

UNCCD COP 14 Highlights: Friday, 6 September 2019

The Committee of the Whole (COW) addressed new and emerging issues in the morning, exchanging views on how to include land tenure and responsible governance of land on the Convention's agenda.

The Committee on Science and Technology (CST) concluded its work, forwarding six draft decisions for adoption by the Conference of the Parties (COP). Reflecting on the quality of decisions, Chair Fiati said it demonstrated parties' cooperation and determination to ensure successful implementation of the UNCCD.

Meanwhile, delegates continued to consider decision texts in the other contact groups.

In the evening the COP adopted the report of the CST and approved a decision on credentials of delegations.

Committee of the Whole

Effective Implementation of the Convention at National, Subregional and Regional Levels: Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues - new and emerging issues:

Land tenure: The UNCCD Secretariat introduced its report (ICCD/COP(14)/20), noting additional revisions to be reflected in the updated draft.

The EU stressed that responsible land governance is intrinsically linked to achieving SDG target 15.3 on land degradation neutrality (LDN). She encouraged the Secretariat to build on work by others, stressing that the LDN Fund should ensure that investments in land restoration do no harm at the local level and respect other principles enshrined in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), as well as the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems.

Ghana, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, said they had endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the report, and recognized the need to collaborate with other stakeholders for good land governance as "no government can do it alone."

eSWATINI and SOUTH AFRICA acknowledged the importance of land governance for achieving LDN, but, with ZIMBABWE, LEBANON, YEMEN, SAUDI ARABIA, OMAN and others, emphasized the importance of respecting national circumstances and policy frameworks.

CHINA noted that land tenure is a new and crosscutting item and there is need to examine the UNCCD's mandate in taking up this work. ARGENTINA and BRAZIL noted that countries use varying definitions of land tenure and, with COLOMBIA, cautioned against creating additional reporting burdens on countries.

While welcoming the contribution of the VGGT, CHILE said more work needs to be done to achieve "certainty on land tenure." COLOMBIA questioned whether the UNCCD was the appropriate forum to consider the issue. JAPAN cautioned against expanding the scope of the Convention, and with the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, INDIA and GUYANA, emphasized the voluntary nature of the VGGT.

SWITZERLAND pointed out that the VGGT have been acknowledged by the UN General Assembly and are therefore recognized by parties. ANGOLA and PALESTINE noted land tenure is a sensitive issue with social, cultural and political dimensions.

KENYA drew attention to increasing land sub-division which limits sustainability and welcomed consideration of the connection between land tenure and land degradation, and other challenges addressed by the Convention.

The EU, NAMIBIA and BENIN highlighted the importance of ensuring gender equity in land tenure systems, while THE PHILIPPINES called for considering the interests of smallholder farmers.

FAO described its support to countries in capacity building, coordination for the implementation of the Convention and achieving LDN. She proposed that stakeholders mainstream the VGGT so as to achieve LDN. The HOLY SEE emphasized ancient value and knowledge from the indigenous peoples in land tenure management.

CSOs underscored the urgent need to secure land-based livelihoods for millions of people to achieve the Convention's goals, calling for recognition of customary land tenure, especially in areas managed by indigenous peoples, as it is crucial for the conservation of natural resources.

Responding to the matters raised, the Secretariat said they had taken note of the sensitivity of the issue and said delegates' views and recommendations would be reflected in the proposals to be tabled in the contact group.

Committee on Science and Technology

Interfacing Science and Policy, and Sharing Knowledge:

During the closing evening plenary, CST Chair Carl Fiati presented, and the CST adopted without comments, six draft decisions relating to the following agenda items:

- Items resulting from the work programme of the SPI for the biennium 2018–2019, including follow-up on the work programme of the SPI on objective 1;
- (ICCD/COP(14)/CST.L1) as orally corrected, and on objective 2 (ICCD/COP(14)/CST.L5), as well as policy-oriented recommendations resulting from the cooperation with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies (ICCD/COP(14)/CST.L6);
- Interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge (ICCD/COP(14)/CST.L2), and on the work programme of the SPI for the biennium 2020–2021 (ICCD/COP(14)/CST.L3); and
- Programme of work for CST 15 ((ICCD/COP(14)/CST.L4).

Egypt, on behalf of the ARAB GROUP, requested extending future CST sessions by one day to reduce delegates' workload and allow smaller delegations to attend all sessions and contact group meetings. INDIA lauded the innovative work undertaken by SPI members and contributing scientists.

Niger, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, requested that draft decisions be shared with all parties, so that they are able to brief their heads of delegation for the High-Level Segment.

Ahmet Senyaz, CST Rapporteur, shared his observations on the work done by the Committee in the last two years, highlighting: the creation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, including the synergies between Conventions; and, the fruitful work of the SPI, which produced three reports in support of decision-makers in the effective implementation of the Convention.

The CST subsequently adopted the report of its 14th Session.

Election of Officers other than the Chairperson of the

CST: The CST elected its vice-chairs: Anna Luise (Italy), Ratko Ristic (Serbia), Pablo Viegas (Argentina) and Karma Dema Dorji (Bhutan).

Closing the session, Chair Fiati thanked Matti Nummelin for his facilitation of the contact group and lauded the successful completion of CST's work. He said the excellent quality of decisions demonstrated parties' determination and cooperation. He adjourned the session at 8:10 pm.

Closing Plenary

Jigmet Takpa, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, introduced document ICCD/COP(14)/21 on the credentials of delegations. The COP adopted the document without comment.

The COP then adopted the report of the CST without additional comments.

Chair Takpa declared the meeting closed at 8:44 pm.

Contact Groups

CST: Delegates concluded their work, agreeing on language for draft decisions relating to the programme of work and the SPI, as well as recommendations resulting from cooperation with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies.

Budget: On Friday the contact group agreed to approve the programme and budget for the biennium 2020–2021, which calls for a nominal budget increase of 1.5% to reflect inflation.

CRIC: The COW Contact Group on matters related to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) finalized text on collaboration with the GEF.

COW Contact Group on Other Matters: In the afternoon, the contact group resumed its discussion on UNCCD policy advocacy frameworks, agreeing to most of the text in the draft decision on gender and starting consideration of the text on migration. Discussions continued into the evening.

The Friends of the Chair Group continued consultations on the New Delhi Declaration.

In the Corridors

The COP held a first exchange of views on whether – and how – to include land tenure in the Convention. Echoing the tone of Thursday's open dialogue session with civil society, there was broad assent that land governance is a critical element in the enabling environment for SLM and the LDN target. However, it quickly became clear this is an issue most parties are not willing to touch. Many described it as a matter of national sovereignty and beyond the mandate of the Convention. Some speculated the COP might push the issue forward to the next meeting, leaving more room to seek consensus on a starting point for discussions.

As government leaders begin to arrive for Monday's High-Level Segment. It remains to be seen if their roundtable discussions – which traditionally explore new and emerging themes – might touch on such "hot potatoes as land tenure or migration" as one delegate put it. He opined "migration is being pushed from one regime to another, and little impact can be seen from the global compact on migration so far." Equally pessimistic on land tenure, he said "you can tell which countries are satisfied with leaving it at voluntary guidelines."

However, several participants seemed more optimistic as they left the evening plenary, perhaps inspired by the arrival of young attendees at the venue. "With youth in the house" one delegate said she hoped to "hear stronger statements from civil society, including on the environmental justice linkage."

Others looked forward to next week's interactive dialogues, hoping to engage ministers in discussions on the policy paradigm shift that youth are calling for: an embrace of sustainable consumption and production patterns globally.



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