

UNCCD COP 14 Highlights: Tuesday, 10 September 2019

On the second day of the High-Level Segment, delegates took part in three interactive dialogues and heard country statements on progress made in implementing the Convention. Facilitators of sessions held over the two days presented the outcomes in a closing plenary in the afternoon that also took note of progress towards developing the New Delhi Declaration.

Meanwhile, delegates continued to negotiate draft decision texts into the evening.

Events held on the sidelines of the meeting included a high-level luncheon to launch the Peace Forest Initiative, which aims to support joint rehabilitation of degraded areas in post-conflict settings; a consultation on the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030; and the Day of Action for Land at the Rio Conventions Pavilion focusing on implementation of land degradation neutrality (LDN) projects.

Special Segment

Interactive Dialogue 1: A values-based approach to land stewardship: The panel was chaired by Ezechiel Joseph, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, Physical Planning, Natural Resources and Cooperation, Saint Lucia. In his opening remarks, he called for a “values revolution” through collective human action and a shift in consumption and production patterns.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, India, proposed a focus on managing population growth so as to reduce the human footprint. He emphasized the need to change mindsets to respect water, food and land as life-making ingredients rather than resources to be exploited.

Baaba Maal, Senegal, spoke on the role that music and culture can play in bringing harmony and peace, and emphasized the need for efforts and support to encourage more young people to return to Africa.

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Chad, noted that traditional knowledge is a crucial link in protecting land and natural resources, stating that for indigenous people, “the environment is our supermarket, our health system and our education.”

Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, Holy See, discussed the relationship between religion and science, and emphasized religious traditions in changing human consciousness back to the concept of “the land is holy.” He called for united efforts from all religions to reverse land degradation trends.

In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted, among other issues: initiatives based on ecological economics; concrete support to mobilize youth; and shared values aimed at a sustainable and transformative development model. Participants also called for mapping out of a wise direction for the world to attain sustainable management of resources, and more concrete actions to be taken to address the depletion of resources.

Interactive Dialogue 2: *Healthy land, healthy people:*

The roundtable was chaired by Dennis Musuku Wanchinga, Minister for Water Development, Sanitation and Environmental Protection, Zambia. Opening the session, he described land as an important, critical resource for human wellbeing that is under severe pressure, with around 2.2 billion people affected by land degradation worldwide.

In a keynote address, Lorena Aguilar Rovelo, Vice-Minister, Foreign Affairs, Costa Rica, pointed out that a lack of knowledge on gender-differentiated health impacts results in a “one-size-fits-only-men syndrome.” She noted that disaggregated data demonstrates that women and girls make up 60% of the chronically hungry, and if they had the same access to productive resources as men, agricultural yields could rise by 20-30%.

Howard Bamsey, Chair, Global Water Partnership (GWP) Steering Committee, highlighted the vulnerability of water systems and the people who depend on them, especially the poor. He cited population growth and climate change as two of the main challenges to achieving the SDG on water, and the increasing urgency of water security. Advocating an integrated approach, Bamsey explained that poor governance gets in the way of measures to reduce vulnerability and that all the stakeholders have to be at the table.

In their interventions, participants stressed challenges including the impacts of soil pollution on food safety and security. The consequences of population growth and resulting pressure on existing, cultivable land was highlighted, as well as the notion of intergenerational equity.

Proposed solutions included: implementing the Voluntary Guidelines on Sustainable Soil Management of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP); enhancing cooperation among different sectors and stakeholders, such as between the GWP and the GSP; and building awareness among consumers for improved health outcomes and behavioral change.

Interactive Dialogue 3: *Boosting sustainable value chains for land-based business:* This session took place in the afternoon and was chaired by Patricia Appiagyei, Deputy Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, Ghana. In her opening remarks, Appiagyei stressed the need for economic diversification and actions towards creating innovative, inclusive and “entirely new” value chains in order to unlock natural capital.

Commenting that “small is beautiful,” Anil Jain, Jain Farm Fresh Foods, explained that providing smallholder farmers with access to knowledge on sustainable farming methods such as micro irrigation and solar energy, as well as capital and linkages to local and international markets, is contributing to improved livelihoods at local level.

Cai Mantang, Elion Resources Group, shared how large-scale plantation of indigenous plants can expand the supply and product chain stemming from ecological restoration of desert regions,

including in the food and pharmaceutical sector. He stressed the necessity of working in partnerships, and with local people, and employing innovative practices, such as growing agricultural products vertically or under the shade of solar panels.

Bernard Giraud, Livelihoods Funds, spoke on the importance of engaging farmers to develop value chains through coalition building, making long-term commitments, incentivizing organic farming and increasing the capacity of young farmers.

