

Summary of the Fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 9-20 May 2022

“We all play a role in the common fight against climate change and land degradation, recognizing that a healthy and safe environment is vital to the future of the Earth.” With these words Côte d’Ivoire Prime Minister Patrick Achi concluded the 15th Session of the Conference of Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Following two weeks of high-level discussions and negotiations, UNCCD COP 15 adopted 38 decisions to improve drought resilience, reduce land degradation, and invest in land restoration efforts, including agreement to:

- accelerate the restoration of one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030 through improved data collection, monitoring, and reporting;
- boost drought resilience by improving a new partnership model for large-scale integrated landscape investment programmes;
- improve national policies and early warning, monitoring, and assessment, in particular as related to sand and dust storms and drought;
- improve efforts around capacity building, sharing of knowledge and lessons, and coordination towards these efforts at the regional level;
- establish an Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought for 2022-2024 to support a shift from reactive to proactive drought management;
- improve women’s involvement in land management through ensuring secure land tenure and collecting gender-disaggregated data on the impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought;
- develop policies to reduce the impact and occurrence of sand and dust storms through early warning, risk assessment and reducing man-made causes;
- ensure greater synergies among the three Rio Conventions, including complementarities in the implementation of these treaties through nature-based solutions and target-setting at the national level; and
- strengthen the participation of civil society organizations and youth in the work and meetings of the UNCCD.

Following the initial two-day High-Level Segment, the UNCCD’s two subsidiary bodies, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), convened in parallel to the

COP. The CRIC developed eight decisions for COP consideration, including: improving the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and formats of reports; integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15) and specifically target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention, and the development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building to further the implementation of the Convention.

The CST developed six decisions for COP consideration, including scientific reports on the potential contribution of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management, and approaches for assessment and monitoring of resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems to drought, among other issues.

New commitments adopted during the COP include:

- the [Abidjan Call](#) issued by the Heads of State and Government attending the Summit;
- the [Abidjan Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality for Successful Land Restoration](#), which emerged from the Gender Caucus; and
- the [Land, Life and Legacy Declaration](#), including the Abidjan Legacy Programme, a five-year, USD 1.5 billion comprehensive

In this Issue

A Brief History of the UNCCD	2
UNCCD COP 15 Report	2
High-Level Segment	2
Opening of the Conference of the Parties	5
Committee of the Whole	6
Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention	12
Committee on Science and Technology	15
Open Dialogue with Civil Society Organizations	18
Closing Plenary	18
A Brief Analysis of COP 15	19
Upcoming Meetings	21
Glossary	22

and innovative approach to fight against deforestation through forest restoration, and aims to restore 20% of the Ivorian forest cover by the end of the decade.

Other initiatives launched during the COP include:

- the [Business for Land Initiative](#), to showcase commitments made by participating companies towards land degradation neutrality, both in supply chains and corporate social responsibility activities; and
- the [Sahel Sourcing Challenge](#) to enable communities growing the Great Green Wall to use technology to monitor progress, create jobs, and commercialize their produce.

COP 15 convened in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 9-20 May 2022. Nearly 7,000 participants attended the COP, including Heads of State and Government, ministers, delegates from the 197 parties to the UNCCD, as well as members of the private sector, civil society, women, youth leaders, and the media.

A Brief History of the UNCCD

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification is one of the three Rio Conventions—along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)—and was called for in Agenda 21, the programme of action adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit).

The intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, convened five times between May 1993 and June 1994. The UNCCD, and four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean were adopted on 17 June 1994. The Convention entered into force on 26 December 1996, and currently has 197 parties. A fifth regional implementation annex, for Central and Eastern Europe, entered into force in 2001.

Key Turning Points

The UNCCD COP convened for the first time in Rome, Italy, in 1997, in parallel with the first meeting of the CST. Delegates selected Bonn, Germany, as the location for the UNCCD's Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the organization to administer the Global Mechanism (GM). Established under Article 21 of the UNCCD, the GM assists countries in the mobilization of financial resources to implement the Convention and address desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD).

At **COP 5** in 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland, the UNCCD established the CRIC. COP 6, held in Havana, Cuba, in 2003, designated the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD.

Parties adopted the first ten-year UNCCD strategic plan in 2007 at **COP 8** in Madrid, Spain. Despite protracted negotiations, the session failed to adopt a decision on the budget, leading to the first-ever UNCCD extraordinary session in November 2007 in New York. At **COP 10**, which convened in 2011, in Changwon City, Republic of Korea, delegates agreed to restructure the UNCCD GM by transferring accountability and legal representation of the Mechanism from Rome-based IFAD to the UNCCD Secretariat in Bonn.

COP 11 took place in 2013 in Windhoek, Namibia. Discussions centered on the Convention's role in achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN) in the context of sustainable development, as agreed at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20). The session established a UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI), as well as an ad hoc working group to provide guidance on how to refine impact indicators for monitoring the Convention's implementation.

At **COP 12** in Ankara, Turkey, soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, discussions focused on how to align existing programmes to the aspiration for LDN, and other relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. Parties agreed to strive to achieve a single, unified objective, with a focus on how to establish and monitor national-level voluntary LDN targets.

Held in Ordos, China in 2017, **COP 13** adopted a new, SDG-aligned UNCCD Strategic Framework (2008-2018), as well as a set of thematic policy frameworks to guide programmes on gender, drought, sand and dust storms (SDS) and migration. The COP also launched the LDN Fund—co-managed by the UNCCD's GM and investment management firm Mirova—to spearhead large-scale land restoration projects. Other key outputs focused on entry points for linking the new UNCCD Strategic Framework (2018-2030) to the 2030 Agenda.

COP 14 took place in New Delhi, India in 2019. Substantive negotiations focused on proposed work programmes on new thematic areas agreed at COP 13. Due to a lack of consensus on how to implement the drought policy framework, delegates agreed, subject to the availability of resources, to establish an intergovernmental working group to explore effective policy and implementation measures. The COP also agreed to include land tenure as a new thematic area under the Convention. With the forthcoming launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), discussions at the High-Level Segment further explored how to build momentum towards a global movement on land restoration.

The **second extraordinary session of the COP (COP ES-2)** convened in December 2021 under the silence procedure to adopt an interim budget for the UNCCD in 2022. This followed the postponement of COP 15, originally scheduled to take place in 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With no written comments received within the 72-hour silence procedure stipulated by UNCCD rules, the budget was formally adopted following a communication from the COP President on Thursday, 9 December 2021. The interim programme and budget allowed the Convention and its Secretariat to continue operating in 2022.

UNCCD COP 15 Report

COP 15 opened on Monday, 9 May, at the Sofitel Hotel in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire with the opening ceremony for the two-day High-Level Segment.

High-Level Segment

Following a ceremonial greeting from the people of Côte d'Ivoire, Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary, provided welcoming remarks, lauding the hospitality of Côte d'Ivoire and its social and political achievements. He highlighted the economic risks from continued loss of fertile land and vulnerability of small

producers, women, and youth to environmental degradation, as well as their important role for solutions. Noting the health of the economy depends on healthy soils, he stressed that investment in land restoration is an ecological necessity that makes economic sense.

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, spokesperson for Indigenous Peoples, stressed that in the 30 years since UNCCD was conceived, temperatures, desertification, and land degradation in Africa have continued to rise. Acknowledging how Indigenous Peoples have used their traditional knowledge to combat these effects while nourishing and supporting the land and their communities, she called for a move from talk to actual support, saying “we cannot do this alone.”

Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, called for accelerated investment in solutions that already exist. Pointing to the escalating climate crisis, rising food prices, and the detrimental impact of fossil fuel use, she highlighted the need to transform food systems, the important role of women and girls in sustainable land management (SLM), the significance of initiatives such as the Great Green Wall for Africa, and the importance of empowering youth and Indigenous Peoples.

Patricia Kombo, Youth, reminded that countries are gathered in Abidjan because they believe in the importance of land as that is where they will find prosperity. Noting “now is the best moment,” since the world needs land restoration more than ever, she said, “We will never be forgiven by the next generations if we fail to reverse the current trend.”

Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, emphasized the crucial role of land restoration in fighting climate change, saying parties must build on momentum from the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and initiatives to restore degraded lands to develop effective drought policies to address water scarcity.

Following a song by Senegalese musician Baaba Maal, Côte d’Ivoire President Alassane Ouattara thanked the UNCCD and Ibrahim Thiaw for the work done under the Convention, stressing its importance for the African continent. Pointing out the negative impacts of climate change and DLDD for his country, Africa and the world, he highlighted how the war in Ukraine and the pandemic have fueled vulnerability to energy and food crises. He recalled the need for decisive climate action and for delivering on climate finance commitments. Calling for a “summit of hope,” he stressed the need for a broad mobilization of new partners and finance, saying that each dollar invested in land restoration can generate USD 7-30 in return.

Official Declarations by Heads of State, Heads of Government and Heads of Delegations: Discussions during this [segment](#) focused on: policy responses to safeguard human security from the multi-faceted consequences of drought and land degradation; private sector partnerships to restore degraded land; and mobilization of resources needed for a land restoration industry. In their declarations, high-level participants also:

- lamented unfulfilled pledges and promises to address land degradation and climate change;
- spoke of nomadic populations, whose animals were being decimated due to increasing recurrent droughts, and shared solutions like drip-feed irrigation;
- called for systemic approaches involving all stakeholders to develop integrated green technologies;

- called for scaling up early-warning systems, providing seeds and fertilizers to vulnerable communities, and championing land restoration as a pathway to achieve the SDGs;
- appealed for USD 19 billion in financial and technical pledges to enable the Great Green Wall members to fulfill their commitments; and
- shared programmes to create two million green jobs, strengthen land access and tenure rights, and enhance early-warning systems as part of the Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S) Initiative. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon lamented that global greenhouse gas emissions are rising even though “we all know we are recklessly heading for a cliff,” urging collaboration across sectors, generations and governments.

Presentation of the Abidjan Initiative and Adoption of the Abidjan Call: Prime Minister Achi presented the “Abidjan Initiative,” referring to the Abidjan Legacy Programme as an integrated response to restore degraded land and increase agricultural production in Côte d’Ivoire. He explained how the programme can be adapted and applied to all countries facing desertification. Aiming to mobilize USD 1.5 billion over five years, Achi described its four axes:

- fighting deforestation, restoring degraded forests, and promoting agroforestry;
- ensuring food security through sustainable intensification of food production;
- making existing value chains more sustainable without desertification; and
- identifying new value chains that are climate resilient.

High-level participants pledged support for the programme.

Final Outcome: In the [Abidjan Call](#), Heads of State and Government, while noting the threat posed by drought and LDN, and aware of the need to take appropriate measures to maintain healthy and productive land, reaffirm their continued commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially SDG 15.3 on achieving LDN by 2030. Countries are urged to place soil and land in the center of spatial planning policies that will establish healthy ecosystems and ensure global food security.

Heads of State and Government also commit to giving the highest priority to the issue of drought and desertification, and integrating efforts to combat climate change and desertification, and halting biodiversity loss in accordance with the Rio Conventions’ objectives.

The declaration also calls on countries to:

- assign a key role to land and nature-based solutions in promoting approaches that are highly efficient, cost-effective, and nature-friendly;
- address the issue of gender equality and the full participation of women and youth in the development and implementation of drought and land restoration policies;
- reassess and reinforce the sustainability and resilience of natural resources, and respond to the challenges and the need for sustainable commodity value chains; and
- align interventions, combine efforts and initiatives, and engage more forcefully in responding to the impacts of drought, invest in large scale land restoration, and provide sustained and multi-faceted support to developing countries towards achieving their voluntary LDN, which will contribute to the creation of jobs, wealth, and prosperity.

Gender Caucus: The Caucus, chaired by Dominique Ouattara, First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, opened on [Monday, 9 May](#). Calling COP 15 the most important conference in the history of the UNCCD, Executive Secretary Thiaw stressed gender equity as key to a balanced foundation for the UNCCD. Highlighting that sustainable development cannot be achieved if half of the population and the producers are left behind, he invited governments to join the Abidjan Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality for Successful Land Restoration and commit to improve the lives and rights of women and girls.

UN General Assembly President Shahid lamented that women and girls, while bearing the brunt of negative impacts from climate change and land degradation, are often not recognized as farmers or value chain actors and excluded from agricultural extension services and rights to land. He called on governments to walk the talk and put gender equality at the heart of all forthcoming discussions.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed highlighted three key steps towards gender equity: including women in all decision-making forums; designing gender-responsive sustainable development and land frameworks; and accelerating efforts to eliminate discrimination and violence, especially against rural women. Referencing the widening gender gap in food security as a sign of worsening conditions, she noted SLM is a key enabler for gender equality and prosperity.

