

UNCCD COP 9 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2009

At the conclusion of the first week of UNCCD COP 9, the CRIC contact group convened in the morning and discussed a draft decision on the GEF. The COW convened in the afternoon to consider civil society participation and the communication strategy. The CST discussed agenda items related to the identification of indicators and the report of the first Scientific Conference, and approved a number of decisions. Contact groups on the CST and the JIU assessment of the GM also met on Friday.

At the conclusion of the COW on Friday, the COW Chair announced that Rashmi Sharma (Canada) would facilitate a group on regional coordination mechanisms and Makase Nyaphisi (Lesotho) would coordinate a group on the budget. These groups, along with the contact groups on the CRIC and JIU assessment of the GM, met over the weekend.

CRIC CONTACT GROUP

The CRIC contact group addressed the draft decision on the GEF (L.21/COP.9). Delegates discussed whether to include a reference to deforestation when noting the need for additional GEF resources, but finally agreed to use the name of the GEF focal area for land degradation. They also considered urging the GEF to provide funds to implement the Strategy and to support the elaboration of national reports by developing countries, but the text remained bracketed.

Participants discussed a paragraph related to the GEF informing the COP Bureau and Secretariat on any further development in the allocation of resources that involve the land degradation focal area. Some parties clarified that the paragraph addresses the importance of obtaining technical information, such as on criteria and indicators, should land degradation be included in the GEF's resource allocation framework.

Delegates agreed to add two new paragraphs: inviting the GEF to include in its reports to the COP an analysis of the activities to combat land degradation in drylands funded through the climate change funds related to adaptation managed by the GEF; and inviting the GEF Council to consider the GM's strategy to enhance collaboration with the GEF.

One regional group proposed a paragraph on inviting the GEF to expand the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) to facilitate access by individual affected developing country parties to GEF funds available for the implementation of the Strategy. The text was bracketed.

The contact group also agreed on a paragraph on the coordination and liaison of the Joint Work Programme of the Secretariat and the GM with the GEF.

COW

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION: The Secretariat introduced the document on the procedures for the participation of CSOs in the UNCCD meetings and processes (ICCD/COP(9)/Add.1). The EU supported, in principle, the proposed procedure and made recommendations for CSO involvement. NORWAY said the document lacked some essential elements on how CSOs would participate in UNCCD meetings.

International Federation of Agricultural Producers said farmers should have a place in the UNCCD process. ARGENTINA stressed gender balance and youth participation, and supported establishing civil society networks. CIVIL SOCIETY emphasized: training new CSO participants; carrying out follow-up activities; and providing financial support. MOROCCO highlighted the importance of establishing criteria for CSO participation.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: The Secretariat presented a draft communication strategy for the Secretariat (ICCD/COP(9)/4/Add.2 and Misc.1). The EU supported giving priority to communication. ALGERIA noted the need to engage major international fora in the work and results of the Convention. SAUDI ARABIA recalled the challenges of communicating to farmers and communities without internet access. BRAZIL emphasized that the communication strategy must reflect the mandate of the Convention. He said a "carefully crafted political balance" in the Convention must be respected, and cautioned that this is "not the land convention" but the Convention to Combat Desertification. He requested that the communication strategy be revised to conform to the UNCCD mandate. SYRIA lamented the minimal media coverage of UNCCD, and of this COP in particular.

The COW Chair appealed to parties not to lose two more years in taking a "decisive and categorical" decision on the JIU recommendations and scenarios. He highlighted the cost of the JIU report and said reservations by parties on the legal and financial implications of a merger between the GM and Secretariat were small compared to the reputational risk of failing to adopt a decision at this COP. SYRIA requested to see the UN report on the legal implications of a possible merger. The Chair further urged parties to come to a decision at this COP,

noting that “this Convention is becoming less and less visible.” He stressed the importance of conveying a clear message to the climate change meeting in Copenhagen in December.

PANAMA, ALGERIA, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC and SENEGAL said they need adequate time to think about the JIU recommendations related to the GM, and therefore suggested taking a decision at COP 10. UGANDA, supported by NIGER, urged the delegates to take a decision on the issue at this COP, saying that the parties should not wait for another two years to implement the Strategy. IRAN said what is most important is to align the work programmes of the two entities to ensure their coordination.

The Chair said the communication strategy would be sent to the regional groups for further consideration.

OTHER ITEMS: CST Vice-Chair Altamirano introduced a document on the costed draft 2-year work programme for the CST for 2010-2011 (ICCD/COP(9)/5/Add.3).

The COW then took note of a document on additional procedures or institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/COP(9)/7).

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Secretariat introduced and delegates took note of the report on the UNCCD fellowship programme (ICCD/COP(9)/CST/6), and a report on progress on the maintenance of the roster of independent experts (ICCD/COP(9)/8).