Nick Salter, Aduna, discussed business opportunities based on products cultivated in drylands. He suggested that large investments to kickstart markets could offer a solution to the “vicious cycle of obscurity” that arises from the lack of awareness of products from dryland regions.

Tony Siantonas, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, highlighted the role of the business sector in supporting the insurance for agriculture soil health, building up community resilience against climate change, and securing land right and land tenure.

In the ensuing discussion, speakers highlighted the need for: investing in dryland areas to boost local livelihoods; ensuring equitable access to land, knowledge and funding, especially for women; and promoting international cooperation. On business solutions, speakers called for, *inter alia*, alternatives to chemical fertilizers, insurance for agriculture soil health, water-efficient irrigation systems and investments for sustainable energy at the local level.

High-Level Segment: Formal Statements Session: Hosted by the COP 14 Presidency, this morning session was addressed by ministers and high-level officials from Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti, Lebanon, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles and Zambia. The presentations highlighted national efforts on, and commitments to sustainable land management, land restoration, soil and watershed management, among other issues.

ICELAND shared insights on the role land restoration played in its journey to become a developed country. BOLIVIA reflected that “poverty comes from the indiscriminate exploitation of our natural resources.” He added that we may see progress now, “but not the ruins that it leaves behind.”

ARMENIA highlighted opportunities to move towards an energy-efficient economy. BHUTAN described challenges facing the Himalayan mountains that are regarded as the “water towers of the world.” He called on leaders of developed countries to take bolder decisions to cut emissions and reduce pollution.

MALAWI called on the international community to establish a land degradation fund that operates less like a private financial instrument, but is more supportive and accessible to struggling economies. Several African countries highlighted drought and degraded land as drivers of instability and conflict, which in turn leads to high numbers of displaced people and resource-driven migration.

Closing Ceremony

COP 14 President, Prakash Javadekar opened the session and invited the respective roundtable and interactive dialogues chairs to present a summary of their proceedings.

Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, presented a summary of discussions on land, climate and renewable energy. He pointed to land restoration as fundamental to development with positive implications for all the SDGs, further emphasizing that ambitious action is now required on climate change.

Ana Cristina Quirós, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Costa Rica, shared recommendations and contributions from the roundtable on rural and urban communities. She

highlighted various drivers of urbanization identified in the discussions and strategies required to incentivize youth to remain in rural areas.

Nestor Batio Bassiere, Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Green Economy, Burkina Faso, presented a summary of the roundtable on fostering a global movement for ecosystem restoration, and emphasized key messages, including that: desertification and land degradation are a global responsibility; partnerships are needed at all levels; and scientific knowledge and technology should guide all actions.

Minister Joseph reported on the interactive dialogue on values-based approach to land stewardship. He noted that discussions covered: the need to protect finite natural capital in the face of rapid population growth, and resulting pressure on global land resources. He further highlighted the moral imperative of the global restoration movement and the need for a broader dialogue with all faiths to inspire collective action to protect global land resources.

Minister Wanchinga presented outcomes of the interactive dialogue on healthy land, healthy people. He stated that humans should be at the center of efforts towards mitigating the effects of drought in the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-30. He also noted views on the need to empower women and improve governance to enhance land management, water supply systems and the productivity of land.

Minister Appiagyei identified obstacles that need to be overcome in order to boost sustainable value chains for land-based business, as discussed during the third interactive dialogue. She noted the need to address the lack of knowledge and funding to green entrepreneurs, including women and youth. She further reported on calls for stakeholders to create shared value and build coalitions to support small-scale farmers and businesses.

COP President Javadekar then reported on progress in Friends of the Chair Group negotiations on a New Delhi Declaration, which will be presented for adoption by the COP.

The COP took note of the reports presented.

In closing, Minister Javadekar, lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his commitment to restoring 26 million hectares of land, creating centers of excellence on land issues, and phasing out single-use plastic in India.

In the Corridors

Following the previous day’s high-level attention, Tuesday’s meetings felt deserted and lacked energy. Some delegations headed to the wrong rooms to make statements while some anticipated speakers were absent. The morning’s COP High-Level Segment — which featured speakers exclusively from developing countries except for Iceland — lacked interpretation. Arabic, French and Spanish-speaking delegates wondered if the few attendees were able to follow the proceedings.

Some delegates remarked that the rushed statements in plenary sessions were a far cry from the promised interactive dialogue and the need for a concrete response to grassroots organizations’ passionate pleas for substantive action. Pointing to a lack of agreement on the way forward for some of the institutional mechanisms established under the Convention, some suggested moving towards more agile and accessible platforms, such as those emerging in the climate and sustainable energy processes.

Meanwhile, rumored attempts to water down the New Delhi Declaration by removing references to international financial mechanisms worried attendees hoping for capacity-building action.