Denise Nyakéru Tshisekedi, First Lady of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, emphasized that women account for half the labor force in Sub-Saharan Africa's agricultural value chain, yet hold only 18% of land titles. She called on all stakeholders to brainstorm and identify long-lasting solutions to address this injustice.

Ouattara, as Chair of the Gender Caucus, lamented that DLDD and climate change push women into an endless poverty cycle, yet expressed "real hope" that the Gender Caucus can provide practical solutions. Noting women's empowerment is at the heart of solutions, including the Abidjan Legacy Programme, she called for increased participation of women in economic life and agriculture, especially through land tenure security and the creation of gender-sensitive financial institutions.

Lorena Aguilar Revelo, former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Costa Rica, presented a study on DLDD's differentiated impacts on women, which, among others, analyzed structural problems such as inequitable access to land. She called for dismantling power structures that allow gender discrimination, violence, and economic hardship, and emphasized the need for women's land rights. She called for a narrative shift to recognize women and girls as leaders and agents of change.

High-level interactive dialogues and round tables: Parallel ministerial and high-level interactive dialogues and round tables convened on [Tuesday, 10 May](#).

Interactive dialogue 1: Land reGeneration: The role of youth in shaping the sustainable land agenda: Alfred Prospere, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Rural Development, Saint Lucia, opened the first interactive dialogue by sharing insights from youth involvement in land restoration in Saint Lucia, highlighting the need to place young people at the forefront at the local and national levels, create green jobs, and encourage collective and meaningful participation.

Other interventions from high-level participants included: the pioneering role of youth concerning sustainable behavior and consumption; solutions owned and implemented by youth, shared

at the Youth Forum; more attention to land-based and green jobs as career options; schools specializing in innovative agricultural techniques; internships and training to engage young people; and guaranteed funds to increase access to finance for young people.

Interactive dialogue 2: Future-proofing land use: Shifting patterns in production and consumption: Eisenhower Nduwa Mkaka, Minister of Natural Resources and Climate Change, Malawi, moderated. On food security's biggest global challenges, Florika Fink-Hooijer, European Commission, highlighted: the triple crises of climate, biodiversity and land degradation; overconsumption; food waste; and high meat consumption diverting land use towards growing feedstock for livestock. To address these, she discussed regulatory responses like the EU's biodiversity, soil and forest strategies, all anchored on healthy soils.

Other interventions emphasized: the need for systemic responses, adequate enabling environments to stimulate lifestyle changes, and better consumer information; better resource use and reorientation of subsidies towards sustainable production and consumption; and improving role of regional and local markets through rural finance and nutrition-linked bonds.

Round table 1: Rights, rewards and responsibilities: the future of land stewardship: Co-Chair Foday Jaward, Ministry of Environment, Sierra Leone, framed discussions as supporting implementation of the UNCCD decision on land tenure. Alexander Müller, Managing Director, TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, delivered keynote remarks, questioning how to: implement the UNCCD decision on land tenure; use the global decision to support local land stewardship; inspire responsible governance; learn from countries leading with successful examples; and continue to achieve synergies among the three Rio Conventions.

Participants emphasized the growing scientific evidence that secure land tenure is an enabling condition to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation, with one calling for a national-level mechanism to translate global policies to local actions.

Many participants agreed on the need to support gender equity and exchanged experiences to improve civil society engagement, highlighting opportunities to raise awareness during the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

Round table 2: Land restoration: A path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery: Luis Vayas Valdivieso, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ecuador, and Megh Nath Kafle, Ministry of Forests and Environment, Nepal, co-chaired the round table.

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO, GEF, delivered the keynote address, calling out the myth that drought only affects arid and semi-arid countries. He urged addressing two global challenges to land restoration: un-internalized externalities and institutions working in silos.

Elizabeth Mrema, CBD Executive Secretary, appealed for bold, actionable decisions to restore land and ecosystems, asking parties to build on momentum created in Abidjan at the biodiversity and climate summits later this year.

On increasing coherence to improve land restoration, delegates repeatedly acknowledged that SLM lies at the heart of responses to the triple crises of climate, biodiversity, and land degradation. They discussed efforts to link LDN and climate targets, saying both offer biodiversity co-benefits.

Round table 3: The Big Dry: From disaster to drought resilience: Co-Chair Philippe Lacoste, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, opened the round table, stating that droughts

affect all countries. In her keynote, Patricia Espinosa, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, highlighted that: human activity is the root cause of the biodiversity, climate, and land crises; cooperation with the other Rio Conventions is central to the UNFCCC; all finance should be considered through a lens of resilience and sustainability; and the focus of UNFCCC COP 27 will be on adaptation and resilience, especially in the African context.

Co-Chair Makhotsa Magdeline Soty, Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa, moderated the session, with many ministers scheduled to speak and more countries wanting to take the floor during a discussion that featured many examples of regional challenges and solutions related to drought.

Opening of the Conference of the Parties

On behalf of the COP 14 Presidency, Bhupender Yadav, Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, opened the session on [Wednesday, 11 May](#). He said, although devastating, the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded the world to reconsider the way to look at water and forests, and in particular land, for the fundamental and cross-cutting role it plays. He described land restoration as a key strategy to put the world on a trajectory to a green recovery, through: protecting biodiversity and combating DLDD and climate change, and thereby ensuring jobs and economic recovery.

Delegates elected Alain-Richard Donwahi, former Minister of Water and Forests, Côte d'Ivoire, as COP 15 President. In his opening remarks, Donwahi described COP 15 as an opportunity for countries to demonstrate their commitment to fight drought and climate change, saying it will require a holistic approach. Citing French author Victor Hugo, he said, "how sad to think that nature speaks and mankind will not listen." He challenged parties to act positively and constructively, focusing on the COP 15 theme of "Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity."

UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw referred to the social and supportive characteristics of elephants, the national emblem of Côte d'Ivoire, and encouraged all to put the major disruption of the past two years behind, and demonstrate the resilience of the UNCCD's commitment to continue the fight against DLDD. He outlined some of the initiatives under the Convention, including Saudi Arabia's cooperation agreement to implement the G20 Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing the Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats, the Great Green Wall in the Sahel, and the Great Green Wall Accelerator announced at the 2021 One Planet Summit in Paris. He said the launch of the Abidjan Legacy Programme comes at a critical point in the fight against land degradation.

On behalf of the host country, Côte d'Ivoire President Alassane Ouattara called for COP 15 to be an event for action, partnership, and solidarity by the international community for those in drought distress, noting progress has been undermined by the climate change, security, and economic crises, with negative consequences for food, energy, and society, consequently increasing migration flows. He said these crises force the world to find solutions.

Opening Statements: Pakistan, for the GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA (G-77/CHINA), recalled that addressing DLDD is key to human survival and achievement of all SDGs, and that many of its members were severely affected by prolonged and recurrent

drought and SDS. He called for concrete commitments from COP 15 on drought, including enhanced means of implementation for developing countries.

France, for the EUROPEAN UNION (EU), highlighted the severe global repercussions from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, including on food security, strongly condemning the Russian aggression, and expressing full solidarity with, and support for, the people of Ukraine. She highlighted the central role of COP 15 in crafting cross-cutting solutions to the biodiversity, climate, and land degradation crises, assuring the EU's full support in reaching a land-degradation-neutral world.

Morocco, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, highlighted the significance of the UNCCD for the African continent, and welcomed the Abidjan Legacy Programme as a platform for practical action. He called for robust institutional arrangements and sustained financial resources to deal with drought. Lamenting that many remained opposed to the target of LDN by 2030, he expressed full support for the implementation of the Convention.

Pakistan, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, highlighted the many large-scale initiatives by its members to combat DLDD, and highlighted the potential for regional cooperation. He called for increased attention, collaboration, and support to address the transboundary issues of drought and SDS, and for the UNCCD to take the lead on drought on global level.

Nicaragua, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), highlighted GRULAC's priority to strengthen mechanisms to guarantee the Convention's effective implementation in the context of SDG 1 (poverty eradication) and the 2030 Agenda, in accordance with parties' national circumstances. He expressed hope that developed countries will provide effective means of implementation synergistically with the CBD, UNFCCC and other UN conventions, particularly by strengthening financial mechanisms.

Turkey, for the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, emphasized regional priorities, including drought, and encouraged building additional tools and mechanisms, as well as providing mutual support through the sharing of best practices, science, and technological achievements. Lamenting the Ukraine conflict could worsen the negative impacts of land degradation with widespread consequences for human life and wellbeing, he said land restoration can contribute to economic recovery, food security and job creation.

Belarus, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, looked forward to in-person discussions on priority issues including LDN, drought, SDS, and gender. He welcomed the transition to LDN Target Setting Programme 2.0 and called on the GM to engage with new financial partners and to further mobilize additional financial resources to enable parties to achieve their voluntary LDN targets.

The US, for AUSTRALIA, CANADA, ICELAND, ISRAEL, JAPAN, NORWAY, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, SWITZERLAND, and the UK, called on Russia to act consistently with international obligations, noting the Ukraine crisis is affecting food security in the Global South. He urged a holistic landscape approach at the national and subnational levels, with meaningful participation of local stakeholders, and said COP 15 decisions should be based on the latest science and provide flexibility for country-specific implementation.

Saudi Arabia, for the ARAB GROUP, associated himself with the ASIA-PACIFIC and AFRICAN GROUPS' statements and highlighted the importance of following up on policy frameworks

and themes like drought, SDS, land tenure, and migration. Noting Middle Eastern countries will host upcoming climate negotiations and highlighting initiatives launched at the 2020 G20 meetings in Saudi Arabia, he expressed support for Saudi Arabia's request to host UNCCD COP 16.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION urged parties to stop using international forums to challenge Russia.

The WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION (WMO) highlighted forecasting and early-warning systems as essential to mitigating drought. He looked forward to working with partners on a major new initiative announced by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to develop early warning systems against extreme weather and climate change within the next five years, and to prepare the SDS global atlas and the SDS Toolbox.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (ECO) requested UNCCD support for regional efforts to promote SLM and consider environmental impacts of climate change.

MOLDOVA appealed to donor countries and partners to establish a global soil fund to directly support developing and least-developed countries to reach LDN.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE urged delegates to reflect a rights-based approach to all decisions.

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) encouraged the adoption of nature-based solutions (NbS) and investment in land restoration to support LDN.

The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) reflected the State of the World's Forests report signals pathways for green recovery by halting land degradation, restoring degraded lands and building green value chains, and noted the launch of the technical guide on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security (VGGT).

GLOBAL GREEN GROWTH INSTITUTE (GGGI) expressed optimism for solutions that address challenges, outlining work to mobilize finance to deliver transformational services in both developed and developing countries, such as establishing green bonds, debt-for-nature swaps, and green hydrogen pilot programmes.

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT recommended establishing an early-warning committee to manage drought; strengthening access and rights of women as landowners; and funding drought management.

Organizational Matters: The COP adopted the agenda and organization of work, including for the subsidiary bodies' sessions (ICCD/COP(15)/1).

Delegates approved the election of Vice-Presidents from the following regional groups: Stephen Muwaya (Uganda) for Africa; Abdu Alsharif (Saudi Arabia) and Zhong Jing (China) for Asia; Edgar Hunter (Dominica) and Reina Sotillo (Argentina) for Latin America and the Caribbean; Nino Chikovani (Georgia) and Narine Hakobyan (Armenia) for Central and Eastern Europe; and Patrick Reilly (US) and Juliane Wiesenhütter (Germany) for the Western European and Others Group.

COP 15 appointed Francisco Jose Avila (Guatemala) as Chair of the Committee of the Whole (COW).

Finally, the COP established a Friends of the Chair group chaired by Ambassador Malan Niamke Benjamin and Bieke Antonin to consider matters related to the Abidjan Declaration.

The COP adopted the document on accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, and representatives from the private sector (ICCD/ COP(15)/14 and Add.1).

Report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and its recommendations to the Conference of the Parties: During the COP plenary on Thursday, 19 May, CRIC Chair Andrew Bishop presented the CRIC report, summarizing the recommendation to adopt eight draft decisions. The COP adopted the report+.

Review of the report of the Committee on Science and Technology and its recommendations to the Conference of the Parties: During the COP plenary on Friday, 13 May, CST Chair Bongani Masuku presented the CST report, summarizing the recommendation to adopt six draft decisions. The COP adopted the report.

Committee of the Whole

On Wednesday, 11 May, Chair Francisco Jose Avila opened the meeting, introducing items to be covered in two proposed contact groups. Parties established COW contact groups on: programme and budget, chaired by Stephane Pailler (France); and other matters, chaired by Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed (Egypt).

UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework: Review of progress in the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification communication plan and the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020): On [Monday, 16 May](#), the Secretariat introduced documents ICCD/ COP(15)/3 and ICCD/COP(15)/21 and invited parties to consider actions taken during the reporting period.

The EU welcomed the communication plan, underscoring the value of engaging youth and non-English speaking communities. CHINA highlighted public awareness-raising activities carried out nationally.

The COW adopted the draft decision on Thursday, 19 May, and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it on Friday, 20 May.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.9), the COP, among others:

- calls for parties, and invites civil society organizations (CSOs), the media, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, to leverage international awareness-raising opportunities, like the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought and the Land for Life programme, for outreach around actions to combat DLDD and achieve LDN; and
- invites parties to develop communication strategies to achieve LDN and drought resilience, and continue raising public awareness and youth engagement on Convention issues, incorporating gender equality and women's empowerment in messages.

The decision further requests the Secretariat to:

- continue implementing the communication plan and enhancing online communications tools;
- raise the profile of UNCCD outreach programmes and products;
- enhance media engagement;
- maximize traditional and social media outreach potential; and
- provide key messages to national focal points and science and technology correspondents to support advocacy efforts.

Follow-up on the midterm evaluation of the UNCCD 2018-2030

Strategic Framework: This item was first discussed in the COW on [Friday, 13 May](#). The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/2 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Delegates welcomed the report and acknowledged the importance of a scientifically robust mid-term evaluation of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, “the backbone of the Convention,” and assessed progress towards its objectives. CHINA and INDIA expressed interest in participating in the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) overseeing the evaluation, and the EU asked for a regionally-balanced composition, mindful of size and budgetary implications. MEXICO acknowledged consideration of the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and post-COVID-19 recovery. ARGENTINA pointed to strengthening funds and, with SOUTH AFRICA and INDIA, highlighted the importance of ambitious national implementation.

The COW adopted the draft decision on Friday, 20 May, and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.17), the COP, among others:

- decides to start the midterm evaluation process immediately after COP 15 with a view to considering the findings and recommendations at COP 16 in 2024;
- adopts the terms of reference for the midterm evaluation, as contained in Annex I to the decision;
- decides to establish an IWG to oversee the midterm evaluation process, and invites the group to further detail the terms of reference for the midterm evaluation, and the organization and schedule of its own work, at its first meeting; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to support the midterm evaluation process and the IWG.

Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies:

This item was considered in the COW on [Monday, 16 May](#). The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/4 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Countries lauded the Secretariat’s efforts, stressing the importance of strong cooperation with other conventions, organizations, and institutions with complementary or overlapping mandates to address the climate, biodiversity, and land challenges, and achieve the SDGs.

The UK, with the EU, called for continued commitment to strengthen interlinkages with the UNFCCC and CBD, and encouraged projects that use integrated approaches. KENYA reminded of the urgency to address the three Rio Conventions together. JAPAN called attention to other relevant organizations, such as the International Tropical Timber Organization.

The International Renewable Energy Agency, for CSOs, reiterated its willingness to strengthen the partnership with the UNCCD to work on the land-energy nexus, stressing that incentives for bioenergy production to provide necessary income streams will help achieve LDN.

The COW adopted a decision on Friday, 20 May, and forwarded it to the COP.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.18), the COP, among others:

- invites parties to engage at the national level to explore complementarities in the implementation of and reporting on the three Rio Conventions, and to explore complementarities

between LDN targets, nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), as well as national targets under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and related planning, programming, reporting, and monitoring in order to achieve the Convention’s objectives;

- invites parties to explore ways to integrate satellite data information into their capacity-development efforts and data analytic tools for evidence-based decision making to support LDN implementation through integrated land use plans (ILUP);
- invites developed country parties, other parties in a position to do so, international financial organizations, CSOs, and private sector institutions to contribute to global partnerships, particularly, the Group on Earth Observations (GEO)-LDN Initiative, and engage in regional and bilateral cooperation to address DLDD;
- requests the Secretariat to continue seeking new partnerships and to provide practical tools, technical guidance, and capacity building to enhance UNCCD implementation, and to develop stakeholder engagement plans, including awareness-raising strategies, for youth, CSOs, the media, and the private sector; and
- invites parties to explore complementarities within relevant multilateral environmental agreements to achieve UNCCD objectives at the national level, including in the implementation of SLM, ecosystem-based approaches, or NbS.

Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: On Wednesday, 11 May, COW Chair Avila opened the discussions on policy frameworks and thematic issues including migration, drought, gender, SDS, and land tenure, then proposed that the COW review each issue individually. Avila reconvened discussions on Friday, 13 May, referring further discussions to the contact group on other matters. On Thursday, 19 May, Chair Avila introduced four draft decisions and proposed to change language from “vulnerable groups” to “people in vulnerable situations,” as agreed in the contact group on other matters. The COW adopted the draft decisions with minor amendments as orally presented. On Friday, 20 May, the COP adopted the draft decisions.

The positive role that measures taken under the Convention can play to address desertification, land degradation and drought as one of the drivers that causes migration: On [Friday, 13 May](#), the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/18 and ICCD/COP(15)/21). Several parties called for improved collection and use of data on desertification-migration links, with ARGENTINA encouraging mapping rural-urban migration trends, drivers, and impacts to enable data-driven policies to address unplanned, undesired large-scale migration. ECUADOR, emphasizing migration cannot be deemed a climate adaptation measure, sought methodologies and indicators on DLDD-migration links to identify human-induced and environmental factors and MEXICO called for support to update its studies on DLDD-induced migration.

BANGLADESH drew attention to forced migration creating enormous threats to life and ecosystems, and called for a special fund for internally displaced persons. CSOs called for direct funding for accredited organizations. OMAN sought technical and financial support through the GM to reduce rural out-migration. INDIA deemed youth engagement vital.

CHINA encouraged fully respecting parties' different national circumstances and sought clarification of the term "compel" in the draft decision (ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.10), the COP, *inter alia*, invites parties to:

- promote sustainable territorial development to strengthen urban-rural linkages;
- address DLDD, and create social and economic opportunities that reduce forced migration and displacement and increase rural resilience and livelihood stability;
- review development policies, including on ILUP and land tenure, with a view to promoting the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems and land restoration, respecting social and environmental safeguards; and
- support the implementation of the Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S) Initiative in Africa, and similar initiatives in other regions, which contribute to employment creation for groups in vulnerable situations by restoring degraded land and supporting the empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, people with disabilities, and youth by facilitating access to secure land tenure.

The COP also:

- requests the GM to continue supporting resource mobilization for the 3S Initiative in Africa, and similar initiatives in other regions, along with developing other projects and initiatives; and
- requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to assist parties to strengthen urban-rural linkages through territorial governance systems by utilizing existing frameworks, including the VGGT; and continue to support regional and international cooperation and initiatives that aim to promote sustainable land and water management to help mitigate the drivers that cause migration and displacement.

Sand and dust storms: The Secretariat introduced the documents (ICCD/COP(15)/16 and ICCD/COP(15)/21) on [Friday, 13 May](#), with further deliberations referred to the contact group on other matters.

Parties shared national experiences facing the catastrophic impacts of SDS, with IRAQ elaborating on the negative impacts of armed conflict. CHINA urged international cooperation to address SDS drivers, especially through early-warning systems.

ALGERIA, IRAQ, SYRIA, and PALESTINE called for initiatives to strengthen capacity, and provide guiding principles, including resource management integrating SDS in national guidelines.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA, with several parties, suggested the Secretariat can play an important role in identifying the drivers of SDS, and developing tools, methodologies, and platforms to address the challenge.

Parties discussed addressing major gaps in monitoring and assessments highlighted by the document, with INDIA offering remote-sensing technical support to develop geographic information system (GIS) mapping and the EU welcoming the development of the SDS Toolbox and Compendium of technical information and guidance on risk assessment, and offering support in building capacity to use these tools. MEXICO called for a typology of initiatives and developing an international programme on reducing SDS.

FAO highlighted SDS impacts on health, crop production and livestock, and described the agricultural sector as a major human-induced driver of SDS. CSOs emphasized the widespread effects

of dust particles on children including premature deaths, and called for holistic solutions that should take a One Health approach, and continued research and data on the topic.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.11), the COP, *inter alia*:

- invites parties to make use of the SDS Compendium: Information and Guidance on Assessing and Addressing the Risks and SDS Toolbox to strengthen their preparedness for SDS; and strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms and regional initiatives that contribute to addressing SDS linked to DLDD, paying particular attention to involving Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, and other people in vulnerable situations;
- invites the Secretariat and the GM, within the scope of the mandate of the Convention, subject to the availability of resources, and in collaboration with partners, to develop a voluntary policy guideline in consultation with countries affected by SDS; and compile an inventory of existing SDS-related tools and technologies beyond the SDS Toolbox and make this information available to parties; and facilitate the organization of a science-policy dialogue on SDS;
- invites the UN Coalition on Combating SDS as well as its members and other relevant UN entities, within their mandates and resources, to continue to assist parties in developing and implementing national and regional policies on SDS, including early warning, risk assessment, and anthropogenic source mitigation;
- invites technical and financial institutions and other stakeholders in a position to do so to provide support for countries to achieve their voluntary LDN targets related to combating SDS linked to DLDD; and
- requests the Secretariat to present a report on implementation efforts relevant to this decision at CRIC 21 and a report on policy issues at COP 16.

Land tenure: General discussions took place on [Friday, 13 May](#), with further deliberations referred to the contact group on other matters. The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/19 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Delegates welcomed the technical guide on integrating the VGGT into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN, and related efforts on awareness raising and capacity building, acknowledging the FAO and other partners for their contributions.

Ghana, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed that building capacity, creating partnerships and attracting the right funding are key to implementing the technical guide and achieving LDN in the region. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, KENYA, NEPAL, and ARGENTINA underscored the importance of tenure governance for sustainable land management (SLM) and LDN, in particular concerning the rights of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples.

FAO offered continued support and CSOs gave recommendations for consideration, including meaningful participation, an intersectoral approach and engagement with civil society, translation into local languages, and a focus on tenure in the different UNCCD tools and initiatives. CHINA asked to delete "other countries in a position to do so" from a paragraph on financing.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.12), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages parties to continue integrating land tenure, in line with the VGGT and the recommendations in decision 26/COP.14, in the implementation of activities to combat DLDD and achieve LDN, and refer to the technical guide on the integration of the VGGT;
- encourages parties, CSOs, and other UNCCD stakeholders to raise awareness on the importance of responsible land governance for combating DLDD; and
- invites parties to integrate land tenure information in capacity development efforts and data analytic tools for evidence-based decision making.

The COP requests the Secretariat and the GM, subject to available resources, to:

- continue to integrate land tenure into the implementation of the Convention and LDN initiatives to develop specific guidance and exchange lessons learned;
- identify financing opportunities to strengthen land governance and build a business case for responsible and sustainable public and private investments in land tenure within the context of activities to combat DLDD; and
- continue exploring existing global indicators and data sets relevant to land governance, when appropriate, and engage with relevant partners and institutions to pilot options to integrate potential indicators in future UNCCD reporting processes.

Gender: General discussions took place on [Friday, 13 May](#), with further discussions referred to the contact group on other matters. The Secretariat introduced its report (ICCD/COP(15)/17 and ICCD/COP(15)/21). Several parties underscored that empowering women and girls must be at the heart of the UNCCD, sharing national efforts to mainstream gender equality.

The EU and others noted the cross-cutting nature of gender, proposing all capacity building include gender. CSOs suggested establishing a gender-sensitive financing and resource mobilization mechanism with gender-specific budgeting within the UNCCD.

ARGENTINA proposed a statistical approach to indicators to quantify gender equality, and, with Benin, for the AFRICAN GROUP, CSOs and others, commended efforts to produce gender-related knowledge and sex-disaggregated data.

CSOs, supported by SWITZERLAND, proposed adding gender experts to the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and other subsidiary bodies. CANADA and Benin, for the AFRICAN GROUP, suggested the Gender Caucus play an advisory role.

