



UNCCD COP 12 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2015

UNCCD COP 12 participants convened in contact groups throughout the final day of the first week, with the CST contact group passing six draft decisions to CST 12. The CST adopted the decisions without comment, but following a lengthy discussion in Plenary, three decisions will require further consideration.

CST

CST 12 Chair Uriel Safriel opened the final session of CST 12 at 4:43 pm, and introduced the CST's six draft decisions, which were adopted without comment. The decisions were: Outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/L.1); Improving the efficiency of the CST (L.2); Improvement of knowledge dissemination, including traditional knowledge, best practices and success stories (L.3); Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (L.4); Roster of independent experts (L.5); and Programme of work for CST 13 (L.6).

Matthias Magunda, Uganda, CST Rapporteur, said the CST 12 report consists of the six decisions adopted by the CST and would be transmitted to the COP. Delegates then elected the Vice-Chairs for CST 13: Foued Chehad, Algeria; Farah Ibrahim, Kuwait; Jorge Luis Garcia Rodriguez, Mexico; and Jean-Luc Chotte, France.

CST 12 Chair Safriel said this was the first session in the CST's history to test the SPI's efforts to interface scientific advice to the CST, which then developed decisions for the COP. IRAN said decision L.5 (roster of experts) should provide for financing to assist experts to participate in DLDD-related events. The EU expressed appreciation at the adoption of the three progress indicators and welcomed the adoption of an ambitious but focused SPI work programme, and said the development of policy-relevant formats will contribute to the effective implementation of the Convention. CSOs suggested referencing CSO networks in decision L.1 on the outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference. The CST Chair reminded speakers that the CST had already adopted the decisions, and declared CST 12 closed at 5:15 pm.

PLENARY

COP Vice President Sedat Kadioglu, Turkey, invited CST Chair Uriel Safriel to report on the CST's progress. Safriel invited the COP to adopt the CST's six decisions.

Kadioglu invited delegates to adopt the draft decision on outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference (L.1). Stating that the Scientific Conference had gone beyond the mandate provided by COP 11, BRAZIL, CUBA and others, called for the COP to "take note," rather than "endorse" the scientific findings, with the US proposing the term "welcome." Several delegations also favored referencing CSOs in a paragraph calling for the strengthening of national networks. BRAZIL opposed references to climate change mitigation and payments for ecosystem services in paragraphs referring, respectively, to the types of policy advice to be provided by the SPI, and policies to be developed by parties. Due to a lack of consensus on the new language proposed, the COP did not adopt this decision.

On improving the efficiency of the CST (L.2), BRAZIL sought clarification on the recommendation to "decouple" UNCCD scientific conferences from official CST meetings. Safriel informed delegates that the proposal emanated from an analysis of the three conferences. Expressing concern that the views of parties would not be reflected in scientific findings published in the UNCCD's name, BRAZIL, with CHINA, proposed calling for the COP to consider the outcomes of scientific conferences prior to their publication. Others, including the US, EU and SWITZERLAND, expressed concern that this might affect the academic freedom of scientists linked to the SPI, and proposed that the COP Bureau undertake such reviews. Plenary delegates adopted the draft decision as orally revised.

On Improvement of knowledge dissemination, including traditional knowledge, best practices and success stories (L.3), CHINA, opposed by the EU and the US, suggested deleting "and other Parties in a position to do so" in the paragraph inviting developed parties to provide financial resources. Action on this item was postponed to allow for further consultation.

On the Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (L.4), BRAZIL requested: adding "voluntary" before "LDN target" in references to its operationalization; replacing "managing land degradation" with "combating DLDD"; and, opposed by UKRAINE, deleting reference to "non-dryland areas" throughout the text. CUBA, with BRAZIL, requested adding cost figures to the objectives of the work programme. The EU requested maintaining reference to climate change mitigation and adaptation in accordance with the Strategy 2008-2018. Action on this decision was postponed.

On the roster of experts (L.5), BRAZIL suggested text to restrict scientists on international panels from speaking on behalf of the UNCCD. He also called for better regional balance in the



roster. SWITZERLAND highlighted that parties nominate their experts, which ensures regional balance. The US said there is no “selection” process, and suggested that the proposed new text could imply an alternative system for generating the roster. The Secretariat clarified that Article 24 of the Convention defines the roster of experts as being formed by a nomination process, and any selection to participate in assessments is done by organizations or systems outside the control of the Convention. With an amendment stating that scientists would speak in their own name on international panels, the decision was adopted.

On the programme of work for the 13th session of the CST (L.6), BRAZIL asked for clarification on the review function by CST on the work of the SPI. The decision was adopted without amendment.

COP Vice President Kadioglu closed the session at 8:00 pm, stating that L.1, L.3 and L.4 are to be revised.

