interactive dialogues and training for delegates. She noted, however, that the number of days allocated to the CRIC is insufficient for substantive discussion and experience sharing and called for the COP to consider extending the duration of future intersessional meetings.

Angola, for the African Group, reiterated concern about the absence of many parties at this CRIC session.

The China Green Foundation, on behalf of CSOs, expressed appreciation that the CRIC took note of their priorities but said a lot of effort is still needed to achieve LDN. Among other issues, she highlighted: the importance of CSO participation in LDN target-setting; the role of policy makers in creating enabling environments for upscaling and replication of SLM and land restoration by local communities; and the relevance of the GAP.

Delivering her final remarks as the UNCCD Executive Secretary, Monique Barbut recalled that as a member of the French country team involved in the UNCCD negotiations in the 1990s she was skeptical about what the Convention could achieve. She described how her views had evolved during her tenure at the UNCCD, especially as she came to understand the potential of the LDN target as an accelerator and integrator of all of the SDGs. She saluted all UNCCD stakeholders for managing the land as if the future of the world depends on it and urged delegates to use their creativity and imagination to help amplify the Convention's core messages as it is not "mission impossible."

In closing, Chair Contreras said that the objectives of the meeting were reached and thanked delegates for a job well done. He gavelled the meeting to a close at 5:12 pm.

A Brief Analysis of CRIC 17

A river runs through it

The 17th session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 17) was held in unassuming yet beautiful Guyana, the "land of many waters," thus named because most of the country acts as a drainage basin for four major rivers. With the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) concept firmly established as the sextant by which to navigate the next decade, CRIC 17 represented the first opportunity to assess countries' progress in implementing the UN Convention to Combat Desertification's (UNCCD) 2018-2030 Strategic Framework. This first set of progress reports, while still lacking in detail, provided countries with a useful moment of reflection on the effort needed to ensure robust monitoring of the Convention's five Strategic Objectives and fully comply with their reporting obligations based on the new four-year review cycle.

Taking stock early on in the journey

The value of having a CRIC meeting at this juncture, 15 months after adopting the Strategic Framework that will direct virtually all UNCCD land-related policies for the next decade, cannot be over-emphasized. It is therefore lamentable, as a number of delegates pointed out, that comparatively few developing countries were able to embark on the long journey to this gem in the Amazon, either because of an unprepared visa-approval system, or because of prohibitively expensive air travel.

Notwithstanding, those delegates that successfully made the journey set out to ensure that the little time they had was spent as meaningfully as possible. The tone of the meeting was that of "getting down to work." One delegate summed up the mood when he remarked that his region is taking the Convention much more seriously, as evidenced by the very detailed nature of the recommendations from all regions. Flaws were reported diligently by countries, and considered bravely by the Secretariat and its funding partners. These ranged from tedious glitches in the prefilled reporting templates to more concerning data mixes from different sources and time scales.

Some of the CRIC's recommendations forwarded to the COP touch on essential building blocks for an effective monitoring and evaluation system: be it the establishment of national baselines

to enable meaningful tracking of global trends on desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD), or adequately reflecting the complexity of national and local contexts. This last point was particularly emphasized by representatives of small island developing states and parties with mountainous regions with significant variability in ecosystems, even at the local scale.

The feedback from parties demands a willingness for the CRIC to go back to the drawing board where necessary to solve data challenges and fine-tune the default templates, while tapping into available databases and the capacities of specialized partners. The wide variety in start and end dates between 2000 and 2015, and among countries' time series proved particularly problematic. Rather than setting fixed start and end dates, the Secretariat asked countries to assess changes by comparing the situation using their earliest and latest reported years, enabling them to manage the problem of different timeframes and baselines. This approach hints at the potential for future global assessments to contribute real value to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global frameworks. For example, while not a primary UNCCD indicator, the use of a novel approach to poverty data for Strategic Objective 2 (improving living conditions of affected populations) enabled the Secretariat to conclude that 282,643,000 fewer people were living below the poverty line—a 27% decline—in countries that reported.

This readiness to explore creative solutions reveals the potential of a cash-strapped Convention to “punch above its weight,” as outgoing Executive Secretary Monique Barbut noted in her farewell remarks. A long list of value-adding partnerships was enumerated at the meeting: from the Secretariat's successful collaboration with Conservation International to help “ground truth” some of the preliminary reports, to making use of specialized UN agencies such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to help build institutional capacities at the national level. The jury is still out, however, on whether the repeated calls for more capacity building and training to ensure a robust monitoring and evaluation process can actually be “bankrolled.”