On Friday, 20 May, Abou Bamba, Côte d'Ivoire, presented and read out the Abidjan Declaration on Gender and Report from the Gender Caucus (ICCD/COP(15)/L.22), which was forwarded to, and adopted, by, the COP.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.13), the COP, *inter alia*:

- approves the proposed road map to guide and accelerate the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) through gender-sensitive and transformative approaches;
- encourages parties, in the implementation of the GAP, to pay special attention to intersectionality (including but not limited to age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, nationality) when planning, designing, and implementing policy and programming related to DLDD;
- encourages parties to submit, on a voluntary basis, reports on the implementation of key national-level activities contained in the road map, and requests the Secretariat to compile such information regularly;

- welcomes the Terms of Reference of the Gender Caucus presented during its proceedings;
- strongly encourages parties to increase the number of women on their delegations attending the COP and invites parties to facilitate meaningful participation of women, women's organizations, and people in vulnerable situations in UNCCD processes at all levels of decision making;
- requests the Secretariat to monitor the level of gender parity across the Convention and report its finding to the CRIC and COP, and facilitate, on an annual basis, the convening of the Gender Caucus in conjunction with the sessions of the CRIC and/or COP, as well as on an ad hoc basis, with a view to guiding and supporting parties to enhance implementation of the GAP and its road map; and
- encourages the Secretariat, subject to the availability of funds, to continue collaboration with the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) to enhance the implementation of the GAP and its roadmap, including to generate gender-disaggregated data to inform gender-responsive policy design for achieving LDN.

Drought: On [Wednesday, 11 May](#), the Secretariat introduced documents ICCD/COP(15)/15, ICCD/COP(15)/20 and ICCD/COP(15)/21. During the opening statements of the COP, Morocco, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for concrete commitments from COP 15 on drought, including enhanced means of implementation for developing countries. Pakistan, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, called for increased attention, collaboration, and support to address the transboundary issues of drought and SDS, and for UNCCD to take the lead on drought at the global level. Speaking for the G-77/CHINA, Pakistan also urged concrete commitments from COP 15 on drought, including enhanced means of implementation for developing countries.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.23), the COP, *inter alia*:

- decides to establish a new IWG on Drought during the triennium 2022-2024, subject to the availability of resources, tasked with identifying and evaluating all options, including, *inter alia*, global policy instruments and regional policy frameworks, and linking, where relevant, to national plans, as appropriate, to effectively manage drought under the Convention, including supporting a shift from reactive to proactive drought management;
- decides that the IWG on Drought will have the following terms of reference: review and analyze relevant reports from the IWG on Drought and COP decisions on drought; identify and evaluate all options, including, *inter alia*, global policy instruments and regional policy frameworks, and linking, where relevant, to national plans to effectively manage drought under the Convention, including supporting a shift from reactive to proactive drought management; and prepare justifications and outline possible elements, processes, institutional arrangements and mechanisms for establishment for each policy option; and
- decides on the composition of the IWG on Drought for the triennium 2022-2024, which will encourage gender balance and membership with specific policy knowledge and adequate experience.

The COP also invites:

- parties to increase their commitment to pursue effective policies and partnerships on drought, with relevant sectors and stakeholders, particularly Indigenous Peoples and local

communities, women, youth, civil society, and the private sector, as appropriate, to enhance the implementation of a wider holistic and integrated approach for improved resilience of communities and ecosystems;

- parties, with the assistance of regional institutions, as relevant, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, to support and increase the utilization of information from monitoring, early warning, and action systems for decision making at national, subnational and local levels to enhance the drought resilience of ecosystems, societies, and economies; and
- the Secretariat to support, upon request, affected country parties to enhance their capacity to assess the effectiveness of strategic actions addressing drought, subject to the availability of resources.

The COP further:

- encourages parties, regional organizations, and other stakeholders working on drought to share their knowledge of and experiences with relevant, innovative and transformative tools for inclusion in the Drought Toolbox, and requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources and in cooperation with partner organizations, to further update and enhance the functionality of the Drought Toolbox, as well as continue related capacity building;
- invites all parties, multilateral and bilateral partners, and international financing mechanisms to scale up and facilitate effective financing for the implementation of drought risk reduction and resilience-building measures at all levels;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM, in collaboration with partners and regional institutions, to continue to assist parties in preparing and implementing gender-responsive national drought plans or other policy instruments related to drought and promoting regional collaboration on drought policies and strategies as a cost-effective means to support national action;
- requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, in consultation with relevant partners and processes, to identify activities to foster high-level global awareness of, and commitment to, enhancing drought resilience, which could include the participation in or co-organization of a ten-year follow-up to the 2013 High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy; and
- requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to encourage, support, and facilitate communities of learning and practice to pursue co-learning and collaboration for drought risk reduction and resilience capacity-building issues.

Programme and Budget: *Programme and budget for the triennium 2022-2024*: This item was first discussed in the COW on [Wednesday, 11 May](#). The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/5, ICCD/COP(15)/6-ICCD/CRIC(20)/2, and ICCD/COP(15)/21). A contact group on programme and budget, facilitated by Stephane Pailler (France), was established and met throughout the COP.

Namibia, for the AFRICAN GROUP, reiterated support for an ambitious work programme to provide impetus for achievements on drought, expressing deep concern that the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework's implementation is not on track.

On the options of zero nominal growth or recommended adjustments to the first scenario and the added costs or savings related to them, BRAZIL and JAPAN supported zero nominal growth, noting contributions to the GEF replenishment. CHINA

considered the indicative scale of assessments addressed sufficiently and encouraged focusing discussions on the budget for COP 16. The EU recognized the need to prioritize effective action on drought.

Youth Foundation of Bangladesh, for CSOs, urged parties to contribute funds to support, *inter alia*: CSO engagement; a drought resilience roadmap; and increased initiatives for youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples.

The COW adopted two draft decisions on Friday, 20 May, and forwarded them to the COP.

Final Decisions: In its decision on the multi-year workplan for Convention institutions (2022-2025) (ICCD/COP(15)/L.19), the COP, among others:

- approves the strategic orientation of the Secretariat and the GM, as contained in the UNCCD results framework for 2022-2025 in the annex to the decision;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to utilize the UNCCD results framework for 2022-2025, organizing their work consistently with the provisions of the Convention and the COP 15 decisions and the guidance outlined in the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to prepare a multi-year workplan for the Convention 2025-2028, utilizing the results-based management approach, for consideration at COP 16.

In its decision on the programme and budget for the triennium 2022-2024 (ICCD/COP(15)/L.24), the COP, among others:

- approves an amendment to Rule 2 of the financial rules of the COP, its subsidiary bodies, and the UNCCD Secretariat to state "The financial period shall be a biennium, of which the first calendar year shall be an even-numbered year, unless otherwise decided by the Conference of the Parties";
- approves, on an exceptional basis, the programme budget for the triennium 2022-2024 in the amount of EUR 24,646,354;
- decides to maintain the level of the working capital reserve at 12% of the estimated annual expenditure in the Trust Fund for the Convention's Core Budget;
- adopts the indicative scale of contributions for 2022, 2023 and 2024, contained in the decision's annex;
- approves a contingency budget of EUR 2,104,660 for conference servicing, to be added to the programme budget for the triennium 2022-2024 if the General Assembly decides not to provide resources for these activities in the UN regular budget;
- encourages developed country parties, and other parties in a position to do so, to facilitate engagement by the Secretariat with potential alternative donors to the Special Trust Fund, including private bodies, to assist in funding the participation of developing country parties in sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies; and
- requests the Executive Secretary to continue monitoring the availability of voluntary contributions to the Special Trust Fund, and to prepare a results-based budget and work programme for the biennium beginning in 2025, presenting two budget scenarios and a work programme based on the projected needs for the biennium in (a) a zero nominal growth scenario; and (b) a scenario based on further recommended adjustments to the first scenario and the added costs or savings related to them.

In its decision on designation of a Convention Secretariat and arrangements for its functioning: administrative and support arrangements (ICCD/COP(15)/L.5), the COP approves the continuation, for a further five-year period, of the current

institutional linkage and related administrative arrangements, to be reviewed by both the General Assembly and the COP no later than 31 December 2023.

Financial performance for the Convention trust funds: This item was first discussed in the COW on [Wednesday, 11 May](#), along with the programme and budget for the triennium 2022-2024. The Secretariat invited consideration of the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/7, ICCD/CRIC(20)/3, ICCD/COP(15)/8, ICCD/COP(15)/9, ICCD/COP(15)/10).

The COW adopted a draft decision on Friday, 20 May, and forwarded it to the COP.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.24), the COP, among others:

- authorizes the Executive Secretary, on an exceptional basis and without setting a precedent, to draw upon available unspent balances or contributions from prior financial periods to: set aside funds for after-service health insurance not exceeding EUR 500,000; support the IWG on Drought, including temporary support staff, in an amount not exceeding EUR 1,050,000, on an exceptional basis; and provide partial funding for the financial needs assessment to be conducted by the GM and submitted to COP 16, in an amount not exceeding EUR 150,000, also on an exceptional basis;
- urges parties that have not yet paid their contributions to the core budget for 2022 and prior years to do so without delay or conditionalities, and requests the Executive Secretary to publish and keep updated information on the status of contributions to the Convention Trust Funds; and
- requests the Executive Secretary to report on core budget contributions made by parties for prior financial periods that have been received during the triennium 2022-2024.

Report of the Evaluation Office: This item was first considered in the COW on Wednesday, 11 May, and then in a contact group. The COW took note of the relevant document (ICCD/COP15/11 ICCD/COP15/21) introduced by the Secretariat.

The COW adopted a draft decision on Friday, 20 May, and forwarded it to the COP.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.24), the COP notes the proposed 2022-2024 Evaluation Office workplan and requests the Executive Secretary to report to COP 16 on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted during this triennium and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations, as appropriate.

Procedural matters: Participation and involvement of CSOs in meetings and processes of the UNCCD: Two open dialogue sessions were held with CSOs. The first was held on [Thursday, 12 May](#), on lands we use, lands we protect, lands we own – opportunities and solutions to equity and equality. The second was held on [Tuesday, 17 May](#), on agroecological approaches and regenerative agricultural practices as a solution to positive transformative change, achieving LDN and addressing DLDD issues. A Youth Forum was held in the sidelines of the COP on 8-9 May 2022.

During the closing session of the COW, delegates heard the presentation of the CSO and Youth Declarations, and parties adopted decisions on CSO and youth participation and involvement in meetings and processes of the UNCCD.

Final Decisions: In its draft decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.1), the COP takes note of the Declaration of Civil Society Organizations attending COP 15 and decides to include the Declaration as an annex to the report of the meeting.

In the decision on participation and involvement of CSOs in meetings and processes of the UNCCD (ICCD/COP(15)/L.14), the COP, *inter alia*: encourages those countries with no or few CSOs accredited to the COP to promote the involvement of their organizations in the UNCCD process at the international level to ensure more balanced participation of CSOs in the sessions of the COP and its subsidiary bodies, particularly CSOs working with people in vulnerable situations, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, people living in rural areas, women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

In its decision on the Declaration of the Youth Forum (ICCD/COP(15)/L.3), the COP welcomes the organization of the Youth Forum as a way to foster the involvement of future generations in the implementation of the Convention, and decides to include the Declaration as an annex to the COP 15 report.

Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the UNCCD and the business engagement strategy: On [Monday, 16 May](#), the Secretariat introduced relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/13 and ICCD/COP(15)/21). Discussions were referred to the contact group on other matters.

Parties welcomed the evaluation of the private sector engagement strategy 2021-2030. The EU added support for robust environmental safeguards, requesting additional information on implementing the strategy, guidance on ways forward, and details on lessons learned. CSOs stressed the importance of ensuring that private sector engagement respects the values inherent to the Convention.

On Thursday, 19 May, bv Abou Bamba, Côte d'Ivoire, presented the report of the Green Business Forum, highlighting the launch of the Business for Land (B4L) initiative, and the Great Green Wall Sourcing Challenge. He called for the development of time-bound targets and clear standards for soil health to enable private investment and better monitoring, and discussed barriers for the private sector to access green and sustainable finance.

On Thursday, 19 May, the COW approved and forwarded the draft decisions to the COP, which adopted them on Friday, 20 May.

Final Decisions: In its final decision on the Report from the Green Business Forum (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.2), the COP welcomes contributions of the Green Business Forum and takes note of its report with appreciation; and decides to include the report as an annex to the report of COP 15.

In its final decision on participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the UNCCD (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.15), the COP, *inter alia*: requests the Secretariat and the GM, within their mandate and subject to the availability of resources, to

- engage with companies that are working in the food-feed-fibre sector that have potential to make positive contributions to addressing DLDD;
- continue promoting decent land-based jobs for youth and land-based youth entrepreneurship;
- facilitate with relevant partners and representatives of the private sector, the organization of the seventh Sustainable Land Management Business Forum on the sidelines of COP 16; and
- facilitate the development of the Business for Land initiative.

The COP invites parties and business and industry entities to support the Business for Land initiative and present specific commitments to ensure the achievement of LDN, on a voluntary basis.

Programme of work for the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties: The Secretariat introduced the relevant document (ICCD/COP(15)/CRP.1/Rev.1). On whether to hold COP 16 in 2023 or 2024, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, supported by several parties and groups, expressed preference for 2024. The EU preferred the second semester of 2023. Namibia, for the AFRICAN GROUP, asked the Secretariat to prepare a thorough analysis of each option. This was further considered in the contact group on programme and budget.

