

Summary of the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 2-13 December 2024

It is fitting that the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was celebrated in the desert city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, at its 16th meeting Conference of the Parties (COP 16). At its adoption in June 1994, parties made a promise to the world that they would combat desertification and mitigate the impacts of drought that have devastating effects on peoples' lives across the world. At COP 16, parties came together to further this work with an impressive list of agenda items aimed at guiding the further implementation of the Convention.

Many anticipated that a decision on drought would be a key outcome at this COP. However, in spite of two weeks of intense negotiations, delegates were ultimately unable to agree on whether to negotiate a framework or a legally binding protocol for addressing drought worldwide. That said, a major milestone on drought was still achieved with the launch of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, which had received over USD 12 billion in pledges by the end of COP 16. Eyes will now turn to COP 17 in Mongolia in two years' time, to see whether parties can bridge the negotiating impasse and agree on a way forward.

Despite the setback on drought, parties reached consensus on a range of important thematic issues related to addressing desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD). Key decisions include one on the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs), which paved the way for the establishment of two new caucuses: one for Indigenous Peoples and another for local communities. This outcome will ensure future discussions at the UNCCD remain grounded and informed by the experiences and expertise of people on the ground.

The COP 16 decision on gender seeks to address the data gap on distinguishing how women and men are affected by DLDD, an issue closely linked to issues such as land tenure, agriculture, and forced migration. Decisions on agriculture and rangelands, which are new issues on the UNCCD agenda, will shape future discussions and the importance of the Convention by bringing agriculture ministries and farmers to the table, and expanding the scope of ecosystems addressed by the Convention.

COP 16 also expanded the work of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI)—both in the number of independent scientists and its mandate—deepening the knowledge base and expertise to reinforce

implementation of the Convention. At the same time, the official adoption of the Dialogues and Declarations from the various caucuses and groups (including youth, civil society, business, and Indigenous Peoples) help to illustrate the Convention's long-term commitment to ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives, while helping ensure it remains a "People's Convention."

UNCCD COP 16 convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 2-13 December 2024. Touted as the largest UNCCD COP ever, 24,638 individuals registered for the public "Green Zone," and another 20,576 people were registered for official events in the "Blue Zone." Over 580 side events took place throughout the two weeks and 141 ministers, vice ministers, and other high-level officials participated in the High-level Segment.

A Brief History of the UNCCD

The UNCCD is one of the three Rio Conventions, along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). UN Member States called for the development of a convention to address desertification and drought in Agenda 21, the programme of action adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit).

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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 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.

The UNCCD COP currently has two subsidiary bodies: the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

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 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 at **COP 8** in Madrid, Spain, in 2007. 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 the 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) for engagement with scientists, 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.

Recent Meetings

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 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. In anticipation of the 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 for 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The budget was formally adopted following a communication from the COP President. The interim programme and budget allowed the Convention and its Secretariat to continue operating in 2022.

COP 15 took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in May 2022. 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. 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 SDG 15 and related 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.

UNCCD COP 16 Report

On Monday, [2 December](#), COP 15 President Alain-Richard Donwahi, Côte d'Ivoire, opened the meeting, noting that COP 15 made significant progress in addressing land degradation, focusing on innovation, financing, and involvement of local communities, women and youth. He reiterated the call from African Ministers for the establishment of a legally binding protocol on drought under the UNCCD. He then handed the gavel over to newly-elected COP 16 President Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen AlFadley, Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture, Saudi Arabia.

COP 16 President AlFadley noted the Middle East is one of the regions most impacted by DLDD. He stressed the importance of international partnerships and highlighted Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the Saudi Green Initiative, which aims to rehabilitate 40 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.

Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of the Riyadh Region, emphasized the role of local governments in complementing strategies and policies developed at the national level. Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, via video, noted 40% of the world is affected by land degradation and urged COP 16 to prioritize: strengthening international cooperation on reversing land degradation and boosting rehabilitation of degraded lands; ramping

up land restoration efforts; and prioritizing financial investment for DLDD.

Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary, reminded participants that land degradation and drought affect all life on earth, threaten food and energy security, force migration, and obstruct trade. He expressed hope this will be remembered as the COP that adopts the most important decisions on addressing drought.

Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai, Prime Minister of Mongolia, expressed gratitude that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) declared 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists and welcomed delegates to COP 17 in Mongolia during that year.

Johan Rockström, Director, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, presented the [Special Report on Land](#), underlining the links between land, resilience, and planetary health. He emphasized the importance of decarbonizing energy systems while also improving sustainable stewardship of land to limit global temperature rise.

Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha, Deputy Minister of Environment, Saudi Arabia, announced the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, which will promote multilateral efforts to take a preventative and proactive approach to drought.

Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser, Chairman, Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB), on behalf of the Arab Coordination Group Member Institutions, reaffirmed their partnership with the UNCCD and the importance of shifting from reactive responses to proactive resilience measures in order to collectively address the challenges of DLDD.

Adoption of the Agenda: On Monday afternoon, [2 December](#), the COP adopted the agenda and the programme of work, as orally amended ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/1/Rev.1](#)). The COP agreed to establish a Friends of the Chair Group facilitated by the COP Presidency to work on a ministerial declaration.

Election of Officers: The plenary elected the following Vice-Presidents: Angola and Morocco (Africa); Mongolia (Asia-Pacific); Chile and Trinidad and Tobago (Latin America and the Caribbean); and Germany and Switzerland (Western European and Others). On Friday, during the closing plenary, the COP Presidency announced the election of Azerbaijan (Central and Eastern Europe).

Establishment of Subsidiary Bodies: The plenary agreed to establish a Committee of the Whole (COW), to be chaired by Anna Luise (Italy).

Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, CSOs and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers: The COP adopted the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/14](#)).

Special High-level Segment

Ministerial dialogue on drought resilience: From Geneva to Riyadh and beyond: Enhancing global and national policy instruments for a proactive drought management approach: On Monday afternoon, [2 December](#), this ministerial dialogue highlighted the urgent need for innovative approaches to address the systemic impacts of drought, focusing on strengthening preparedness and resilience at all levels. COP 16 President AlFadley stressed the importance of adopting a new approach to tackle drought, underscoring that adequate financing and capacity building are needed to build national resilience.

Co-Chair Cary Fowler, UN Special Envoy for Global Food Security, noted the success of tackling droughts will come from deploying a range of options from farm level to landscape and government level. Co-Chair Bernice Swarts, Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa, underscored the importance of mitigating against the effects of drought.

In his keynote address, Achim Steiner, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, called for a risk-informed approach and efforts to strengthen drought resilience-building initiatives by improving everyone's understanding of drivers of drought.

Commending the launch of the Riyadh Drought Resilience Partnership, Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser, Chairman, IsDB, pledged USD 1 billion to strengthening drought resilience approaches by 2030. Other panelists discussed how drought creates far greater deficits in degraded lands and deserts, affecting developing countries ten times more than developed countries, and the need for resilience-building actions, research, and innovative financing.

During ministerial interventions from the floor, all countries reported droughts are becoming more frequent and severe. Speakers highlighted efforts to develop early warning systems and ensure water systems are more efficient and resilient, including by introducing water saving technologies and irrigation. Many stressed the need for financial support to address reduced soil fertility and loss of fertility in livestock due to drought, and build capacity of communities facing the compounded effects of climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and drought.

Ministerial dialogue on finance: Unlocking public and private finance for land restoration and drought resilience: On Tuesday morning, [3 December](#), this dialogue addressed the critical need for increased investments to combat DLDD.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw emphasized that USD 1 billion per day is needed to contribute to land restoration by 2030. He also noted USD 2.6 trillion is spent every year to subsidize activities that are harmful to the environment.

UNDP Administrator Steiner underlined that addressing DLDD will require USD 23 trillion by 2050. He emphasized that the GEF, Green Climate Fund, and Adaptation Fund offer significant opportunities for financing, public finance offers untapped potential, and banks have identified new related risks in nature-related financial disclosures.

Muhammad Sulaiman al Jasser, President, IsDB, said the IsDB has mobilized over USD 5 billion from private capital markets to address land degradation, drought, and water scarcity.

Abdulhamid Alkhalifa, President, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund, said the OPEC Fund allocated 34% of financing to climate action in 2023, with the aim of reaching 40% by 2030.