A number of emphatic “reminders” scattered throughout the recommendations also point to latent fears among some delegates about residual sticking points that are not only likely to resurface at COP 14 but represent broader implementation challenges and issues that the Convention needs to address in coming years. These include questions about the validity of linking land degradation and drought as drivers of displacement, migration and ensuing conflicts, as well as to urbanization.

Provisions for the voyage

After making a big splash at COP 13, the much-anticipated LDN Fund finally became operational in late 2018, yet confusion remains about its role and functions. The Fund's name might not be helping matters as its main purpose is not to directly help countries reach their LDN targets but instead it is an impact investment fund that blends resources from public, private, and philanthropic sectors to fund LDN-related projects carried out by private sector actors. Public money is used as leverage to raise private capital with a clear expectation for return on investments in sustainable land management (SLM) and land restoration projects. Some developing countries and civil society organizations have continued to express skepticism about the Fund, suggesting that it is problematic that a UNCCD-associated fund is “acting like a bank.”

Additionally, Mirova, the private-sector investment management firm that manages the Fund, alluded to the fact that

raising private capital for SLM has felt like swimming against the current, as demonstration of returns has yet to materialize. So far only USD60 million has been capitalized and USD100 million pledged of the USD300 million target. Nevertheless, many delegates expressed hope that once projects generate proof-of-concept, more private sector bodies, such as developed countries' pension funds, will come on board. Additionally, public funding for LDN is slowly growing under the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility Trust Fund (GEF-7) having a 10% increase in funding for the land degradation focal area.

Developing country parties, in particular, urgently called for additional funding for capacity building at the national level to establish baselines, leverage funding, transfer complex technical expertise into actions at the local level, and adequately fill national focal point positions. LDN implementation requires multi-stakeholder engagement and planning across scales and sectors, supported by national-scale coordination that should work with, and incorporate existing local and regional governance structures. Added to this burden is the requirement that knowledge from monitoring should be verified through stakeholder consultation and applied to LDN implementation and future management of land degradation. Such actions will require substantial resources, particularly in countries with the least capacity struggling with the greatest land degradation and drought challenges.

On a more positive note, the three Rio Conventions have taken a progressive step to establish the Project Preparation Facility to finance larger projects that address common issues across the three Conventions. Countries will thus be encouraged to integrate their Aichi Biodiversity Targets, Nationally Determined Contributions, and LDN targets, which will undoubtedly lead to more holistic approaches in environmental management and reduce duplication of efforts.

Changes at the helm

The fairly recent and imminent leadership changes in both the Global Mechanism and Secretariat have the potential to cause unintended waves. One seasoned UNCCD observer, reflecting on the leadership trajectory since the Convention's inception, said each of the different Executive Secretaries built on the contributions of the former and made improvements. In her farewell speech, Monique Barbut acknowledged that her journey with the UNCCD was not always “smooth sailing,” and as a national delegate involved in the negotiations that would establish the youngest Rio Convention, she was initially skeptical of what the UNCCD could achieve. Against this backdrop, her widely acknowledged achievements in stabilizing the Convention's finances and global profile reflected a “sea change” that she did not hesitate to reference at the close of CRIC 17. She reminded delegates that while LDN is now seen as an accelerator and integrator of all of the SDGs, “the water is not calm but clearer” and achieving the Convention's full potential will require using all their creativity and imagination. UNCCD stakeholders are keen to see how the incoming Executive Secretary, former UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw will help the Convention navigate a steady course at this critical juncture.

All hands on deck

Although CRIC 17 has laid the groundwork for a robust debate at COP 14 later this year, much remains to be done to unlock the potential of crucial “catalytic” issues, such as empowering women and ensuring land rights to the most vulnerable, as well as finding the necessary resources to aid the Convention's

implementation. The challenge now is how to turn the basket of CRIC recommendations into clear implementable decisions for consideration by the COP in October 2019. It is really in India where the course will be set for the next two years. With a new captain at the helm, the Secretariat and Global Mechanism will be on deck to keep things steady, lest momentum is lost and investors disappear. As the now former Executive Secretary aptly said, UNCCD parties, partners and stakeholders must address these concerns and “manage the land as if the future of the world depends on it.”