The Secretariat then introduced a document on advice on how best to measure progress on strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the Strategy (ICCD/COP(9)/CST/4). Leonard Berry, Florida Center for Environmental Studies, presented a recommended set of indicators. MALI, supported by NEPAL, said updating baseline data would require considerable resources. ARGENTINA, supported by NEPAL, CUBA, PANAMA and URUGUAY, said a methodology for defining affected areas is needed, with NEPAL and PANAMA suggesting reducing the number of indicators. The EU said a roadmap on the use of the indicators should be elaborated. MOROCCO, supported by SENEGAL, COSTA RICA, BURKINA FASO and URUGUAY, stressed the need for regional level indicators, as many of the global ones might not be relevant for all countries. SOUTH AFRICA cautioned on adopting too quickly methodologies that have not been thoroughly tested. The World Meteorological Organization informed the CST of a forthcoming workshop on early warning systems on drought. AUSTRALIA suggested that the COP request UNDP, UNEP, FAO and the UNFCCC Secretariat to assist countries in their work on indicators. SENEGAL suggested establishing a timeline for measuring accomplishments. The PHILIPPINES underlined the need for capacity building. COSTA RICA, supported by CUBA and GUATEMALA, said protocols on indicators should be developed and more funding should be made available. IRAN said it is difficult to measure socioeconomic indicators, and to include land use for agricultural crops. INDIA said a minimum set of global indicators must be agreed upon and expressed concern about using 2008 as baseline year. MEXICO said indicators on biodiversity and SLM are relevant for the region. THAILAND suggested starting with the lowest possible number of indicators, to be increased later on. SWITZERLAND recommended adopting the proposed indicators, which can be refined and adapted regionally. ITALY said regional indicators could foster regional cooperation. CENSTA stressed the need to involve local communities. CHILE said consensus would be needed on protocols, indicators, and methodology before the reporting in 2012. The issue was deferred to the CST contact group.

The Secretariat introduced the “Report of the UNCCD first Scientific Conference: Note by the Secretariat” (ICCD/COP(9)/CST/INF.2). The EU said the first Scientific Conference has provided lessons regarding the selection of the consortium and its work with the Secretariat. He said the next scientific conference should take place in 2012 and focus on an economic assessment of desertification, and a CST special session in 2010 should follow-up on the conference and discuss implementation of indicators. BURKINA FASO and ARGENTINA emphasized attention to regional equity in the preparations for a second scientific conference. BRAZIL cited the decision from CST SS-1 calling for geographical balance in the selection of participants, and said the decision to produce a note by the Secretariat entails that the recommendations will not have political ownership. CUBA said recommendations from the Scientific Conference were not directly related to the CST’s agenda because there was not a clear mandate regarding the Conference’s expected outcome. CHILE highlighted the IPCC as an example for scientific input. BOLIVIA said the scientific conclusions should produce solutions with practical applications.

In the afternoon, CST delegates adopted decisions on: Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) (L.30/COP.9); the UNCCD Fellowship programme (L.31/COP.9); Roster of independent experts (L.32/COP.9); Reshaping the operation of the CST in line with the Strategy (2008-2018) (L.27/COP.9) and Date, venue and programme of work of the second special session of the CST (L. 28/COP.9).

CONTACT GROUP – JIU ASSESSMENT OF THE GM

Contact group participants received two documents: a draft decision proposed by Chair Mbengashe on the JIU report on the GM; and a non-paper to the COW containing a legal opinion on the JIU’s recommendation to the COP on the institutional merging of the GM and Secretariat. The Secretariat’s legal advisor clarified that the non-paper was prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the UN Office of Legal Affairs (UNOLA) in response to a request by the COW. She noted that a separate legal opinion requested directly from UNOLA was not yet available.

Participants questioned the legality of a legal opinion contained in a non-paper. Some participants stressed that the document must be translated. The legal advisor said the GM could be merged with the Secretariat without amending the Convention, as long as the unification results in neither body losing its separate and distinct legal identity or its existence. Participants further questioned whether the Secretariat could legally house the GM and whether it had the capacity to do so.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the first week of COP 9 came to a close, participants commented on the need to accelerate the pace of negotiations. The CST contact group delivered the meeting’s first five draft decisions, with some participants highlighting that constructive talks in the CST contact group had absorbed initial lessons from the first Scientific Conference. Yet, participants in the CRIC and JIU contact groups were reportedly unable to get past their different perspectives on what the mandate of the Convention is and where the GM fits. While anticipating the arrival of their ministers for Monday’s high-level segment, participants also wondered what impact the arrival of some key negotiators involved with the framing of the Convention might have on the second week of talks.