

UNCCD COP 16 Highlights: Tuesday, 10 December 2024

Tuesday was Resilience Day at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). During the day, various sessions focused on strengthening resilience against escalating threats from desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), water scarcity, and sand and dust storms (SDS). At the same time, delegates had to strengthen their own resilience to keep up with nearly twelve hours of negotiations in the various contact groups.

In the morning, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) held a brief session to address the agenda items on securing additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms, and the programme of work for the next session of the CRIC.

The contact groups met throughout the day as delegates painstakingly negotiated draft decisions on agenda items under the CRIC, the Committee of the Whole (COW), and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The COW contact group on the budget and the informal group on drought convened as well. An informal group also discussed the draft decision on improving the procedures for the communication of information, as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Louise Baker, Managing Director, Global Mechanism (GM), UNCCD Secretariat, introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/5](#) and [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/INF.1](#)).

The EU reinforced the need to engage technical partners, strengthen tracking mechanisms, including gender-sensitive markers, and making financial flows visible. He requested information on how to leverage resources, including how to address and redirect harmful subsidies. He invited the GM to provide the sources and methodology for domestic and private sector flows. He said any strengthening of the GM should be done with voluntary funds and noted the potential for national financing strategies on land-related objectives to develop and expand work with international development banks and financial institutions.

ARGENTINA supported the establishment of targets for resource mobilization and discussed the need for people in his

region to identify and mobilize resources. He said the GM has a role to play in finding resources from different funds and platforms working across environment and agriculture as well as across different thematic areas.

ECUADOR noted progress on establishing voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets and improved monitoring and reporting systems. They urged additional financial resources to promote innovation and strengthen national capabilities.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS highlighted the importance of small grants and the need for collaboration with governments, multilateral agencies, and relevant stakeholders to provide blended finance. They suggested integrating resource mobilization with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3 and to ensure adequate resources for ongoing GM initiatives on gender equality, land tenure for LDN, SDS, and rangelands. He described a number of priorities, including sustainable agriculture, water, land and ecosystem restoration, indicators for LDN, climate resilience, green jobs, sustainable economic initiatives such as agroforestry and ecotourism, protection of land defenders, and digital platforms.

Programme of work for the 23rd session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention: The Chair urged the CRIC to conclude their work so they can consider the programme of work for the 23rd session of the CRIC.

Contact Groups

COW: The COW contact group met throughout the day, beginning with an update from the facilitator of the informal group on **drought**. He reported progress on finding convergence on establishing an *ad hoc* intergovernmental working group, and that four elements had been developed under the annex: objectives, process, cross-cutting consideration, and mandate. The key outstanding issue is on whether parties will negotiate a framework or protocol.

Delegates then resumed discussions on **land tenure**, where they briskly worked through several paragraphs, finding common ground and making compromises.

Regarding the paragraph on synergies between the Rio Conventions, lengthy discussions focused on: terminology, including whether to reference land tenure “security” or “issues”; referencing implementation; and whether parties should carry out actions “to accelerate” or “with the view of accelerating” progress on the SDGs. Some parties lodged reservations on a proposed

paragraph inviting parties to consider nominating and providing support for national focal points for land tenure.

A lengthy discussion ensued on multiple options for a paragraph about providing financial and technical support to design and implement land administration systems to improve the responsible governance of tenure in accordance with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), and to support the delivery of requested national consultations for integrating land tenure into LDN. Eventually, parties decided to establish a small group to tackle this paragraph as well as the paragraphs on land tenure focal points.

The contact group then addressed the draft decision on **migration**. After resolving terminology on “forced migration and displacement,” they cleaned preambular paragraphs on “terrestrial ecosystems” whose degradation relates to food security and water availability, and a paragraph on vulnerable groups.

They then moved onto operative text, agreeing to a paragraph on territorial development. On the implementation of sustainable land and ecosystem management, parties discussed at length: including mention of support of international finance; the appropriate reference and link to land-use planning; and whether to reference conservation.

Regarding the paragraph on supporting the implementation of initiatives, parties discussed how to appropriately reference the link between land tenure security, DLDD, and migration, with some parties also wanting to reference only “land tenure.” Parties also discussed whether to include qualifiers regarding the availability of resources.

CST: The CST contact group met throughout the day. In textual deliberations on **aridity trends**, progress was initially swift, but the paragraph on collaboration with other bodies proved contentious, with some parties preferring to include specific reference to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, while others preferred to keep the language general without naming specific bodies. One party suggested a small group meet to consider the three different proposals to find a compromise.

Deliberations on the remainder of the decision on aridity trends and impacts continued throughout the day, with one party offering to facilitate negotiations. Good progress was made following a series of bilateral discussions and the contact group agreed on the entire decision by mid-afternoon. The group agreed to move the paragraph related to technology transfer to the CST draft decision on knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation.

On the next draft decision addressing recommendations emanating from the Science-Policy Interface’s (SPI) analysis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Sixth Assessment Report (IPCC AR6), delegates discussed whether to encourage parties to increase efforts to promote sustainable land management, especially on agricultural land. After much discussion, they agreed to delete the paragraph in question.

They also debated minimizing tradeoffs between different ecosystem services and biodiversity and between socio-economic objectives, including climate change mitigation and adaptation. In

this context, they discussed how the paragraphs align with IPCC and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) definitions. Further informal consultations did not make much progress.

After bracketing a paragraph including reference to subsidies and financing mechanisms, pending resolution of the preambular paragraph related to this topic, delegates moved swiftly through the remainder of the decision text. The contact group decided to move onto the next draft decision, with the facilitator encouraging parties to continue informal consultations outside of the contact group.

The group began discussions on the draft decision on knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation, and deliberations continued into the night.

Other Contact and Informal Groups: The CRIC contact group addressed the draft decision on collaboration with the Global Environment Facility in the afternoon. The COW contact group on the budget continued to make progress, as did the informal group on drought. An informal group under the Joint CRIC-CST contact group made progress on the draft decision on improving the procedures for the communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP.

In the Corridors

Parties are negotiating at least 26 decisions at COP 16. The number as well as the speed at which parties discuss them, led one participant to say, “it’s like a mirage, in the desert,” describing the mountain of decisions where negotiators need to find agreement.

Contact group meetings were woven throughout the day in ever longer and more intense sessions, requiring delegates to request huddles, necessary breaks, and snacks from the Secretariat. The pace meant that some contact groups went into over time, and ran into the timeslots of others. Some delegations were running between contact groups and informal meetings, facing challenges as they tried to split their time. Still, the talks went late Tuesday night, despite the pleas by some delegates to finish earlier. The COW contact group on other matters began negotiations at 10:00 am and was scheduled to continue with only a few short breaks for 12 hours.

Not everyone is pessimistic. “This process is slow,” said one delegate, “but not slower than climate change negotiations.” Others think the schedule is both inevitable and promising. “Delegates are taking their time to ensure good and comprehensive decisions on really critical issues,” someone noted, recalling the importance of meaningful and effective decision outcomes. They continued, “It will all be worth it if sound advancement of sustainable land management is achieved at COP 16.”

Ultimately, contrasting feelings of hope and worry flowed throughout the corridors. When asked about the current stage of talks, one delegate running between contact groups said, “Oh no, it’s already Tuesday!” while another exclaimed “Don’t worry, it’s only Tuesday!”