

UNCCD COP 13 HIGHLIGHTS: SATURDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2017

In the morning, UNCCD COP 13 participants convened in plenary for a dialogue with civil society organizations (CSOs), focused on the theme, “Land and Climate,” and in the afternoon the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) met in plenary and forwarded six decisions to the COP. Contact groups met throughout the day to discuss draft decisions related to the COP, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and CST agendas.

COP

ELECTION OF OFFICERS OTHER THAN THE PRESIDENT: Election of Vice-Presidents: Delegates elected the following candidates as Vice-Presidents of COP 13: Andrey Kuzmichof (Belarus) and Valeriu Cazac (Moldova) for Central and Eastern European States, and Barbara De Rosa- Joynt (US) for Western European and Other States.

CSO OPEN DIALOGUE SESSION: Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, opened the dialogue by recalling the inclusion of civil society into UNCCD discussions since 1997, calling it a “wise decision.” She commented that CSOs are the main actors responsible for implementation of the Convention, since they work closely with local stakeholders and can bridge the flow of knowledge between government and local communities.

Moderator Liu Fangfei, UNCCD Drylands Ambassador, China, introduced the Green Handkerchief Campaign, designed to combat climate change by encouraging the replacement of disposable with reusable handkerchiefs.

In a keynote address, Bariş Karapinar, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), stated that emissions from the agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors is one of the largest contributors to climate change. Noting that land serves as a significant carbon sink, he urged for its protection, and highlighted the synergies between adaptation and mitigation in sustainable land management (SLM). In closing, he acknowledged the efforts of CSOs on the ground towards climate change mitigation and adaption.

Diallo Ahmed Sékou, Association de Formation et d’Appui au Développement, Mali, for the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized that it is possible to address the environmental and economic challenges Africa is facing. He outlined a project on environmental governance in Mali that achieved good results through activities such as: public and local government awareness raising; training at the grassroots level; environmental grassroots monitoring groups; and land tenure commissions that help prevent disputes and conflicts.

Vũ Thi Bích Hòp, Center for Sustainable Rural Development, Viet Nam, representing the ASIA GROUP, showed photos of the recent flash floods in India and Viet Nam, and emphasized

climate change impacts and land degradation faced by most Asian countries. Presenting on an organic pilot project in rural Viet Nam by using sustainable practices to raise pigs, she recommended the UNCCD includes some NGO best practices into its Strategic Framework and include CSOs in land degradation neutrality (LDN) funding.

Juan Riet, Uruguay, representing GRULAC, highlighted an initiative taking place in the semi-arid area of Brazil to improve the capacity of local populations, with a focus on water provision. He said activities, such as establishing family networks to collect water, and awareness raising, have resulted in an increase in water availability, improved soil fertility, and zero-net deforestation, and called for the increased involvement of local communities in establishing national policies.

Sophiko Akhobadze, Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus, Georgia, representing the EASTERN EUROPE GROUP, discussed a project that applied SLM to mitigate land degradation in rural areas and prevent poverty in Georgia, partly funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). She said the project has downscaled LDN target setting to eight inclusive local groups and has increased women-led farms from zero to 42. She noted the crucial role of CSOs in SLM, and stressed that access to land ownership by poor people is vital for achieving the SDGs.

Robert Tansey, Nature Conservancy, representing WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHER GROUP, highlighted climate change as one of the most urgent challenges of this century, which threatens to undo decades of conservation work, both in developing or developed countries. He underscored the potential of nature-based solutions to mitigate the challenges of land, fresh water, cities and oceans, and cited CSOs as essential partners in achieving this.

Andrew Lesa, New Zealand, representing YOUTH, voiced his views that not only young academics, but young farmers, young indigenous, and young marginalized people, including the disabled and unemployed, should be included in the “green revolution.” He called for additional support from the business and government sectors to youth, to focus on “ruralization,” rather than urbanization, as a solution to climate change impacts.

In interventions from the floor, INDIA urged for a green wall of trees in his region and the investment of funds to restore degraded lands. BOLIVIA suggested that governments support, including financially, the work of CSOs and NGOs in combating desertification and climate change. SENEGAL highlighted the positive contributions of CSOs to SLM, called for national mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of SLM, and reminded the COP that the Strategic Framework did not explicitly refer to CSOs.

CHAD said it is high time for the UNCCD to reference land tenure rights and formally recognize the role of traditional knowledge. IRAQ asked for an explanation of mechanisms and work plans to engage local communities in achieving LDN.

URUGUAY said CSOs are the most important stakeholders in achieving the objectives of the government especially related to agriculture and the environment. CHINA said women have historically, and are currently, working hard to combat desertification.

NEPAL challenged panelists to provide solutions for structural transformation, not just “information or figures.” CABO VERDE asked about the role of science in enhancing CSOs’ effectiveness. NAMIBIA said the government views CSOs as reliable partners, noting that joint action is critical in making policies come to life. VENEZUELA discussed the country’s process to build a participative democracy. SOUTH AFRICA highlighted the role of youth and women and the crucial contribution of CSOs to knowledge generation and exchange.

