

UNCCD COP 14 Highlights: Wednesday, 4 September 2019

Discussions continued in the CRIC and CST, as well as in their corresponding contact groups throughout the day. The Friends of the Chair Group on the New Delhi Declaration also met to consider the COP 14 outcome document.

On the margins of the Conference, more than 15 side events took place exploring, among other issues: natural capital accounting in support of land degradation neutrality (LDN); contribution of global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the LDN 2030 target; “pathways for big money to reach local communities”; the land degradation, climate change and migration nexus in the Sahel region; and sustainable land management practices by Indian businesses.

CRIC

Effective Implementation of the Convention at National, Subregional and Regional Levels: Review of the report of the CRIC on its 17th session: CRIC Rapporteur Anna Luise introduced the CRIC 17 report (ICCD/CRIC(17)/9) and highlighted parties’ recommendations on, among other issues, capacity building, monitoring LDN, and the gender action plan. In response, eSWATINI called for concrete ideas and an implementation plan for the CRIC 17 outcomes as the key objective of CRIC 18. SAUDI ARABIA echoed the importance of capacity building for the development of national data sets.

Securing of Additional Investments and Relations with Financial Mechanisms: Report by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on the financing of programmes and projects concerning desertification/land degradation and drought:

The UNCCD Secretariat introduced the document (ICCD/CRIC(18)/5). Chizuru Aoki, GEF, highlighted an increase of 10% in the Land Degradation Focal Area (LDFA) national allocation for GEF-7 compared to GEF-6, noting a total of 75 projects and programmes were approved for funding under this and related funding windows of the GEF Trust Fund during the reporting period.

In the ensuing discussion, many countries expressed their overall appreciation for the GEF support, but noted funding remained inadequate.

LEBANON sought clarification on how the increased allocation can support implementation of the UNCCD Strategic Framework, including the strategic objective on drought. SAUDI ARABIA stressed the need to enhance support for capacity building, particularly on national reporting and data collection. The EU noted the importance of maximizing resources through synergies with the LDN Fund and other financial mechanisms, as well as approaching new donors.

In response, Aoki said that considering the many priorities, GEF resources need to serve more areas, beyond the land agenda. She encouraged innovative, flexible and integrated measures to maximize the effectiveness of the available funding.

Update on the Global Support Programme in support of UNCCD reporting: Global Mechanism (GM) Managing Director Juan Carlos Mendoza introduced the report (ICCD/CRIC(18)/6).

SWITZERLAND proposed differentiating between the reporting obligations of affected and non-affected parties. INDIA called for improving coordination and synergies and for better datasets for reporting on land degradation.

Report by the Global Mechanism on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention: Mendoza introduced the report (ICCD/CRIC(18)/7).

ARGENTINA noted that the Convention’s focus on dry and arid lands does not always align with private sector interests. eSWATINI called for making the business case for land degradation to attract private sector investment. SWITZERLAND observed that resource mobilization, the main task of the GM, was not fully considered in the report. She further pointed out that demand-driven and export-focused value chains are not the only approach for mobilizing resources, and recommended exploring investments in value chains for food systems, as well as connecting rural and urban areas.

eSWATINI, with the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC and ANGOLA, underscored the need to mobilize resources to ensure they reach the people most in need through transformative projects and programmes.

COLOMBIA, supported by the US, emphasized the need for resource mobilization to focus on implementing the Convention and improving existing processes.

CSOs highlighted the need for appropriate financial mechanisms to support people and communities in sustainable land management practices and proposed mobilizing the GEF Small Grants Programmes to enable communities to restore land.

In response, Mendoza explained that the GM aims to maximize the level of support on all aspects of LDN, guided by recent COP decisions. He noted that resource mobilization cannot take place in a vacuum, adding that something of value has to be brought to the table in the form of a mandate from parties, as well as technical work, such as target setting to enhance credibility.

Improving the Procedures for Communication of Information as well as the Quality and Formats of Reports to be Submitted to the COP: Outcomes of the work of the CST on a monitoring framework for the strategic objective on drought:

In the afternoon, UNCCD Lead Scientist Barron Orr introduced the document (ICCD/COP(14)/CST/7-ICCD/CRIC(18)/4). He explained how the Global Multi-Hazard Alert System (GMAS) framework developed by the WMO can serve as basis for harmonizing national drought mapping and reporting across

countries, and elaborated on how the proposed tiered approach might help link the work of the Secretariat and the WMO to provide default data to parties.

In the ensuing discussion, UKRAINE stressed the relevance of the proposed framework in unifying the work of diverse organizations involved in drought monitoring. The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC underscored the link between drought and LDN, and called for institutional collaboration to integrate meteorological, and hydrological data into the monitoring framework.

INDIA called for the development of a holistic measure to link early warning and monitoring systems. ARGENTINA stressed the importance of global data and indicators applicable at the national level.

SAUDI ARABIA, IRAQ, EGYPT, SYRIA and PALESTINE highlighted that the Arab region is the area most affected by drought, with a huge economic and social impact.