Mahmoud Mohieldin, UN Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda, stressed that addressing land tenure is essential as 30% of the world population does not have land rights.

Simon Stiell, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, drew attention to the climate finance goal agreed at UNFCCC COP 29. He said multilateral development banks should deploy funds in tandem with national implementation ambitions across the Rio Conventions.

Muhammad Sulaiman al Jasser, on behalf of the Arab Coordination Group (ACG), committed to support the UNCCD's land restoration agenda.

Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), stressed the need to diversify the sourcing of finance to address the triple threat of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Other panelists called for: setting a clear, united vision for land and water preservation; establishing partnerships for sustainable land practices; shifting the USD 635 billion spent every year to subsidize the use of fertilizers to instead support farmer's actions to reduce land degradation, and improving land security and public health.

In ministerial statements, many focused on the need for: simplifying access to finance; increasing grant-based funding, green bonds, public-private partnerships, new financial support, and technology transfer; building synergies across the Rio Conventions; recognizing the benefits of existing partnerships and financing mechanisms; establishing long-term, robust financing strategies; enhancing collaborative policy frameworks; negotiating a legally binding instrument on drought under the UNCCD; and repurposing subsidies.

Ministerial dialogue on migration: Impacts of land degradation and drought on forced migration, security and prosperity: On Tuesday afternoon, [3 December](#), this dialogue examined how sustainable land management (SLM) and drought resilience can address the interconnected challenges of land degradation, forced migration, and conflict.

In his keynote address, Adel bin Ahmed Al Jubeir, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and Climate Envoy, Saudi Arabia, stressed that land degradation and drought does not just impact people and countries with arid climates and landscapes, but affects everyone on Earth. He highlighted Saudi Arabia's initiatives to restore or reduce land degradation by 50% by 2040.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw drew attention to the correlation between land degradation, forced migration, and conflict. Highlighting that 40% of cross border conflicts are linked to disputes over natural resources such as land, minerals, and water, he encouraged actors to focus on the root causes of conflicts.

Baaba Maal, UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador, shared stories of impressive work by women's associations and youth, calling for greater support for these groups at the local level.

Carlos Andrés Alvarado Quesada, former President of Costa Rica, reminded participants that we live in an era of complexity, and said narratives used to frame issues and solutions tend to simplify reality. He warned that a failure to embrace the nexus between land degradation, desertification, and migration will lead to false debates and false solutions.

Ugochi Daniels, Deputy Director-General for Operations, International Organization for Migration, highlighted the Kampala Declaration on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change, and the Baku Call on Climate Action for Peace, Relief and Recovery as examples of powerful frameworks for bridging the gap between migration, environmental change, and peace.

Ministers highlighted how increased climate change, DLDD, and water scarcity have led to forced internal and international migration. They also illustrated how DLDD and floods present a threat to food security and lead to increasing urbanization. Several ministers highlighted how armed conflict can also increase the risk of land degradation, undermine agricultural capacity, and force

migration. Many called for collective global action for vulnerable and marginalized communities and a 360° approach to address these complex, interconnected problems.

Closing of the High-Level Segment: UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw announced that 141 ministers and vice ministers participated in the sessions. He also announced that the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership announced during the opening session of COP 16 had received pledges of more than USD 3 billion so far. Osama Ibrahim Faqeha, COP 16 Presidency, informed participants that the Riyadh Political Declaration would be annexed to the COP 16 report.

High-Level Interactive Dialogue: Gender Caucus

On Wednesday, [4 December](#), Tarja Halonen, UNCCD Land Ambassador and Co-Chair of the UNCCD Gender Caucus, opened the session and underscored that women and girls in rural communities bear the greatest burden of DLDD and their empowerment is crucial for addressing urgent land challenges.

COP President AlFadley noted that women's empowerment enhances SLM and the preservation of ecosystems and builds community capacity for long-term resilience against DLDD. Executive Secretary Thiaw highlighted the "shocking figure" that women produce up to 80% of food in developing countries but only own 13% of agricultural land in the world.

Panelists highlighted that, at the current rate, it will take 162 years to achieve gender parity in environmental leadership within ministries. They said investing in women is not only a moral imperative but also contributes to building community resilience. Some called for a global coalition for future rangelands and pastoralism solutions, focusing on gender equality and the role of youth, children, and women. Speakers also highlighted the structural barriers women face in relations to property rights.