During the final session of the COW, parties forwarded two draft decisions to the COP, which were adopted.

Final Decisions: In the decision on the dates and venues of future sessions of the COP (ICCD/COP(15)/L.8), the COP decides that COP 16 will be in Saudi Arabia in 2024 and COP 17 will be in Mongolia in 2026.

In the decision on the programme of work for COP 16 (ICCD/COP(15)/L.21), the COP adopted a list of agenda items for COP 16, and agreed to include interactive dialogue sessions with relevant stakeholders, including ministers, CSOs, the business community, the scientific community, and members of parliament, on agenda items of relevance to them.

Closing of the COW: After the COW approved all of its draft decisions and forwarded them to the COP for adoption, Chair Avila congratulated the parties for concluding the negotiations cordially, and said he would prepare the report of the COW to the COP and gavelled the session to a close.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

CRIC Chair Andrew Bishop (Guyana) opened CRIC 20 on [Thursday, 12 May](#), underscoring the need to promote and execute sustainable solutions, specifically bold initiatives to match finance activities on the ground. UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw encouraged participants to ensure all activities and aspirations are infused with the aim to improve the lives of all people. He commended the 129 countries that have committed to set LDN targets and looked forward to sharing knowledge on capacity building to advance implementation. The CRIC then heard opening statements.

Organizational matters: Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: The Secretariat introduced the agenda and organization of work (ICCD/CRIC(20)/1), which was adopted, as orally revised by the Bureau.

Election of officers: Bishop announced Vice-Chair Hussein Nasrallah (Lebanon) can only participate during the second week, so the CRIC Bureau decided that Saliha Fortas (Algeria) will act as rapporteur until he arrives.

Effective implementation of the convention at the national, subregional and regional levels: Review of the report of the CRIC on its nineteenth session: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(19)/6 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10) on Thursday, 12 May. On Wednesday, 18 May, Chair Bishop presented, and the CRIC adopted, the report of CRIC 19, containing its draft decision. The COP adopted the decision on Thursday, 19 May.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.1), the COP, *inter alia*: requests the GM and the Secretariat within their respective mandates and subject to the availability of financial resources, and in collaboration with relevant financial and technical partners in a position to do so, to:

- continue supporting voluntary LDN target-setting processes;
- develop training and capacity building at national and regional levels;
- assist parties in translating voluntary LDN targets into concrete actions; and
- support parties to improve and accelerate gender-responsive, viable transformative projects and programmes that address DLDD and increase knowledge sharing.

The COP also:

- invites developed country parties, and all other parties and partners in position to do so, to increase financial and technical resources specifically dedicated to implementation of the UNCCD;
- encourages the LDN Fund to facilitate a larger and more regionally and subregionally balanced project portfolio and an accelerated geographical expansion to include more projects in dryland areas located in developing countries;
- requests the GM to facilitate capacity building for the public and private sector and other interested stakeholders on accessing the LDN Fund;
- requests the Secretariat, the GM and appropriate UNCCD institutions and bodies, within their respective mandates and subject to the availability of financial resources, to support parties by developing further regional and subregional projects to address the issues of drought and SDS, reinforce the work done under the Drought Initiative and policy instruments, and strengthen synergies among the three Rio Conventions;
- urges parties to consider gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of youth and children in the further implementation of the priority action areas identified in their national drought plans or other policy instruments related to drought;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to continue their efforts to effectively integrate gender equality into the structure and function of the Convention and its bodies;
- urges parties to implement the recommendations contained in decision 26/COP.14 for improved land governance towards achieving LDN and the objectives of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD, including fostering legal and political environments that promote women's and vulnerable populations' equitable access to and control over land and resources, including secure and non-discriminatory land tenure; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to assist parties at their request with effective implementation of the technical guide and the voluntary guidelines with the aim of mainstreaming and incentivizing land tenure in decisions made on investments as well as in the design and implementation of projects and programmes to address desertification/land degradation and drought, and help achieve voluntary national LDN targets.

Multi-year workplan for Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents on the multi-year workplan for Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies (ICCD/COP(15)/6, ICCD/CRIC(20)/2, ICCD/CRIC(20)/3 and ICCD/COP(15)/21) on [Thursday 12 May](#). The budget contact

group conducted the negotiations on the draft decision. On Wednesday, 18 May, Chair Bishop presented, and the CRIC adopted, the draft decision. The COP adopted the decision on Thursday, 19 May.

Final Decision: In its decision on the date and venue of CRIC 21 (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.4), the COP decides that CRIC 21 will be held in Uzbekistan in 2023.

Performance of Convention institutions and subsidiary bodies: On [Thursday, 12 May](#), the Secretariat introduced the interlinked relevant documents on the multi-year workplan (ICCD/COP(15)/6, ICCD/CRIC(20)/2) and the performance of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(20)/3), referencing draft decisions (ICCD/COP(15)/21).

EU asserted that it is not possible to implement decisions effectively without peace and security, encouraged progress and supported work to, *inter alia*: integrate the LDN objectives and other targets related to capacity building and data sharing; improve transparency and use of the LDN Fund; and support the GAP.

After discussions in a contact group, CRIC Chair Bishop noted this item would be taken up by the COW.

Integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/7 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10) on [Monday, 16 May](#). Several parties described efforts to achieve LDN targets, reflecting the value of partnerships and need for political and economic momentum to raise ambition, and urging sufficient funding to deliver actions to achieve LDN targets.

The US reiterated that the UNCCD is the official reporting entity for SDG target 15.3, but not for the related implementation activities and called for the Convention to maintain focus on drylands in LDN targets.

BANGLADESH emphasized the value of sustainable land management (SLM) and land restoration in solving land degradation, supporting synergies with the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) and Rio Conventions. BANGLADESH also called for an assessment tool to calculate the resources required to achieve national LDN targets, and with LAOS, TANZANIA and MAURITANIA, called for resources and technical assistance to implement their LDN plans and develop reports. CHINA called for deleting reference from a paragraph related to finance, saying “others in a position to do so” is unclear.

On Wednesday, 18 May, Chair Bishop presented, and the CRIC adopted, the draft decision. The COP adopted the decision on Thursday, 19 May.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.2), the COP, *inter alia*,

- encourages parties that have not yet done so to formulate voluntary LDN targets; and
- invites parties, as appropriate and on a voluntary basis, to enhance the integration of the SDGs, in particular target 15.3, into their national strategies, plans, and programmes and map them with those of the other two Rio Conventions and other processes.

The COP requests the Secretariat and the GM to, *inter alia*:

- support parties to create an enabling environment to achieve voluntary national LDN targets;
- promote public-private partnerships and partnerships with CSOs, within their respective roles, to support the implementation of the Convention and achievement of LDN; and

- contribute to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building to further the implementation of the Convention: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/6 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10) on [Monday, 16 May](#). Seven panelists from each regional implementation annex, Western Europe and Other States, and CSOs presented on their capacity-building initiatives.

Parties expressed appreciation for capacity-building activities already undertaken with the EU encouraging deepening synergies and conceptual links with other UN agencies; development of a Capacity Building Marketplace (CBM) involving CSOs and the private sector; and continuation of a transformative and inclusive gender-based approach.

On Wednesday, 18 May, Chair Bishop presented, and the CRIC adopted, the draft decision, which the COP adopted on Thursday, 19 May.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.3), the COP, *inter alia*: requests the Secretariat to continue enhancing, within available resources and in keeping with its mandate, all measures to support the facilitation of capacity development for the effective implementation of the Convention including:

- the participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, CSOs, and private sector entities, and the education of students;
- expansion of the CBM and e-learning platform; and
- development of additional tools that concerned parties may use to further national capacity-building efforts to address SDS.

The COP also requests the Secretariat, the GM and SPI, within available resources and in accordance with their respective mandates, to:

- continue the pursuit of partnerships, both formal and informal;
- broaden their scope of cooperation with all relevant public and private sector entities to support capacity development, including relevant regional and subregional entities; and
- expand and deepen innovative approaches.

The COP further invites:

- parties to support and fully participate in the Secretariat’s and GM’s efforts to develop and implement, as appropriate, specific capacity-building programmes concerning gender-sensitive and transformative approaches to the implementation of the Convention, resilience to SDS, drought preparedness and mitigation, and land degradation and desertification; and
- invites accredited CSOs involved in capacity building to make full use of opportunities offered through the Secretariat and the GM.

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP: On Thursday, 12 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/7-ICCD/CRIC(20)/8, ICCD/CRIC(20)/9, ICCD/CRIC(20)/INF.1, and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10). This agenda item was first considered in a joint CRIC/CST contact group, then in plenary on [Monday, 16 May](#).

Statements focused on support for increased capacity-building workshops at the local and regional level. Saudi Arabia, for the ARAB GROUP, specified the need for support to collect necessary data in arid land regions. BRAZIL emphasized national reports should consider national circumstances. CHINA raised the issue of data sovereignty, supporting monitoring data on a national basis.

In plenary on Monday, the Secretariat presented: the report on activities undertaken to improve the UNCCD reporting process, including e-learning tools provided to support national reporting during the pandemic and other capacity-building activities; and features of the fourth edition of the Performance Review and Implementation System (PRAIS 4).

Alex Zvoleff, Conservation International (CI), presented on innovations to the online land-change monitoring platform, Trends Earth, allowing better control over national reporting, including the ability to customize datasets, and upcoming features like flagging false positives and negatives, and modifying land cover legends.

Many parties lamented the lack of response from the GEF on provision of financial support for national reporting (Umbrella projects) and stressed the need to align timing of resources with reporting deadlines. Some parties shared persistent issues with access to online tools, insufficient resolution of global datasets, and maintaining national data collection processes. Others raised specific challenges, such as in measuring and reporting on soil erosion, carbon stocks, and land productivity.

A draft decision was adopted during the CRIC closing plenary on Wednesday, 18 May and forwarded to the COP.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.6), the COP, among others:

- requests that the Secretariat, in arranging future CST and CRIC sessions, maximize participation of the science and technology correspondents in the regional meetings;
- urges parties to use PRAIS 4 to, *inter alia*: ensure LDN implementation actions are quantifiable, spatially explicit, and time-bound; share national data in a way that maximizes their potential to inform decision making on land; and ensure that comparable, robust and credible data will be submitted to the COP;
- requests the Secretariat and GM to: support parties in reviewing and refining their voluntary LDN targets; support national reporting in a format that can be automatically transferred to PRAIS; ensure PRAIS remains current and relevant; pursue data-centered partnerships to enable a data-driven transformation; and continue establishing partnerships towards using data-driven tools for informed decision making; and
- requests the Secretariat to periodically review and update the Good Practice Guidance documents and encourages parties to follow the guidance, use the updated implementation framework and provide information on the gender dimension of national-level projects, and provide UNCCD-relevant information and good practices to the WOCAT database.

Securing additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Report by the Global Environment Facility on the financing of programmes and projects concerning desertification, land degradation and drought: On Tuesday, 17 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/4 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10).

Ulrich Apel, GEF, highlighted substantial progress made in the GEF Land Degradation Focal Area (LDFA); programming trends; and expected portfolio results. He noted that USD 715.58 million, which leveraged USD 5,270.69 million in co-financing, was approved from the LDFA and looked ahead to a 26% increase in funding for LDFA in the GEF's eighth replenishment (GEF-8).

CHINA suggested direct coordination with UNCCD national focal points and INDIA opined that GEF funding is not balanced

across the Rio Conventions, echoing the suggestion from CHINA to direct funding through national focal points. SYRIA lamented the lack of GEF financial assistance since 2012, stating that there are many projects in need of support. The EU called for continued synergies with other financial mechanisms, like the LDN Fund, and exploration of private sector partnerships and innovative funding. ARGENTINA queried if drought could be addressed through arrangements similar to those of the Umbrella projects during GEF-8. Senegal, for AFRICAN GROUP, pondered if there could be a financial instrument dedicated solely to the Convention, in cooperation with GEF.

Following discussions in a contact group, a draft decision was adopted on Thursday, 18 May, and forwarded to the COP.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.8), the COP, requests the GEF to support:

- parties to meet their reporting obligations timely;
- the Southern Africa Great Green Wall Initiative; and
- the implementation of national drought plans and other drought-related policies, especially strengthening early warning, preparedness, mitigation and recovery, rehabilitation, and monitoring systems, and capacity building.

The COP further:

- invites the GEF to assess the feasibility of establishing a focal area for drought to increase visibility and financial resources allocated to drought, and to further align the land degradation focal area strategy implementation with the Convention goals; and
- encourages the GEF to further enhance the means to leverage synergies among the Rio Conventions and other relevant environmental agreements at the implementation level.