CONTACT GROUPS

Programme and Budget Contact Group: Facilitated by A.K. Mehta, India, this group met on Friday afternoon. Among other issues, delegates requested clarification on the projected liabilities to the Convention caused by Canada’s withdrawal, the use of the Secretariat’s impress account, and the coordination of implementation activities.

Participants discussed a document detailing the costs of hosting a CRIC. Some requested a downward revision of the incremental costs to encourage more countries to consider hosting the CRIC.

On the reclassification of posts, delegates were informed that all GM staff positions go through rigorous checks under the UN system for the Classification of Posts, to ensure that the job descriptions are assessed at correct grade levels.

On the draft decision on the multi-year work plans for the Convention and its subsidiary bodies, in a section on the UNCCD results framework for 2016-2019 contained in the annex of the document, delegates debated calling for “improved knowledge of reducing social tension related to land degradation” as a main outcome. Some delegations interpreted the phrase as a livelihood issue, and others stressed that it is outside the scope of the Convention and called for its deletion. Others suggested quoting the Convention’s strategic objective on improving the living conditions of affected populations to avoid a “reinterpretation” of the Strategy. They agreed to reference “improved knowledge of reducing socio-economic and environmental vulnerability related to DLDD.” On the generation of global benefits, they agreed that SLM and combating DLDD contribute to, *inter alia*, the implementation of the SDGs. Under the outcome indicators, participants engaged in a drafting exercise to, *inter alia*, agree on language requesting an expansion of the scope of finances for DLDD.

The contact group will resume discussions on Monday, 19 October, to finalize consideration of the multi-year work plans, and address the programme and budget.

COW Contact Group on Matters Other than Programme and Budget: This group, co-facilitated by Karma Dema Dorji, Bhutan and Luca Marmo, EU, met on Friday to continue discussions on issues related to LDN, the MoU with the GEF and the request by Annex V countries regarding the mandate and scope of the Convention.

CST Contact Group: Facilitated by Matthias Magunda, Uganda, this contact group met throughout the morning to conclude negotiations on its remaining draft decision. Following initial concerns by participants that the draft text did not give clear instruction to the SPI, the work programme of the SPI

(L.4) was revised to, *inter alia*: expand the Secretariat’s role in facilitating and supporting the SPI; engage further with IPBES, IPCC and the Global Land Outlook; and broaden the review of resilience-based assessment frameworks beyond the initially proposed Resilience, Adaptation Pathways and Transformation Assessment (RAPTA) framework. The draft decision on the roster of independent experts was forwarded to the CST with minor textual clarifications. A decision on the programme of work for CST 13 calls for further review of the work of the SPI and for consideration of the policy implications of SPI outputs.

CRIC Contact Group: On Friday morning, Chair Mwendandu invited the contact group to resume their discussions on assessment of financial flows for the implementation of the Convention, following initial consideration of the draft text on Thursday evening. Delegates addressed operative paragraphs relating to: adequacy, timeliness and predictability of financial resources; submission of project proposals on DLDD to various multilateral funding agencies; and access to technology. On funding sources, there were mixed views on whether to include specific references to the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund. Those in favor of retaining this language noted it makes UNCCD parties aware of new opportunities to access funding for DLDD programmes. The group did not reach agreement on whether to refer explicitly to developed country obligations to provide financial support for NAP implementation, including technology transfer, and south-south cooperation initiatives. The contact group is scheduled to finalize consideration of the text on Saturday morning, and to consider remaining draft decisions on: collaboration with the GEF; improving communication and reporting procedures; formulation, revision and implementation of action programmes in view of the post-2015 development agenda; assessment of the implementation of the Convention against the operational objectives of The Strategy; and additional procedures or institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention.

Joint CST/CRIC Contact Group: This group, facilitated by CRIC Chair Richard Mwendandu, Kenya, deliberated a draft decision on improving communication procedures and reports to the COP, with parties raising a number of issues on the availability of national data and parties’ capabilities to develop the three progress indicators: trends in land cover, trends in land productivity or functioning of the land, and trends in carbon stocks above and below ground. Delegates also discussed the appropriateness of asking the Secretariat to lead on harmonized indicator efforts across the Rio Conventions, with some considering the SPI to be more appropriate to carry out this task. Further discussions on this decision were postponed until Saturday morning.

IN THE CORRIDORS

On the last day of the first week of COP 12, delegates actively worked in contact groups in an attempt to complete the CST and CRIC decisions. Justifying the reopening of CST-agreed language during the evening COP plenary, which was supposed to adopt the CST decisions, several delegates expressed concern about convening multiple parallel negotiations, saying it had stretched small delegations to the limit. Some observers speculated that splits in established regional groupings had forced countries to “go it alone” in defending their positions. With some contact group meetings scheduled for the weekend, and uncertainty about how to finalize the CST text as many scientific experts were due to leave Ankara, several delegates were heard speculating about the need to rethink the organization of COPs.