Interventions from the floor highlighted: the need to address discriminatory practices and systemic barriers restricting women's empowerment; National Gender Strategies, gender mainstreaming, integrated gender-responsive policies, and gender-responsive budgeting; women's participation in the blue, green, and circular economies; and links between the gender gap and food insecurity.

Open Dialogues with Civil Society Organizations

Participants convened for two half-day sessions of Open Dialogues organized by CSOs.

Inclusive and Sustainable Agri-food systems: On Thursday, [5 December](#), delegates convened for the first Open Dialogue. UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw opened the session, stating that these sessions create a unique opportunity to integrate CSOs into the UNCCD process. Mauro Centritto, Moderator, praised the Open Dialogues, which provide a platform to amplify on-the-ground perspectives on combating land degradation and advancing LDN.

Keynote Speaker Siddhesh Sakore, 2024 UNCCD Land Hero, shared his journey back to farming after obtaining an engineering degree. He highlighted ways his research on severe soil degradation aims to bring positive change to farmers' lives while promoting sustainable agriculture and social and environmental well-being.

Panelist Erimelinda Temba, Islands of Peace, highlighted their work supporting communities in northern Tanzania through agroecological farming, discussing successes including the diversification of farming practices, the revitalization of traditional seed systems, and land restoration activities.

Priyanka Patil, Golden Era Eco Services, shared stories of resilience from rural India, explaining how a shift towards activities such as crop rotation, mixed cropping, and water management could help counter the harms from intensive food production, which threatens food production and harms communities.

Glenda Mangia, Fundación CAUCE, spoke of her work building capacity among young people to reverse the destructive cycle of soil degradation stemming from monoculture farming and using fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified seeds.

Anand Ethirajalu, Conscious Planet, shared the case study of coconut farmers transitioning to agroecological practices, thereby improving soils and increasing productivity by 55% in a few years. He said using animal urine and dung in drip irrigation systems to build back soil health has the highest potential to improve soil productivity.

Sopike Babalashvili, Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, noted that when equipped with the right tools and accessible funding within an enabling environment, youth can harness their potential to reimagine innovative and creative approaches to food system transformation.

Ali Aii Shatou, Mbororo Pastoralists of Cameroon, discussed the deep ecological and spiritual significance of food and land to Indigenous Peoples. She noted the limitations of an agri-food system approach that narrowly views food as a commodity, stressing the need for a holistic approach that centers the ecological relationship between food, people, and the land as a cultural way of life.

During the dialogue, discussions focused on:

- the critical role of CSOs and the importance of enhanced civil society participation in decision making;
- land as the common ground linking the challenges across the Conventions, noting improving soil health helps combat desertification, biodiversity loss, and climate change;
- the importance of having practices for sharing strategies, celebrating traditional food systems, and diversifying crops;
- the importance of monitoring impacts and knowledge exchange;
- ways to increase the participation of Indigenous Peoples;
- recognizing youth as catalyzers who can leverage technology in appropriate ways to promote education; and
- the role of traditional knowledge and local seed varieties as an important alternative for food system resilience.

Many supported a statement by INDIGENOUS PEOPLES asking for parties to change “agri-food systems” to “food systems and agriculture” because the latter goes beyond the concept of a commodity, instead recognizing how food is rooted to culture and “connected to everything.” CSOs provided recommendations for sustainable and inclusive agri-food systems.

The power and impact of land governance in communities across the globe: Opening the second Open Dialogue on Monday, [9 December](#), Tarja Halonen, Former President of Finland and UNCCD Land Ambassador, remarked on the importance of inclusive solution-building, and highlighted the significance of local, Indigenous, and traditional knowledges and the need for horizontal knowledge exchanges. Ellen Otaru Okoedion, Journalist Environmental Association, moderated the session.

Keynote speaker Celeste Drake, International Labour Organization, noted the importance of inclusive dialogues for elaborating solutions that last.

Panelist Tiffany Marcelle, Caribbean Youth Environment Network, emphasized the importance of youth empowerment and

their role as innovative problem solvers, and called on parties to recognize the “profound lessons” Indigenous knowledges offer for SLM. Mawe Moube Épse Nzoda, Youth in Action for Sustainable Development, Cameroon, detailed work they are doing to support the sustainable use and harvest of eco-forest products to empower woman.