Report by the Global Mechanism on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention: On Tuesday, 17 May, Louise Baker, GM Managing Director, introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/5 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10). Parties welcomed GM activities like the project preparation partnership (PPP) and private sector engagement. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA hoped the PPP will enhance LDN at national, regional and global levels. BANGLADESH sought effective global cooperation and support.

The EU encouraged reviewing available funds for capacity building and supported strengthening partnerships to resolve backlogs in projects, including on land management and drought resistance. VENEZUELA suggested increasing investments in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building networks for drought preparedness, and more webinars on drought. CUBA called for "greater operability" in financing to meet LDN targets and tackle drought.

The CBD Secretariat encouraged connecting with biodiversity national focal points in setting LDN targets.

Following discussions in a contact group, the CRIC adopted a draft decision on Wednesday, 18 May, and forwarded to the COP.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.7), the COP, requests the GM and the Secretariat to:

- determine the financial requirements for the Convention's implementation, building on national reporting and voluntary targeting-setting exercises;
- develop a strategy to increase fund mobilization;
- support voluntary LDN target-setting and -refining activities;

- support creation of an enabling environment for national reporting, implementation of national drought plans and drought-related policies;
- mainstream LDN in ILUP frameworks and national development plans; and
- strengthen partnerships towards a geographically-balanced project preparation pipeline for gender-responsive, large-scale integrated landscape investment programmes and flagship initiatives on SLM and drought resilience.

The COP further:

- requests the GM to accelerate efforts to support private sector engagement and promote innovation;
- invites the Group on Earth Observations LDN (GEO LDN) Initiative and partners to facilitate using Earth observation data and tools; and
- invites parties to refine voluntary LDN targets and translate national drought plans and drought-related instruments into concrete action.

Procedural matters: Programme of work for CRIC 21: On Tuesday, 17 May, the CRIC introduced the draft decision on the programme of work (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.5). The COW adopted the draft decision on Friday, 20 May, and the COP adopted it.

Final Decision: In its decision on the CRIC 21 work programme (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.5), the COP, *inter alia*, includes the following items on the agenda of CRIC 21 for parties to review and discuss:

- inputs from regional meetings;
- implementation of the Convention using progress indicators contained in the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD and new indicators tested in the 2022 UNCCD reporting process;
- implementation of voluntary LDN targets and related implementation efforts;
- financial flows for the implementation of the Convention; and
- the procedure for the communication of information.

The COP requests the Secretariat to circulate in all UN languages, at least six weeks prior to CRIC 21, a provisional annotated agenda and appropriate documentation for that session.

Closing Plenary: During the fifth and final meeting of the CRIC on [Wednesday, 18 May](#), Chair Andrew Bishop presented, and the CRIC adopted, eight draft decisions.

Angola, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, welcomed the outcome of the session, acknowledging the sense of solidarity and constructive spirit during discussions, and support received. He lamented that drought had not received the attention it deserved, highlighting Africa's belief that a legally binding instrument would be the best way forward.

Panama, on behalf of GRULAC, acknowledged progress relating to capacity building, reporting methodologies, and tools, such as the geospatial platform. She encouraged additional efforts to stimulate the production of better datasets to support decision making at all levels. She called for timely development of funds for Umbrella projects and strengthening of the LDN Fund.

The FAO expressed readiness to continue supporting, *inter alia*: the implementation of integrated landscape management and land resource planning approaches to promote SLM; knowledge platforms for sharing lessons and best practices to promote capacity building across sectors and levels; drought preparedness initiatives; collaborations to combat SDS; and the strengthening of capacity on applying the technical guide on integrating the VGGT into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN.

Adoption of the report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention: CRIC Vice-Chair and Rapporteur Hussein Nasrallah (Lebanon) presented a summary of the outcomes of CRIC, and the parties approved the report of CRIC without comment.

Election of officers other than the Chair: The CRIC approved the election of four Vice-Chairs for its twenty-first and twenty-second sessions: David Payang (Cameroon); Abduvokhid Zakhadullaev (Uzbekistan); Karima Lince (Panama); and Baptiste Astrade (France).

Chair Bishop thanked all delegates for the successful conclusion of the committee's work, noting it moved the needle in key priority areas including the implementation of voluntary LDN targets and the drought initiative, and operationalization of the LDN Fund.

Chair Bishop gavelled the CRIC to a close at 8:57 pm GMT on Wednesday, 18 May.

Committee on Science and Technology

Bongani Masuku (eSwatini), Chair of the 15th session of the CST, opened the meeting on Wednesday, 11 May.

Executive Secretary Thiaw commended the scientific community for ensuring a scientific foundation that underpins the UNCCD's work, despite the global pandemic. He emphasized the significance of CST deliberations to allow a comprehensive analysis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports and direct the work programme of the SPI for the biennium 2022-23. Urging a spirit of consensus, he looked forward to recommendations for actions to achieve all 17 SDGs, as "we need to convince the world that actions on land are the best chance we can have to achieve these."

France, on behalf of the EU, commended the work of the SPI for being founded on solid scientific knowledge and urged SLM that includes safeguarded land tenure.

Argentina, on behalf of GRULAC, noted concern about drought and desertification, and called for remaining focused on the 2030 Agenda, strengthening the systems and institutions that can achieve the SDGs, and addressing the need for fuels necessary for society. He called for greater effort in building capacity at the national level, including financial and technical support for SLM to help in the fight against desertification.

Turkey, for the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, said the SPI had met high expectations and expressed hope that its contributions will pave the way for a more effective approach to the important issue of drought.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, expressed gratitude for the development of tools for SDS and drought, and encouraged further capacity building and inter-regional knowledge exchange.

The US commended the high quality of work produced under challenging circumstances, but expressed concern about the compressed schedule and the number and complexity of agenda items.

KENYA expressed support for the CST's work, highlighting the need for a good decision on drought.

CSOs highlighted the importance of science and technology for transformative change and called for co-creation of knowledge with affected communities.

Organizational matters: The CST adopted the provisional agenda (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/1) and appointed Abdul Hamid (Bangladesh) to the CST Bureau, replacing the Vice-Chair from Pakistan, and elected Anna Luise (Italy) to serve as rapporteur.

Items resulting from the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2020–2021: Evidence on the potential contribution of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management to positive transformative change, achieving LDN and addressing DLDD issues: The Secretariat introduced the report contained in documents ICCD/COP(15)/CST/2 and CST/8 on [Wednesday, 11 May](#). Ermias Betemariam, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), presented the summary, noting the rationale for developing the report is that land is a limited resource and it is therefore crucial to support the development of policies, tools and practices focused on ILUP and ILM. He outlined two proposals, including: to frame the role of land use planning in implementing SDG targets and reconciling competing claims on land; and to embed LDN in land use planning and to build capacity for land use planning and learning from experience, using tools to inform land use planning and LDN integration, and collaboration between academic and research practitioner communities through generation and sharing of experiences in ILUP and ILM to achieve LDN.

Several countries expressed concerns about lack of consultation, and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION highlighted that the new terms “ILUP” and “ILM” pose challenges in interpretation in different languages and contexts.

On the use of tools, ESWATINI asked about support mechanisms and barriers to using the proposed tools, and SOUTH AFRICA asked whether the team applied any modeling or scenario-setting during the research.

Many raised concerns about the specificity of local and national contexts, and the need for local ownership to ensure implementation of the recommendations. The issue was further discussed in the CST contact group, which met throughout the week. The CST adopted the decision on Friday, 13 May.

Final Decision: In its final decision on Objective 1 (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages parties to provide a more central role for ILUP and ILM beginning with an assessment of land capability and suitability in national, subnational and local policy development to address DLDD, help achieve LDN, and support efforts to address the interlinked challenges underpinning the SDGs;
- also encourages parties to foster and support ILUP and ILM as enablers of synergies, complementarities, and policy coherence among the three Rio Conventions, in tandem with the implementation of LDN targets, considering the potential of LDN for climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as biodiversity conservation and sustainable use;
- further encourages parties to integrate LDN target-setting and implementation into national and subnational ILUP and ILM processes; and
- reiterates the importance of respecting land tenure in the development and implementation of land use planning approaches and tools.

Evidence on the approaches for the assessment and monitoring of the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems to drought: The Secretariat introduced the background and rationale for document ICCD/COP(15)/CST/3 on [Wednesday, 11 May](#). SPI

members Sergio Vicente-Serrano (Spain) and Mark Svoboda (US) summarized key findings, emphasizing the report’s novelty. They highlighted that drought impacts are modulated by resilience, and that proactive risk mitigation is more cost effective than reactive relief measures, with no universal metric existing for measuring drought resilience. The report provides an inventory of drought resilience indicators. They introduced a roadmap for drought resilience assessment based on five forms of capital, and ecological and social resilience.

During discussions, delegates commended the important work undertaken by the SPI and highlighted: increasing and severe effects of drought in their countries; the need for financial support and capacity building; the importance of ocean phenomena when assessing drought; specific data limitations and vulnerabilities in low-income countries; and remaining gaps in assessment of drought risk and ecosystem resilience. The issue was further discussed in the CST contact group. The CST adopted the decision on Friday, 13 May.

Final Decision: In its decision on Objective 2 (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.2), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages parties to consider the roadmap for drought resilience assessment summarized in document [ICCD/COP\(15\)/CST/3](#) as an indicative pathway for developing a new approach or reviewing an existing one to national and subnational drought resilience assessment and monitoring, taking into account national circumstances as well as the existing drought resilience indicators and assessment guidance;
- also encourages parties to enable or enhance systematic drought impact collection and risk assessments at national, subnational and local levels using, where appropriate, a globally standardized approach;
- further encourages parties to pursue the development and implementation of integrated drought risk management from existing communities of practice and learning networks, including the Integrated Drought Management Programme and its cooperating partners, and to monitor and assess drought risk in natural and managed ecosystems; and
- encourages parties to seek support in the development and implementation of integrated drought risk management from existing communities of practice and learning networks.

Coordination of activities of the Science-Policy Interface with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/4, and ICCD/COP(15)/CST/8) on [Thursday, 12 May](#).

SPI members Ravindranath Nijavalli (India) and Graham von Maltitz (South Africa) presented key conclusions based mainly on the IPCC 2019 Special Report on Climate Change and Land, which contains dedicated chapters on desertification, land degradation, and food security. They emphasized the most central conclusion was that land and climate are directly interlinked in multiple ways. Other key messages included:

- climate change leads to intensification of land degradation;
- most land-management measures have co-benefits;
- demand and supply side mitigation options, such as reducing food loss and waste, or dietary change, provide co-benefits without requiring land;
- land-based mitigation options at very large scales can have trade-offs due to increased competition for land and degradation, but SLM practices can help to address these;

- LDN has many co-benefits in terms of human well-being and food security, but also for mitigation and adaptation; and
- delaying mitigation will make adaptation in the land sector increasingly difficult.

Parties discussed national plans and activities, the need for capacity building and financial support, the importance of focusing on drought, desertification, and SDS, and more attention to attribution to drivers as well as to gaps in knowledge. Others lauded clarification of the roles of climate-related and directly human-induced factors for land degradation in the report; called for a reduction of the draft decision text, since it was too complex and difficult to interpret; asked for the inclusion of wetlands, and queried a finding on adverse side-effects of carbon dioxide removal measures; called for overcoming academic and institutional silos; asked to make knowledge accessible to those on the ground; and called for including agroecological and regenerative practices in the next SPI work programme.

The draft decision was adopted on Friday, 13 May.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.3), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages parties to carefully read and, as appropriate, disseminate the final report of the SPI on policy-oriented recommendations resulting from the cooperation with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies; and
- also encourages parties to consider the adoption of SLM approaches and technologies, including those that have been demonstrated to simultaneously address land degradation, promote climate change mitigation/adaptation, and contribute to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and sustaining livelihoods in the implementation of, *inter alia*, UNCCD national action programmes, voluntary LDN targets, UNFCCC nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans, and the CBD National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, as appropriate.

Interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge: The Science-Policy Interface, the dissemination and accessibility of best practices, and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub: The Secretariat introduced documents ICCD/COP(15)/CST/5 and CST/8 on [Thursday, 12 May](#), reminding that the Knowledge Hub had been incorporated into the UNCCD website at the beginning of 2022.

Parties: requested that the web-based tool should be further developed and enhanced, and the next COP be informed of the use and effectiveness of this tool, in particular regarding drought and SDS; offered technical support to strengthen the Knowledge Hub; urged dissemination of experiences and best practices from countries across the world; requested details about the efficacy of land restoration implementation strategies to ensure only successful tools are implemented; and noted the value of South-South cooperation where they share best practices.