In response, Orr noted the close relationship between indicators for drought, land degradation, and biological loss, and underlined that achieving LDN requires consideration of each land type.

Development and Promotion of Activities for Targeted Capacity Building to Foster Implementation of the Convention:

The UNCCD Secretariat introduced the report (ICCD/CRIC(18)/8). INDIA noted that targeted LDN interventions will require sustainable capacity building.

CAMBODIA emphasized the important role of local communities in implementation and the need for easy-to-use materials, including video.

Welcoming ongoing capacity building efforts and resources, GRENADA highlighted challenges facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in moving from theory to practical action, calling for resources to be more focused and strategic.

KENYA recommended targeted capacity building for national reporting and measurement indicators.

GUYANA called for focusing capacity building on women, youth and local authorities. He lauded the UNCCD internship programme but highlighted the need for equitable participation, especially for countries experiencing acute capacity constraints, such as SIDS.

CST

Interfacing Science and Policy, and Sharing Knowledge: Monitoring framework for the strategic objective on drought:

Chair Carl Fiati introduced the documents (ICCD/COP(14)/CST/7 and ICCD/CRIC(18)/4). Barron Orr, UNCCD Lead Scientist, elaborated on the GMAS framework. He presented a flexible tiered approach to address initial drought vulnerability analyses with less variables, while acknowledging that it might be too cumbersome for countries to report on.

CHINA outlined the country's drought forecasting and early-warning operating system with "rolling" observations and real-time updating capabilities. GUINEA-BISSAU called for regional cooperation on fighting drought and protecting forests. ALGERIA and MOROCCO stressed the value of including the traditional knowledge of local populations, with the latter warning that "unless we adapt, we will have to move."

Several delegates discussed interlinked ecosystem issues, with BOLIVIA stressing water depletion and scarcity, and SRI LANKA discussing the status of soil fertility, soil erosion and agricultural productivity. Highlighting socio-economic aspects, Egypt, for the ARAB GROUP, called for a clear definition of drought.

In response, the WMO explained that data is obtained at country level. Orr, and SPI member Mark Svoboda, emphasized that no single indicator can represent each country optimally, but explained that countries are not limited to the proposed indicators, and are encouraged to adapt data collection methods to local contexts.

Items Resulting from the Work Programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the Biennium 2018–2019: Guidance to support the adoption and implementation of land-based interventions for drought management and mitigation, under objective 2: The Secretariat introduced this item (ICCD/COP(14)/CST/3) and Mark Svoboda presented the process and assessment approach used by the SPI to produce the technical report.

Several parties cautioned against introducing drought-smart land management (D-SLM) as a new concept. SOUTH AFRICA raised concerns over the classification of land-use types in the report, noting the omission of savanna landscapes. He also objected to combining forests and woodlands and questioned the scientific basis for recommendations on afforestation or reforestation of arid areas.

Niger, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for: greater clarity on water management; sharing information on drought-resistant plant varieties; and including references to "youth" and "persons with disabilities" in the context of strengthening local capacities.

ARGENTINA proposed focusing on drought mitigation, for example through initiatives to enhance the health of soils. Stressing that frequency and severity of droughts cannot be addressed at local and national levels alone, SWITZERLAND recommended mentioning the latest IPCC findings and proposed that COP 14 issues a call to parties to take action on climate change. CHINA requested more knowledge sharing on the links between climate change and drought, including possible temperature increase scenarios.

MOROCCO and SUDAN urged consideration of traditional land management practices, and JAPAN called for a common understanding of drought risk and management based on restoration case studies. INDIA highlighted participatory water management initiatives that could boost LDN. COLOMBIA called for integrating soil and drought monitoring.

In the afternoon, lead author Alisher Mirzabaev explained the categorization of land-use types, noting it was a continuation of the format used in previous SPI reports and is consistent with the categories adopted by the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT). On the use of the D-SLM term, he said the aim is not to introduce new terminology but to link drought and land management.

COP Plenary

Election of Officers other than the President: In the afternoon, the COP briefly resumed to finalize the election of the remaining COP officers. Delegates confirmed the election of Barbara De Rosa-Joynt (US) as Vice-President for the Western European and Others Group, and Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, Minister of Environment of Costa Rica, as COP 14 Rapporteur.

In the Corridors

The role of the GM as the "operational arm" of the UNCCD came under scrutiny in the CRIC Wednesday, with several delegations observing that while its fundraising efforts are appreciated, it should not get "too creative" in designing land restoration projects. One observer compared this to the tricky balancing act required of the Secretariat, which has to be proactive, but also responsive to the priorities of parties. Upcoming negotiations on land tenure and drought are likely to present a reality check – if not a sharp brake – to those calling for greater ambition in the UNCCD's 2030 targets. But many also sounded a note of optimism, with one insider noting the timing of UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed's participation at next week's High-Level Segment – a few days before the start of the UN Climate Summit – signifies the UNCCD "is finally providing the answers" on how to accelerate climate action.