PERU reported that the country has set up a commission to involve civil society in combating land degradation and climate change, and that domestic public funds are increasingly directed to environmental matters. CUBA noted the importance of integrating social traditional experiences by smallholders into key national processes to fight desertification and drought. REPUBLIC OF KOREA introduced the joint effort by Korean, Chinese and Japanese CSOs and NGOs in successfully combating the expansion of the eastern Kubuqi desert and looked forward to upscaling these efforts to western China through the One Belt One Road Project. MOROCCO called for greater international cooperation on mitigating climate change impacts, especially in southeastern regions of the country. NIGER called for international organizations to offer more financial help to enhance CSO involvement into the government’s scheme to combat land degradation.

LIBERIA emphasized that CSOs are fundamental to engaging land users at all levels. UN ORGANIZATIONS AND ITS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES stated that the GEF Small Grants Programme has supported CSOs in undertaking SLM, including to improve agro-ecosystems and reduce pressure on land resources. THE STATE OF PALESTINE stressed the need to work together with CSOs to achieve the SDGs and combat desertification.

Karapinar concluded the session by drawing attention to a draft proposal to integrate CSOs into the Strategic Framework for consideration by the COP, and urged that the issue of land rights, a precondition to LDN, not be forgotten.

CST

In the afternoon, CST 13 Chair Hamid Čustovič opened the final session of CST 13, and introduced the CST’s six draft decisions. The decisions were: follow-up on the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) for 2016-2017 (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/L.1); cooperation with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/L.2); improving the efficiency of the SPI (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/L.3); work programme of the SPI for the biennium 2018-2019 (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/L.4); promoting the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub (UNCCD/COP(13)/CST/L.5); and the programme of work for CST 14 (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/L.6).

The CST adopted the draft decisions with minor editorial adjustments. MOROCCO recommended a closer collaboration on the exchange of documents between the SPI and CST, prior to publication. BRAZIL commented that it is important to reflect on the role of CST for the next COP.

ADOPTION OF THE CST REPORT: Rapporteur Jean-Luc Chotte said the LDN conceptual framework will provide a practical, solid, scientific guide to monitoring LDN, to achieve sustainable solutions to desertification, land degradation and drought. CST adopted the report without comment.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Election of officers other than the CST Chair: Delegates elected as Vice-Chairs for CST 14 Carl Fiati (Ghana), María Angélica Fernández (Colombia), German Kust (Russian Federation), and Ahmet Senyaz (Turkey).

In his closing remarks, Čustovič stated that with the LDN conceptual framework, the SPI has provided both solid scientific advice and a practical tool for decision makers, and expressed new optimism at the ability of the Convention to reach visible results on the ground. He closed the meeting at 4:13 pm.

CONTACT GROUPS

COW CONTACT GROUP ON OTHER MATTERS:

Delegates met to continue negotiations on the draft decision on the integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the UNCCD. Discussions revolved around: adding references to the voluntary nature of the LDN targets; specificity of references related to indicators for monitoring and evaluation of achievement of the LDN targets; and inviting facilitation and upscaling of finance for the achievement of LDN.

COW CONTACT GROUP ON BUDGET: Delegates met to continue discussions on the budget.

CRIC CONTACT GROUP: The contact group met throughout the day and in the evening. In the morning, delegates reached agreement on the draft decision on the development and implementation of strategies through NAPs in light of the 2030 Agenda. The group then completed a first reading of the draft decision on resource mobilization, with some parties questioning the mandate of the group to propose language touching on political and financial commitments, and suggesting to forward the relevant paragraphs to the COW.

In the evening, the Secretariat introduced the draft decision text on collaboration with the GEF, which, *inter alia*, takes note of the report of the GEF to COP 13 and invites the GEF to continue its support to the UNCCD under GEF-7, as well as to continue considering technical and financial support for voluntary national LDN target setting in the context of GEF-7 enabling activities. The group also began consideration of the final substantive decision text on reporting.

CST CONTACT GROUP: In the morning, the group concluded discussions on draft decisions on: the work programme of the SPI for 2018-2019; promoting the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub; and programme of work for CST 14.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the first week marched to a close, delegates looked forward to a day of respite on Sunday, when they could tag along to a cultural field trip to the Kubuqi desert that promises real-life experience with combating desertification and implementing land restoration, coupled with the unfailingly meticulous Chinese organizational skills. Some optimistic souls were hoping that the desire to take advantage of this opportunity could take their minds off the tragedies happening in other parts of the world. To be sure, the final day of the first week was haunted by the natural disasters that directly and indirectly touched many of the participants. As the committees and contact groups convened, speeches included condolences to the victims of the earthquake in Mexico and hurricane Irma in the Caribbean and US, perhaps adding a renewed sense of urgency to the topic at hand. One particularly hopeful delegate sighed “I just hope these events will serve as a reminder and foster a collaborative team spirit as we trek towards final decisions next week.”