On the term “Nature-based Solutions” (NbS), BRAZIL highlighted that NbS is a subject of ongoing debate and that the COP should first test its validity and mutually accept it. ESWATINI cited a resolution taken by the recent fifth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) in which the term is considered appropriate for advancing sustainable development.

The draft decision was discussed in the contact group throughout the week and adopted on Friday, 13 May.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.4), the COP, *inter alia*:

- requests the CST Bureau and the Secretariat, after consulting with those intergovernmental scientific bodies and panels cooperating with the SPI, to develop a gender policy and implementation plan for the SPI whereby gender is mainstreamed, and gender parity is progressively achieved;
- requests the CST Bureau and the Secretariat to revise the SPI terms of reference and selection criteria to be consistent with the gender policy and implementation plan;
- encourages the SPI to continue fostering partnerships with scientific bodies and institutions, international organizations, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders and invite the representatives of these entities to its meetings as external observers when feasible, with a view to strengthening collaboration;
- requests the Secretariat to continue the expansion and further enhancement of the Knowledge Hub, as an integral part of the UNCCD website under the new Knowledge and Data section, to address the needs and priorities of country parties to help disseminate relevant knowledge to all stakeholders;
- also requests the Secretariat to (a) continue the development of the Drought Toolbox, the Sand and Dust Storms Toolbox and other knowledge tools, in collaboration with partners, in order to ensure synergies and effectiveness of these knowledge tools in addressing the needs of UNCCD stakeholders; and (b) conduct an assessment of the use and effectiveness of the tools and, based on the results, where possible explore opportunities to improve their efficacy; and
- subject to the availability of resources, to continue the collaboration with WOCAT, facilitating an exchange of knowledge on sustainable land management between United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification stakeholders globally.

Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2022-2023: The Secretariat introduced the documents (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/6, ICCD/COP(15)/CST/8) on [Thursday, 12 May](#). The US cautioned about the workload implied in the work programme and mentioned there could be additional requests from the GM, which should be discussed by the COP.

Interventions focused on: greater consultation prior to publication; the work programme should be less generic, particularly regarding weak policies; the quality of reporting will improve during the next biennium; formulation of targets and that parties’ opinions should be factored into the work programme; and including SDS in the second objective of the SPI recommendations.

The draft decision was further discussed in the CST contact group, and adopted on Friday, 13 May.

- Final Decision:** In its decision (ICCD/COP(15)/L.5), the COP:
- adopts the SPI work programme for the triennium 2022-2024, as contained in the annex to the decision, and decides on priorities;
 - requests the Executive Secretary to: present a synthesis report, including, when appropriate, a concise set of policy-oriented recommendations on objective 1 included in the SPI work programme 2022-2024, at CST 16; present a synthesis report, including, when appropriate, a concise set of policy-oriented recommendations on objective 2 included in the SPI work programme 2022-2024, at CST 16; and present a synthesis report, including, when appropriate, a concise set of policy-

oriented recommendations resulting from the coordination activities conducted by the SPI during the triennium 2022–2024, at CST 16.

Information on modalities for reporting on the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework: The Secretariat introduced the relevant document (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/7-ICCD/CRIC(20)/8, ICCD/CRIC(20)/10) on [Thursday, 12 May](#). The US noted general concern about the addition of new reporting requirements, and the issue was forwarded to the joint CRIC/CST contact group.

During the CST closing plenary on Friday, 13 May, Chair Masuku noted that outcomes from the joint CRIC/CST contact group on this agenda item would be submitted for adoption at the CRIC plenary.

Procedural matters: Programme of work for the sixteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology: On [Thursday, 12 May](#), the CST forwarded the draft decision on the programme of work for CST 16 (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.6) to the CST contact group. The CST adopted the draft decision on Friday, 13 May.

Final Decision: In the final decision (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.6), the COP, *inter alia*:

- decides that CST 16 should be organized so as to facilitate a thematic dialogue between the parties and the SPI regarding the policy implications of the scientific outputs and enable the formulation of concise policy-relevant recommendations; and
- requests the Secretariat to circulate a provisional annotated agenda and appropriate documentation, including a set of clear and concise recommendations and a separate document with draft decisions for consideration by parties in all six official languages of the UN, at least six weeks prior to CST 16.

Adoption of the report of the Committee on Science and Technology: On Friday, 13 May, the CST Vice-Chair and Rapporteur reported on the six decisions adopted by the CST that were transmitted to the COP. Delegates elected the Vice-Chairs for CST 15: Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed (Egypt), Abdul Hamid (Bangladesh), Hamid Čustović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Jeffrey Herrick (US). The CST approved the draft report of the session, on the understanding that the Rapporteur would complete it with the assistance of the Secretariat.

Open Dialogue with Civil Society Organizations

Lands we use, lands we protect, lands we own – Opportunities and solutions to equity and equality: On [Thursday, 12 May](#), delegates convened for an open dialogue session. Sabina Gasimova, International Dialogue for Environmental Action, moderated.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw expressed gratitude for CSOs' valuable contributions to the UNCCD process. He said they are being heard, as the COP-14 land tenure decision demonstrates.

Panelists:

- called for collaborative efforts to address pressing challenges of soil degradation, referencing the harbingers of hope in Africa that bring solutions to be scaled;
- discussed bringing global policies to the national and regional levels, and solutions such as collaborative management of land to ensure the rights of nature and future generations; and
- clarified that solutions exist, and advocated for greater engagement and the empowerment of local communities to support actions needed to build resilience.

Agroecological approaches and regenerative agricultural practices as solution to positive transformative change, achieving LDN and addressing DLDD issues: A second open dialogue session took place on [Tuesday, 17 May](#), with COP 15 President Donwahi moderating. The Secretariat presented key findings and recommendations on food production systems in the second Global Land Outlook, noting transformed food systems could provide one-third of climate mitigation needed to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement.

Civil society representatives emphasized the importance of agroecological and regenerative practices as the solution to land degradation, including:

- agroecology mitigates land degradation and biodiversity loss;
- integrating agroecology in the SPI work programme;
- increasing entrepreneurial farming opportunities;
- promoting holistic agroecological approaches to strengthen climate resilience, using local species and sharing research results to improve soil fertility;
- rehabilitating old water reservoirs;
- protecting Amazonian flora and fauna; and
- integrating silviculture and silvopasture; and supporting regenerative ranching.

Many participants expressed appreciation for the crucial work done by CSOs, especially in vulnerable communities and those engaged with ILM. The EU called for a more systemic inclusion of CSOs in all bodies of the Convention, including access to closed meetings.

Closing Plenary

On Friday, 20 May, UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw, congratulated delegates for their hard work throughout two weeks of “an intense journey,” celebrating the collective effort to elevate the work of the Convention and ensure the great achievement of COP 15. He thanked Côte d’Ivoire for its hospitality, COP 15 President Donwahi, and the UNCCD Secretariat.

Prime Minister Achi reflected that hosting COP 15 presents a double-symbol of Côte d’Ivoire’s rebirth, and commitment to seek effective and enduring solutions to combat DLDD. He called the Abidjan Legacy Programme a model of effective land management to be replicated across the world. He thanked everyone, noting the priorities have been set; “it is now time to rapidly implement activities.”

Organizational matters: Election of officers other than the President: The COP elected Jorge Luís García Rodríguez (Mexico) as Chair of CST 16 and Biljana Kilibarda (Montenegro) as the Chair of CRIC 21 and 22.

Credentials of delegations: The COP adopted the final report (ICCD/COP(15)/L.16), as orally updated by the Secretariat.

Organization of work, including the sessions of the subsidiary bodies: COW Chair Avila presented a summary of the outcomes of COW deliberations. He noted that the COW established two contact groups on: programme and budget, and other matters and successfully concluded its work. He reported the COW adopted 19 draft decisions and submitted them to COP 15 for adoption. The COP adopted the draft decisions.

Adoption of the COP 15 Report: The COP adopted two draft decisions. The first contains the Land, Life and Legacy Declaration (ICCD/COP(15)/L.20). The COP also adopted a decision on the

high-level opening ceremony (ICCD/COP(15)/L.7), taking note of the Chairs' summaries with appreciation and gratitude, and including them as an annex to the report of COP 15.

President Donwahi then invited COP Rapporteur Narine Hakobyan (Armenia) to present the report of COP 15, and the COP adopted the report contained in document ICCD/COP(15)/L.6, authorizing the Rapporteur to finalize it after the session.

Mali delivered the "Expression of gratitude to the Government and People of Côte d'Ivoire," contained in ICCD/COP(15)/L.4.

Closing statements: Delegates thanked the government of Côte d'Ivoire and the UNCCD Secretariat. Morocco, for the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized drought is critical for Africa and welcomed the consensus reached to establish a new IWG on drought to tackle drought in a far-reaching manner, and hoped for more funds to enable transformative projects to attain LDN.

France, on behalf of the EU, welcomed progress made in enhancing the importance of land on the global political agenda and the continuation of the IGW on drought, while stating disappointment that the term "nature-based solutions" had led to controversy, despite a recent UN Environment Assembly resolution.

Mongolia, on behalf of the ASIA PACIFIC GROUP, stressed the impacts of DLDD and SDS in her region and said to be truly united for land, "we need to be ready to make commitments for the good of our Conventions." She welcomed delegates to her region for CRIC 21, COP 16, and COP 17.

Ecuador, on behalf of GRULAC, acknowledged new and valuable decisions to bolster the goals of the Convention, and highlighted: the importance of LDN for his region; synergies with the other Rio Conventions; the need for finance, capacity building, and technology transfer; and GRULAC's commitment to strengthening the fight against DLDD.

Turkey, for the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, acknowledged events, key decisions and the ambitious Land, Life and Legacy Declaration, emphasizing that gender equity is essential for all topics discussed during COP 15 and lauded progress on drought, reiterating the need for resources to implement the Convention.

Georgia, on behalf CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, reflected that the Land, Life and Legacy Declaration is a confirmation of commitments at the highest political level, emphasizing a need to continue to mobilize additional and diverse finance to implement the Convention and welcomed the new IWG on drought and road map to guide implementation of the GAP.

US congratulated Côte d'Ivoire for taking on the challenge of hosting a massive event during a global pandemic, adding the hard work by the country's president and first lady "shone a light" by driving consensus among many groups and putting the country on a path towards SLM.

Noting the solutions to our planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation, the UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME expressed hope to deliver on the mandate of the COP, including through renewed financial commitments to achieve the LDN targets, food systems transformation, and investing in nature as the solution to vulnerability and poverty.

FAO recognized the fundamental importance of land governance and land tenure security to achieving LDN, and expressed readiness to support applying the technical guide on integrating the VGGT into the implementation of the Convention and the LDN Initiative.

Environmental Monitoring Group, for CSOs, expressed regret that the drought decision is not up to the scale of the challenge, and recommended humanizing drought. She also strongly encouraged using the term "people in situations of vulnerability" rather than "vulnerable people," and called for the promotion of agroecological approaches and regenerative practices as LDN solutions and contributors to synergizing the three Rio Conventions.

In his closing remarks, COP President Donwahi appreciated the spirit of fraternity and unity experienced during the conference. He highlighted the full buy-in and commitment of all and the pressing need to eliminate all forms of discrimination of women as central to achieve LDN. Stating that "the real work will begin now," he gavelled the meeting to a close at 9:01 pm GMT.

A Brief Analysis of COP 15

"Elephants, like humans, are smart and strong, but their real virtue is their empathy and ability for cooperation." In his opening remarks to the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)—the first in-person meeting since its landmark conference in Delhi in 2019—UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw used the metaphor of the host country Côte d'Ivoire's national symbol, "a highly intelligent and social animal known for sharing loud joyful cries when reuniting with family" to highlight both the joy of being reunited, and the essence of solidarity and cooperation to move towards land degradation neutrality (LDN).

COP 15 took place against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating economic and health impacts, underscoring the fragility of our societies. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and its repercussions on global food and energy supply prompted the repeated call that "none of our intentions can be achieved unless there is peace and security for all." At the same time, the UNCCD tried to build on unprecedented international attention since the Glasgow Climate Conference in November 2021 placed land-based and nature-positive solutions firmly on the international agenda. Thiaw frequently made clear he sees an opportunity for UNCCD to step out of the shadow of its "big sister" conventions—the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)—and reposition itself as a core part of the solution to the interlinked land-food-climate-biodiversity crises.

This brief analysis considers progress made at COP 15 towards this goal as well as the core thematic areas mandated in Delhi: migration, land tenure, sand and dust storms (SDS), gender, and drought. The outcomes of the High-Level Summit and negotiations in Abidjan reflect the passionate attempts of the nearly 7,000 participants who braved tropical heat and torrential rains to restart and strengthen UNCCD implementation to combat desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD).

