

14th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 2-13 September 2019

The fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 14) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) opens on Monday, 2 September 2019, in New Delhi, India. COP 14 will address critical gaps in land management and planning, as well as practical actions to ensure countries achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) by delivering tools and resources that are fit for purpose. The COP will take place in conjunction with the 18th session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 18) and the 14th session of the UNCCD's Committee on Science and Technology (CST 14). Over 3,000 participants from all over the world are expected to participate in the two-week meeting.

Expectations for this Meeting

Following the adoption of the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030 in 2017, COP 14 will provide parties with an early opportunity to review progress under the Convention's five Strategic Objectives:

- To improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification/land degradation, promote sustainable land management and contribute to land degradation neutrality;
- To improve the living conditions of affected populations;
- To mitigate, adapt to, and manage the effects of drought in order to enhance resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems;
- To generate global environmental benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD; and
- To mobilize substantial and additional financial and non-financial resources to support the implementation of the Convention by building effective partnerships at the global and national level.

The review will draw on an initial set of 135 voluntary country reports, as well as relevant intergovernmental scientific reports, including the 2018 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) assessment on land degradation and restoration and the 2019 Special Report on Climate Change and Land adopted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in August. The discussions will also contribute towards preparations for the midterm evaluation of the Strategic Framework, scheduled for 2024.

Similar to previous meetings, COP 14 will provide a platform for high-level policy debates and exploration of emerging themes that have been insufficiently addressed by the Convention. This year's Ministerial Segment will pay particular attention to human dimensions of desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD), by addressing such issues as land rights and values, sustainable value chains and links between rural and urban populations.

COP 14 is expected to adopt decisions outlining strategies and actions needed to accelerate achievement of the Convention's goals by 2030. Among key themes to be addressed are:

- people-centered land management policies;
- land, security, and stability;
- drought preparedness, management, and response; transformative actions to accelerate land restoration and resilience;
- the role of science in enhancing actions on the ground; and
- enhanced commitments at global level accelerate achievement of the land-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Moreover, with the adoption of drought as a standalone objective under the new UNCCD Strategic Framework, COP 14 delegates will consider the development of a global indicator to help parties assess their progress in implementing drought preparedness, management, and response programmes.

Origins of the UNCCD

The UNCCD is one of the three Rio Conventions—along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)—and was called for in Agenda 21, the programme of action adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit). Following the Earth Summit, the UN General Assembly 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 Convention text as well as four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean. The UNCCD was adopted on 17 June 1994, entered into force on 26 December 1996, and currently has 197 parties. A fifth regional implementation annex, for Central and Eastern Europe, entered into force in 2001.

Key Turning Points

COP 1: The COP and the CST met for the first time in Rome, Italy, in 1997 from 29 September to 10 October 1997. Delegates 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 Mechanism, which was established under Article 21 of the Convention to assist countries in the mobilization of financial resources to implement the Convention and address desertification, land degradation, and drought.

COP 4: Convening in 2000, in Bonn, Germany, COP 4 adopted the fifth regional annex for Central and Eastern Europe. The COP also adopted a decision on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council initiative to explore the best options for GEF support of the UNCCD's implementation.

COP 5, meeting in 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland, established the CRIC. The CRIC became a standing subsidiary body of the UNFCCC at COP 9 in 2009.

COP 6: Convening in 2003 in Havana, Cuba, COP 6 delegates designated the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD.

COP 8 convened in Madrid, Spain, in 2007 and adopted its first ten-year strategic plan.

COP 10 convened in 2011, in Changwon City, Republic of Korea. Delegates addressed 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: Held in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2013, COP 11 followed the landmark UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20) in June 2012. The discussions highlighted the role of the Convention in achieving a land-degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development, as agreed in the Rio+20 outcome. Among key decisions reached at the COP were: agreement to establish a science-policy interface (SPI) to enhance the UNCCD as a global authority on DLDD and sustainable land management (SLM); and the establishment of an *ad hoc* working group to provide guidance on how to refine impact indicators for monitoring the Convention's implementation.

COP 12: With the adoption of the SDGs and the UNCCD-related target on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), a key focus at COP 12, held in Ankara, Turkey, in 2015, was how to further align the UNCCD's goals and parties' action programmes with the global framework. The meeting agreed that parties would strive to achieve a single, unified objective, and that future reporting would focus on three biophysical indicators: trends in land cover, land productivity, and carbon stocks. Delegates also 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.

COP 13: COP 13 convened in Ordos, China, in 2017. Decisions helped to further align the Convention's future strategy with the 2030 Agenda, in particular through launching global indicators and a unified reporting and monitoring process, and strengthening the scientific bodies that will oversee technical guidance of this process. One of the highlights of the meeting was the adoption of a new Strategic Framework for the period 2018-2030 to succeed the UNCCD 10-year Strategy (2008-2018). The COP also endorsed the scientific conceptual framework for LDN developed by the SPI and launched the LDN Fund—co-managed

by the UNCCD's Global Mechanism and investment management firm Mirova—to spearhead large scale land restoration projects. COP 13 further endorsed new thematic priorities for the Convention, notably a standalone Strategic Objective on drought and a new Gender Action Plan, and adopted revised terms of reference for the CRIC.

Intersessional Highlights

IPBES-6: During its sixth session, held in Medellín, Colombia, in March 2018, the IPBES Plenary endorsed the first-ever comprehensive Global Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration. Among key findings, the IPBES report concludes that worsening land degradation caused by human activities is undermining the well-being of two-fifths of humanity, driving species extinctions, intensifying climate change, and contributing to mass human migration and increased conflict.

CRIC 17: CRIC 17 convened from 28-30 January 2019 in Georgetown, Guyana. Following the adoption of the new UNCCD Strategic Framework and revised terms of reference for the CRIC at COP 13, the meeting provided the first opportunity to review parties' progress towards the 2030 targets. Delegates also engaged in three interactive dialogues exploring:

- progress in implementing voluntary LDN targets and how to translate UNCCD progress indicators into action;
- initial experiences in the implementation of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan; and
- emerging innovative financing opportunities to combat land degradation.

Appointment of new UNCCD Executive Secretary: On 31 January 2019, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Ibrahim Thiaw of Mauritania to succeed Monique Barbut as Executive Secretary of the UNCCD. Thiaw previously served as Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for the Sahel and Deputy Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Thiaw is the fourth Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.

UNCCD 25th Anniversary Celebrations: Commemorative events to mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention took place on 17 June 2019 during World Day to Combat Desertification. Various initiatives announced on the Day, which was themed "Let's Grow the Future Together," focused on advancing SLM and achieving the UNCCD's LDN target by 2030. The global observance event in Ankara, Turkey, included a tribute to the late Hama Arba Diallo, the UNCCD's first Executive Secretary.

IPCC-50: Convening from 2-6 August 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland, the 50th session of the IPCC adopted the Special Report on Climate Change and Land, which addresses interlinkages between climate change, DLDD, SLM, food security, and greenhouse gas (GHG) fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems. The report states that land is already under growing human pressure and climate change is adding to these pressures. At the same time, keeping global warming to well below 2°C can be achieved only by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from all sectors including land and food. The report also states that when land is degraded, it becomes less productive, restricting what can be grown and reducing the soil's ability to absorb carbon. This exacerbates climate change, while climate change in turn exacerbates land degradation in many different ways. SLM can help reduce and in some cases reverse these adverse impacts. The Special Report not only contributes to the IPCC's sixth assessment cycle, but is also expected to support the monitoring of progress under the three Rio Conventions, as well as diverse SDG targets.