Upcoming Meetings

Fourth Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA):

The theme of the fourth UNEA session is “Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production.” UNEA 4 will be preceded by a meeting of the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives from 4-8 March 2019. **dates:** 11-15 March 2019 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **contact:** UNEP **email:** beatpollution@unenvironment.org **www:** <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/>

Land and Poverty Conference 2019 – Catalyzing

Innovation: The 20th Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty will gather an expected 1,500 participants from government, academia, civil society and the private sector to discuss the latest research and innovations in policies and good practice on land governance around the world. **dates:** 25-29 March 2019 **location:** Washington DC, US **contact:** World Bank **email:** landconference@worldbank.org **www:** <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2018/08/13/land-and-poverty-conference-2019-catalyzing-innovation>

First Global Conference on Synergies between the

2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement: The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will convene the first global multi-stakeholder conference on synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change that will serve as an Expert Group Meeting on SDG 13 (climate action) ahead of the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. **dates:** 1-3 April 2019 **location:** Copenhagen, Denmark **contact:** UN Division for Sustainable Development Goals **email:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/contact/> **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019#preparation>

Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2019:

The fifth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will take place on the theme “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.” Convened by the UN Economic Commission for Africa in collaboration with regional organizations and the UN System, the Forum seeks to advance implementation of both the SDGs and Africa’s Agenda 2063. **dates:** 16-18 April 2019 **location:** Morocco **contact:** UNECA **email:** https://www.uneca.org/contact/Communications_Section **www:** <https://www.uneca.org/arfsd2019>

7th Session of the Global Soil Partnership Plenary

Assembly: The Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly constitutes the main venue where all partners come together each year to make important decisions about the global soil agenda. **dates:** 5-7 June 2019 **location:** Rome, Italy **contact:** Global Soil Partnership Secretariat **email:** GSP-Secretariat@fao.org **www:** <http://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/resources/events/detail/en/c/1170347/>

56th Meeting of the GEF Council: The GEF Council will approve projects to realize global environmental benefits in

the GEF’s focal areas, provide guidance to the GEF Secretariat and implementing agencies, and discuss its relations with the conventions for which it serves as the financial mechanism.

dates: 10-13 June 2019 **location:** Washington DC, US **contact:** GEF Secretariat **phone:** +1-202-473-0508 **fax:** +1-202-522-3240/3245 **email:** secretariat@thegef.org **www:** <https://www.thegef.org/council-meetings>

International Soil Congress 2019 – “Successful Transformation toward LDN: Future Perspective”: Marking the 25th anniversary of the UNCCD, the Congress will bring together senior scientists, academicians, experts, policy makers and young researchers to analyze the current and future trends of soil and land resources, establish new policies based on the principles of LDN, and create a universal message for the sustainable use of soil and land resources. Themes include: soil health in the food production chain; integrated planning approaches for sustainable use of land and soil resources; unlocking investments for LDN; gender; and sustainable value chains for LDN. **dates:** 17-19 June 2019 **location:** Ankara, Turkey **contact:** Secretariat **email:** ldnsoil@gmail.com **www:** <https://soil2019.gidatarim.edu.tr/en>

50th Session of the IPCC: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is currently in its sixth assessment cycle, which includes the Special Report on Climate Change and Land, which is tentatively scheduled to be adopted in August 2019.

dates: 13-17 August 2019 (TBD) **location:** TBD **contact:** IPCC Secretariat **phone:** +41-22-730-8208/54/84 **fax:** +41-22-730-8025/13 **email:** IPCC-Sec@wmo.int **www:** <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

UNCCD COP 14: India will host the next session of the UNCCD COP. **dates:** 7-18 October 2019 **location:** New Delhi, Delhi, India **contact:** UNCCD Secretariat **phone:** +49-228-815-2800 **fax:** +49-228-815-2898/99 **email:** secretariat@unccd.int **www:** <https://www.unccd.int/>

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

Glossary

COP	Conference of the Parties
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
CSOs	Civil society organizations
CST	Committee on Science and Technology
DLDD	Desertification, land degradation, and drought
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GM	Global Mechanism
GSP	Global Support Programme
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
PRAIS	Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLM	Sustainable land management
SO	Strategic objective
SPI	Science-Policy Interface
TPP	Transformative projects and programmes
TSP	Target-Setting Programme
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
VGGTs	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests
WMO	World Meteorological Organization