Parade of the Heavyweights

UNCCD COP 15 started with a parade of high-ranking officials. In a first for this Convention, the two-day high-level segment preceded the actual negotiations and featured the President, First Lady, and Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire, an impressive count of African Heads of State and high-level UN dignitaries in line with civil society organizations (CSOs), youth, business leaders, and celebrities serving as "land ambassadors" and "land heroes," throwing their collective weight behind the important mission of

UNCCD. The host government demonstrated its strong commitment through the Abidjan Legacy Programme, an exemplary integrated sustainable land management (SLM) and restoration project across Côte d'Ivoire, intended as a roadmap to inspire others and increase prosperity and connectivity among West African nations. It also launched the Abidjan Call to mobilize the international community to support LDN, and put the spotlight on the first session of the Gender Caucus, chaired by the Ivorian First Lady on the opening day of the conference. The resulting "Abidjan Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality for Successful Land Restoration" underscores the pioneering role of the Convention in championing women's rights, including in the challenging issue of land tenure.

Eat the Elephant One Bite at a Time

Desmond Tutu once said, "There is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time." Even the task of addressing the interlinked climate-biodiversity-land crises, as daunting, overwhelming, or even impossible as it may seem, will be accomplished gradually, step by step. The Abidjan conference marked the first of the three Rio Convention COPs scheduled for 2022, "setting the bar," as one participant noted, and kicking off the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration. UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa and CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema stayed well beyond the opening days, bringing to life the many calls for synergies between the three Rio Conventions. The final text on strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions surprised observers with the first ever mention of Nature-based Solutions in a Rio Convention decision, setting an important precedent for the CBD COP later this year.

The Rio Conventions Pavilion programme highlighted land as the binding agent of the three Rio Conventions, addressing many core issues of DLDD "one bite at a time." One event that stood out was the first ever UNCCD "Food Day"—to be followed by similar Food Days during the UNFCCC and CBD COPs—which reflected important findings of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit and underscored the central message of the second [Global Land Outlook](#) that transforming food systems is key to solving multiple crises. CSOs pushed for the UNCCD to give more space to science-based agroecology and regenerative practices, highlighting their importance in supporting ecosystem resilience and nutrition, but also their contribution to the UNCCD's ambition to "put people first," and conserve biological and cultural diversity.

Science was ubiquitous at COP 15, since it provides "the engine for the functioning of the Convention," as the Chair of the Committee for Science and Technology (CST) noted during his closing remarks. There was no lack in praise for, or engagement with, the vital insights, tools, and instruments that science provides to address DLDD. The first ever Science Day attracted an enthusiastic crowd happily diving into the nuts and bolts of practical implementation challenges. However, the recurrent theme of limited resources and formal recognition for this important work was not addressed in Abidjan.

Serving the Rider and the Elephant

"The rider and the elephant" is often used as a metaphor to describe that everyone has two personalities that need to be in harmony in order to achieve important goals, with the rider representing the rational and the elephant the intuitive, compassionate side. The opportunity to meet and engage with other practitioners, researchers, and policymakers during COP 15 side

events appealed to both sides, and speaks to the character of the UNCCD as a "hands-on convention," as one observer put it. The strong presence of youth, CSOs, and representatives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as the private sector, underpinned the mantra of "we need action, not speeches" that echoed throughout the halls during the first week.

The side events also provided a counter-balance to what many perceived as somewhat lackluster formal sessions in half-empty plenary halls, especially during the second week. While some attributed the relatively low participation in plenary to the placement of the high-level segment, others speculated it may be due to a high turnover in delegations: many countries brought in a new generation of negotiators, who are still familiarizing themselves with how the Convention works, and the remaining seasoned veterans were huddled in contact groups for most of the second week. Luckily the Secretariat, which has seen considerable staff changes itself, provided an [informal guide](#) to new "riders," laying out the structure and organization of the talks in such a clear and accessible way that it could well serve as a role model for other UN processes.

Opening up Corridors for Others to Follow

One of the important roles of elephants is to create corridors through dense thickets for the herd to follow. In Delhi, COP 14 mandated work on several potentially challenging thematic issues, including migration and land tenure. The fact that land tenure, which is a critical yet politically sensitive issue for SLM, which other conventions tend to "shy away from," as one CSO representative said, was taken up by the UNCCD has been widely lauded as a sign of the critical role that CSOs play in agenda setting in this "bottom-up" Convention.

COP 15 saw a positive response to the technical guide to the voluntary guidelines on responsible land tenure (VGGT), and the related decision was agreed in just one day, mandating important further steps such as a "Land Tenure Strategy and Action Plan" and the invitation to "proactively collect data on legitimate land tenure rights in priority areas of voluntary LDN plans."

Similarly, discussions related to migration sailed relatively smoothly to a decision that "provides legs" to the Convention to address DLDD as one of the drivers of migration, and reflects a shift towards a positive narrative: emphasizing the potential of land restoration to revive rural areas, rebuilding the resource base, mitigating conflict, and providing economic opportunities for youth. Parties agreed to work on rural-urban linkages and strengthen international collaboration and support to projects such as the Great Green Wall, which, as incubators for rural development that enables people to stay, constitute "so much more than tree planting."

With the launch of the UNCCD's SDS Compendium and work on an SDS Toolbox under way, SDS is finally understood as a "global phenomenon that has an effect on our economies, health and environment, and not just in the drylands," as UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary Andrea Meza Murillo put it. That spirit is reflected in the SDS decision and will likely be a key priority for the incoming COP 16 presidency, Saudi Arabia.

Finally, many appreciated the decision on gender as a step forward, highlighting the proposed road map to guide and accelerate implementation of the Gender Action Plan, and the progressive language referring to intersectionality for policy and programming related to DLDD.

The Elephant in the Room: Drought

Dealing with drought is one of the three key mandates of UNCCD, however many feel that it has not yet received the attention and resources it deserves. African countries, especially, have long advocated for a global legally binding instrument on drought within the Convention, including a dedicated financial mechanism. The observed rise in devastating drought globally, and expected increases in the frequency and severity of droughts due to climate change, may have finally alerted the international community to the urgency of the problem. Lack of attention and awareness no longer seems an issue as demonstrated by the prestigious first day at the Rio Conventions Pavilion dedicated to drought, the launch of the authoritative compendium “[Drought in Numbers 2022](#),” past and mandated future work under the CST related to drought, and widely appreciated efforts of the Global Mechanism’s “Drought Initiative” and the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought. However, preparedness and resources continue to be a challenge. As one seasoned drought expert put it “suddenly everyone is talking about drought,” but “we are not prepared.”

Tensions around the best way forward for drought were the major political stumbling block at COP 15, with a closed contact group working late into the evenings, and a near breakdown of negotiations in the early hours of the last day. Since those unfortunate dynamics may have reflected not only parties’ differing priorities and red tape, but reportedly also fatigue, lack of experience, and coordination within the group, a compromise was reached only after COP 15 President Alain-Richard Donwahi and Executive Secretary Thiaw were pulled in to help on Friday morning. Finally, even the African Group expressed appreciation for the decision to establish a new Intergovernmental Working Group on drought to tackle the issue in a deeper and more far-reaching manner, although the soft language on provision of finance and lack of reference to a dedicated financial mechanism in the embattled decision on “Policy advocacy on drought” was a bitter pill to swallow.

A Gait – Not a Gallop Ahead

One of the lessons learned from this COP might be that the scheduling of negotiations after the High-Level Segment, while helpful in terms of building momentum and creating media attention, may result in stalemates on issues that technical negotiators cannot agree on without ministerial intervention. Both Saudi Arabia and Mongolia, the designated COP 16 and COP 17 presidencies, respectively, were watching closely to see how the negotiations unfolded.

COP 15 started with a veritable firework of high-level events and calls, however despite great efforts by the COP presidency, and challenging and protracted talks in the Friends of the Chair Group, it did not succeed in getting the final COP 15 “Land, Life and Legacy Declaration” to go beyond what several insiders called the “least common denominator.”

Also, negotiations got tricky whenever financial support beyond voluntary contributions were at stake. The need to “walk the talk” was summarized very eloquently by one delegate during closing: “We must be united for land. If we really believe this, we need to be ready to make commitments for the good of our Convention.”

Still, as noted by Executive Secretary Thiaw, countries have sent a united call about the importance of healthy and productive land for securing future prosperity for all, and important progress was achieved during COP 15: road maps and other important steps for

implementation were decided for critical issue areas, emphasizing the vital role of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities in addressing DLDD, a new partnership model for large-scale integrated landscape investment programmes was established, the Rio Conventions closed ranks to explore synergies and support UNCCD’s mission, and last but not least, greening initiatives in all shapes and sizes managed to attract attention and resources, showing that land restoration is really happening on the ground and very much alive.

Upcoming Meetings

Seventh Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction: The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is the main global forum to assess and discuss progress on the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The seventh session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP2022) will explore how to strengthen disaster risk governance and build stronger systems for managing all types of risks. **dates:** 23-28 May 2022 **location:** Bali, Indonesia **www:** globalplatform.undrr.org/

Stockholm+50: “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity” will take place five decades after the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The event will provide leaders with an opportunity to draw on 50 years of multilateral environmental action to achieve the bold and urgent action needed to secure a better future on a healthy planet. **dates:** 2-3 June 2022 **location:** Stockholm, Sweden **www:** stockholm50.global/

UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies: The 56th sessions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) will prepare for COP 27, scheduled for November 2022 in Egypt. **dates:** 6-16 June 2022 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** unfccc.int/SB56

Fourth Meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: The fourth meeting of the Working Group is scheduled to finalize the draft text for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework in preparation for the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15). **dates:** 21-26 June 2022 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** cbd.int/meetings

62nd GEF Council: The 62nd GEF Council meeting will convene to evaluate operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities. **dates:** 21-23 June 2022 **location:** McLean, Virginia, US **www:** thegef.org/events/62nd-gef-council-meeting

IPBES 9: The ninth session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services will consider, *inter alia*, the thematic assessment of the sustainable use of wild species, methodological assessment regarding the diverse conceptualization of multiple values of nature and its benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and engagement with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). **dates:** 3-9 July 2022 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** ipbes.net/events/ipbes-9

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2022: The 2022 meeting of the HLPF, under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council, will convene under the theme, “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” **dates:** 5-7 and 11-15 July 2022 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf

UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15): This meeting includes the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD, the 10th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the 4th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing. The meetings are scheduled to take place to review the achievement and delivery of the CBD’s Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. It is also expected to take a final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as decisions on related topics, including capacity building and resource mobilization. **dates:** August 2022 (TBC) **location:** Kunming, China (TBC) **www:** cbd.int/meetings

26th Session of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO): The biennial sessions of COFO bring together heads of forest services and other senior government officials to identify emerging policy and technical issues, seek solutions, and advise the FAO and others on appropriate action. **dates:** 3-7 October 2022 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** fao.org/unfao/govbodies/gsbhome/committee-fo

Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Change Conference: The 27th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27), the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 17), and the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 4) will convene. **dates:** 7-18 November 2022 **location:** Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt **www:** unfccc.int/

CITES CoP 19: The 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) will review progress in the conservation of species included in the CITES Appendices and consider proposals to amend the lists of species in Appendices I and II. **dates:** 14-25 November 2022 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** cites.org/eng/cop19

Ramsar COP 14: The 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands will adopt decisions to administer the Convention and guide its implementation. **dates:** 21-29 November 2022 **location:** Wuhan, China **www:** www.ramsar.org/

UNFF18: The United Nations Forum on Forests will review progress in implementation of the UNSPF and preparations for the MTR, as well as UNFF18 inputs to the HLPF, work toward the global biodiversity framework and other international forest-related developments. **dates:** 8-12 May 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/esa/forests/

UNCCD CRIC 21: The twenty-first session of the Committee for Review of the Implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is tentatively scheduled to take place in Uzbekistan. **dates:** 2023 (TBC) **location:** Uzbekistan **www:** unccd.int/events

UNCCD COP 16: COP 16 is tentatively scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia. **dates:** 2024 (TBC) **location:** Saudi Arabia **www:** unccd.int/events

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org/

Glossary

CBD	Convention of Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
COW	Committee of the Whole
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
CSOs	Civil society organizations
CST	Committee on Science and Technology
DLDD	Desertification, land degradation and drought
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GM	Global Mechanism
GRULAC	Group of Latin American and Caribbean States
ILUP	Integrated land use plans
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IWG	Intergovernmental Working Group
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
NbS	Nature-based solutions
PRAIS	Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDS	Sand and dust storms
SLM	Sustainable land management
SPI	Science-Policy Interface
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	UN General Assembly
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies