

UNCCD COP 14 Highlights: Thursday, 12 September 2019

Discussions in the morning took place in the two Committee of the Whole (COW) contact groups on budget, and other matters.

In the afternoon, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation (CRIC) convened its closing plenary, where delegates approved the report of CRIC 18 and all seven draft decisions finalized by the Committee. The COW also adopted a first set of finalized decisions, including on modalities for the mid-term evaluation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, and follow up of UNCCD thematic issues, relating to migration, sand and dust storms, and gender. Representatives of youth, civil society and business groups provided a summary of their reports prior to adoption.

In the evening the Conference of the Parties (COP) plenary adopted the CRIC decisions and the report of CRIC 18. Thereafter, the budget contact group finalized its remaining three decisions, while the contact group on other matters made progress on remaining texts.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

Adoption of CRIC decisions: In the afternoon, CRIC Chair Samuel Contreras, Philippines, presented, and parties adopted without comment, the following seven draft decisions:

- Assessment of the implementation of the Convention against the strategic objectives of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.4);
- Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.2);
- Collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.1);
- Assessment of financial flows for the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.6);
- Enhancing the implementation of the UNCCD in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the enhancement, strengthening and promotion of capacity building (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.3);
- Date and venue of CRIC 19 (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.5); and
- Programme of work for CRIC 19 (ICCD/CRIC(18)/L.7).

Organizational Matters: Election of officers other than the chair of the CRIC: The CRIC approved the election of four CRIC vice-chairs for its nineteenth and twentieth sessions: Nino Chikovani (Georgia), Hussein Nasrallah (Lebanon), Saliha Fortas (Algeria) and Ahmet Şenyaz (Turkey).

Lauding CRIC 18 as truly successful, Chair Contreras reflected that a friendly exchange of opinions among parties allowed for the ultimate success despite divergent views on certain issues.

Chair Contreras then gavelled the CRIC to a close at 3:35 pm.

Committee of the Whole

Adoption of CRIC decisions: During the afternoon plenary, the COW adopted, without comment, draft decisions relating to:

- Terms of Reference for a midterm evaluation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework (ICCD/COP(14)/L.13);
- Policy frameworks and thematic issues: gender (ICCD/COP(14)/L.4);
- The positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification/land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that cause migration (ICCD/COP(14)/L.6); and
- Policy frameworks and thematic issues: sand and dust storms (ICCD/COP(14)/L.2).

On procedural matters, the COW heard statements from youth, civil society and business groups. THE GLOBAL YOUTH CAUCUS ON DESERTIFICATION AND LAND called for a more open COP process allowing youth to participate more meaningfully and at all levels in matters related to decision making, implementation and monitoring. Youth supported ending the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture, and adopting a legally binding instrument on drought.

The COW then adopted the decision containing the declaration of the youth forum (ICCD/COP(14)/L.1).

Centre d'Actions et de Réalisations Internationales (CARI), speaking for CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, recommended securing land access and improving direct access to finance to local communities, in particular youth and women, involved in land restoration. He explained how CSO projects can play a crucial role in preventing migration from rural areas, and stressed the need for more focus on transitioning to sustainable consumption and production patterns.

The COW then adopted the decision, including the declaration of CSOs (ICCD/COP(14)/L.3).

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, speaking on behalf of BUSINESS, called for improved harmonization among UN frameworks and called on governments to adopt a “new deal” for nature. He further called for providing enabling environments and developing clear policies and targets, including on: rewarding sustainable use of nature; enabling public and private sector dialogues; harnessing the role of market-based mechanisms including carbon markets; and strengthening local land tenure in particular for youth and women.

The COW then adopted the decision including the declaration from the Sustainable Land Management Business Forum (ICCD/COP(14)/L.8).

Adoption of the CRIC Report: In the afternoon, the COP briefly convened and approved the report of the CRIC without comment.

Contact Groups

COW Contact Group on Budget: Convening in the morning, the contact group reopened the draft decision on programme and budget for the biennium 2020-2021. Several paragraphs were still bracketed, and negotiations continued throughout the day. Discussions centered on the two budget scenarios set out in line with decision 1/COP.11 on workplans and programmes based on projected needs for the biennium, including a zero-nominal growth scenario, and a scenario based on further adjustments to the first scenario and added costs or savings related to them.

Other discussions focused on whether unspent funds remaining from the previous biennium in the Trust Fund may be used towards implementing the drought initiative, and whether text on mobilizing additional contributions of financial and non-financial resources to the initiative should be included in the decision. The declaration of donations from private donors and tracking of voluntary contributions payments also received some attention.

COW Contact Group on Other Matters: The group resumed consideration of outstanding texts in the morning, addressing among other topics: policy frameworks on drought and land tenure; integration of SDG 15 (life on land) and related target 15.3 in the UNCCD; partnerships with other relevant conventions; and the UNCCD communication plan.

On drought, the contact group made progress on some paragraphs recognizing the role of various collaborative initiatives in support of drought preparedness and other priorities of affected countries, but remained divided over calls by some parties to establish an intergovernmental working group to make proposals on effective measures and arrangements for addressing drought under the UNCCD.

On land tenure, delegates negotiated contested references to, *inter alia*, sovereignty and the principle of free, prior, and informed consent. With little progress made, Chair Torrington invited delegations to hold informal consultations to try and reach consensus. In the evening, after accepting compromise language proposed during consultations by concerned parties, the land tenure text was also agreed. The group also finalized texts on communications, partnerships, and programme of work.

In the Corridors

In the home stretch of the COP, contact groups struggled to maintain momentum and reach agreement on remaining decisions. Discussions proved difficult, with one contingent accusing others of “cherry picking” issues to make them more visible, while other delegates emphasized the importance of these issues to the UNCCD process and final decisions. One delegate—impressed by the energy spent arguing non-binding decisions instead of achieving consensus on how to implement the Convention effectively—joked, “it looks like this cow is being slaughtered rather than milked.”

Another delegate expressed their wish to have “meatier” decisions. The effects of “trying to get more from the cow than it can give” are stretching meetings into long nights and early mornings, eroding delegates’ faculties. In one contact group, a negotiator was called by the wrong country without correction or apparent notice. A tired COW Chair made his concerns crystal clear in the afternoon plenary, saying, “I understand there are parties with strong views, but I would encourage delegates in contact groups to apply themselves, bearing in mind the time constraints.”

The day at least concluded on a hopeful note, with the CRIC decisions and report approved by the COP. Lack-lustre participation in plenary, echoing the rather empty halls and corridors of the venue, was hard to ignore, however, and left delegates with a sense of anticlimax despite the day’s achievements.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of COP14 will be available on Monday, 16 September 2019, online at: <https://enb.iisd.org/desert/cop14/>



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