Jiajia Luo, China Green Foundation, described how the Million Forest project led to the planting of 2.6 million trees on the border of the Tengger and Badain Jaran Deserts by using a crowd-funding approach among young people and awareness raising. Valentina Kastarakova, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee, and Representative of the Altai Region, Russia, shared the experiences of western Siberian communities using traditional knowledge to replace expensive fertilizer and harmful herbicides, and called on the SPI to integrate Indigenous knowledges with their free, prior, and informed consent.

Interventions addressed:

- the ways CSOs “reflect the lives of those on the front lines” and are instrumental in facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement;
- the importance of CSOs for ensuring decisions are scientifically robust and socially and economically sustainable;
- speakers’ support for meaningful and effective participation of youth as a driving force of innovation and action to promote environmental sustainability;
- the need for involving Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and peoples with disabilities to address DLDD and achieve LDN targets; and
- the importance of establishing an Indigenous People’s Caucus under the UNCCD.

Committee of the Whole

On Monday [2 December](#), COW Chair Anna Luise (Italy), opened the meeting, emphasizing the need for a collaborative approach to reach common objectives. The COW established two contact groups: one on programme and budget, facilitated by Balchinlvsan Lkhagvasuren (Mongolia), and one on other matters, facilitated by Asher Nkegbe (Ghana). Each agenda item was opened in the COW plenary, negotiated in a contact group and then adopted by the closing COW plenary on 13 December.

2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD: Review of progress in the implementation of the UNCCD communication plan:

On Monday, [9 December](#), the Secretariat introduced this agenda item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/3](#)). During initial discussions, ECUADOR and the EU emphasized that communications should be science-based. The EU welcomed the extension to a broader, non-English audience. The Committee took note of the report.

Follow-up on the midterm evaluation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework:

On Wednesday, [4 December](#), Daniel Van Assche, Chair of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG), presented its report ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/2](#)). The IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (Annex V parties) discussed the importance of extending the Convention’s mandate beyond arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas as crucial for achieving LDN. The EU, supported by AUSTRALIA, preferred a shortened draft decision, with recommendations addressed under their respective agenda items to avoid the risk of duplication. VENEZUELA expressed support for a recommendation for reforming the UNCCD science-policy guidance approach to ensure better visibility and responsiveness to country-level

needs, highlighting including Indigenous Peoples' knowledges. BANGLADESH highlighted the need for a recommendation to address the gap between land degradation and the pace of financial investment. The item was sent to the COW contact group on other matters.

In the contact group on Monday, [9 December](#), the Secretariat proposed moving specific paragraphs in the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)22](#)), including on the private sector, CSOs, synergies, gender, the SPI, communication of information, and resource mobilization into the relevant decision under each of those agenda items to ensure consistency.

On Thursday, [12 December](#), delegates discussed a request to the Secretariat to prepare a generic list of main tasks for national focal points and Science and Technology Correspondents (STCs), before agreeing the Secretariat would instead assist in national efforts to effectively coordinate and share information about the Convention at the national and local levels to support implementation.

They also addressed: whether to reference “nature-based solutions” and/or “ecosystem-based approaches,” and “regenerative” or “sustainable” agriculture in relation to defining and promoting the use of approaches and practices for environmental and socio-economic gains. They debated inclusion of language, noting a significant portion of land degradation occurs beyond arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas, and how this affected the Convention’s mandate. On Friday, 13 December, parties agreed to replace “regenerative” agriculture with “agroforestry,” reflecting language from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.21), the COP:

- invites parties and relevant stakeholders to enhance national information sharing and coordination on the preparation for and the follow-up to UNCCD meetings, to integrate the implementation of the Convention into national policies, planning, and budgeting systems;
- requests the Executive Secretary and invites relevant regional and international organizations and UN bodies to support the capacity of national focal points and STCs to enhance national information sharing and coordination;
- encourages parties categorized as non-affected to enhance their implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Framework, including setting voluntary LDN targets and submitting national reports;
- requests the Executive Secretary to initiate a comprehensive discussion among parties on how to best reaffirm the global role and importance of the UNCCD in deepening political commitment and cooperation, and requests the Secretariat to present recommendations stemming from this process to COP 17;
- requests the Executive Secretary to translate the LDN concept and methodology into a concrete tool that is simple, concise, and easily understandable by policymakers and the general public; and
- requests the Secretariat to continue exploring different frameworks and systems to identify possibilities to ease the current data collection and verification tasks of parties, and further develop capacity building for national reporting.

Promotion and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies: On Monday, [9 December](#), the Secretariat introduced this item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)4](#)), which over the course of the meeting was often referred to as the “synergies” decision.

CHINA reinforced “independent voices” and autonomy of the Conventions, while REPUBLIC OF KOREA emphasized synergies require effective communication. COLOMBIA, GUATEMALA, and INDIA emphasized international cooperation. COLOMBIA called for a financing strategy that mobilizes resources for synergies. MEXICO and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) highlighted the outcome of the Bern III Conference on Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC said synergies make the Rio Conventions more adaptable, and the EU said synergies would improve implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The EU and UNEP emphasized the role of nature-based solutions, while URUGUAY cautioned these can be positive for mitigation but negative for LDN. PANAMA called attention to the UNDP Nature Pledge uniting the three Rio Conventions. The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) highlighted the centrality of agrifood systems. CSOs emphasized synergies among UN entities on SLM. UN WOMEN stressed the importance of gender-responsive implementation across the Rio Conventions.

In the COW contact group on other matters on Wednesday, [11 December](#), and Friday, 13 December, discussions on the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)22](#)) covered a range of issues, including:

- acknowledging that implementation of the Convention benefits from strong and effective collaboration for leveraging synergies and the significance of addressing DLDD to achieve objectives on climate change and biodiversity;
- phrasing linked to respecting the mandates of the conventions and taking into account the Secretariat’s limited financial and human resources;
- whether to request the Secretariat to continue strengthening interlinkages to scientific bodies, namely the IPCC, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and the SPI; and
- the terminology for referencing who will provide financial contributions.

Parties debated whether to refer to “synergies,” “relationships,” or “cooperation” and how to address them in terms of international and national work. Recurring discussions took place on whether to refer to individual multilateral environmental agreements or specific national implementation plans in both preambular and operative text. While basic capacity-building activities were readily agreed, more specific actions on interlinking coordination and policy objectives between the UNCCD and climate change and biodiversity policies and instruments remained challenging.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.20), the COP:

- encourages parties to leverage synergies at the national level in the planning and implementation processes of the three Rio Conventions through integrated actions and approaches;
- invites parties to prioritize holistic and integrated action to tackle DLDD, and interlinkages with climate change and biodiversity loss;

- invites parties to engage at the national level to explore opportunities to foster cooperation among the national focal points of the Rio Conventions and other relevant international processes to minimize policy fragmentation;
- invites developed country parties and other parties, international financial organizations, and others to consider contributing, financially or in-kind, to global partnerships, alliances and coalitions, and regional and bilateral cooperation to address DLDD;
- requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to promote the sharing of data collected under each convention and initiate joint science-policy publications, among others; and
- requests the Secretariat and appropriate Convention bodies and institutions to continue to intensify efforts to strengthen the interlinking of the scientific bodies associated with the Rio Conventions (IPBES, IPCC, SPI) and with other relevant data-providing initiatives.

Policy frameworks and thematic issues: Migration: On Wednesday, [4 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/18](#)). ALGERIA said an integrated approach is needed to address DLDD as a driver of migration and called for investing in the reclamation and rehabilitation of land and economic systems. The EU stressed that all ecosystems are fundamental for food and freshwater security and promoted regenerative agriculture and agroforestry, including silvopasture and active grazing. VENEZUELA: highlighted unregulated urban development; advocated for legal and social protections to avoid displacement and internal migration; and called for financial and technical assistance to build capacity.

FAO stressed durable solutions for people facing forced displacement and reaffirmed FAO's commitment to continue developing agrifood systems for resilience and a peaceful future. CSOs called for: prioritizing investment in land restoration practices to mitigate against forced migration, inclusive governance, aligning national migration and land use policies with international frameworks, accessible funding mechanisms, and investing in data production and Indigenous knowledge.

The draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)) was sent to the COW contact group on other matters, where it was discussed on Friday, [6 December](#), Monday, [9 December](#), and Tuesday, [10 December](#). Discussions covered, among other things: whether to refer to reducing “forced migration and displacement,” “migration and forced displacement,” or “migration and displacement” in relation to promoting sustainable territorial development; how to specify “terrestrial ecosystems” whose degradation relates to food security and water availability; whether to mention support of finance, land-use planning, and conservation in relation to the implementation of sustainable land and ecosystem management; and how to appropriately reference the link between land tenure security, DLDD, and migration in relation to supporting implementation of initiatives.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.9), the COP:

- encourages parties to promote sustainable territorial development, including multilevel, integrated and inclusive land governance, to strengthen urban-rural linkages, address DLDD, and create social and economic opportunities that increase rural resilience and livelihood stability;

- encourages parties to implement land use planning that integrates sustainable land and ecosystem management, including land restoration, at national and subnational levels, by enhancing understanding of how changing rural-urban interactions affect the livelihoods of low-income people and people in vulnerable situations;
- encourages parties to support the implementation of initiatives that address the impact of DLDD as one of the drivers of migration, including by restoring degraded land and ecosystems and facilitating access to land tenure;
- requests the GM to support resource mobilization for integrated initiatives that address the impacts of DLDD as one of the drivers of migration to provide economic opportunities for youth and livelihoods for people in vulnerable situations; and
- requests the Secretariat to support subregional, regional, and international cooperation and initiatives that promote sustainable land and water management and drought resilience to help mitigate one of the drivers of forced migration and displacement.

Drought: On Monday, [2 December](#), the Secretariat introduced this item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/15](#)). Alfred Prospere (Saint Lucia), Co-Chair of the IWG on Drought, introduced the Group's report ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/20](#)), which outlines seven proposed options on drought:

- an amendment to the Convention;
- a COP decision on collaboration with the GEF;
- COP guidance to the GM;
- a global framework on drought resilience;
- political declarations;
- the development of a protocol; and
- a special and ambitious COP decision on drought.

During initial discussions in plenary, the AFRICAN GROUP and TONGA called for a comprehensive and robust legally binding instrument that will allow countries to meet their national priorities and commitments. The US, EU, and ARGENTINA supported solutions arising from existing frameworks, with the US saying that, although business-as-usual is not the correct approach, neither is a legally binding, one-size-fits-all policy. ARGENTINA called for regional approaches for addressing drought. CHINA urged parties to consider that the legally binding and non-binding options presented in the report are not mutually exclusive.

BRAZIL, MEXICO, and the MARSHALL ISLANDS asked parties to be sensitive to the need for increased resource mobilization so financial and technical support can help address the collective challenges that parties face. CSOs urged parties to prioritize inclusive, rights-based, and community approaches addressing drought and strengthening the participation of women, youth, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples.

The COW contact group on other matters discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)) on Wednesday, [4 December](#), and Thursday, [5 December](#). Although they reached agreement not to consider an amendment to the Convention, differing opinions remained on which option or combination of options to choose. The Chair established an informal group, facilitated by Saudi Arabia, to agree on a way forward. The group met throughout the rest of the meeting.

On Tuesday, [10 December](#), and Wednesday, [11 December](#), the informal group updated the contact group that they had found common ground to propose establishing an *ad hoc* IWG, and agreed on the group's objectives, process, cross-cutting considerations, and mandate. On Thursday, [12 December](#), the COW contact group

split so the contact group could discuss the informal group's text. The informal group presented a "clean" draft decision, except for the question of whether parties would negotiate a framework or protocol. However, contact group delegates proposed new amendments on the majority of the text, which led to heated debate.

Following further informal consultations on Friday, 13 December, which were extended into the early hours on Saturday, parties still could not reach agreement. When they returned once again to the contact group, tense exchanges ensued, and parties had little choice but to conclude negotiations and agree only to a procedural decision. The COW resumed at 1:30 am to approve the decision, and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.22), the COP:

- takes note of the report of the IWG on Drought and the options contained therein; and
- decides to continue discussions on the basis of the progress made at COP 16, as contained in the annex to the decision, with a view to adopting a decision at COP 17.

The annex indicates it "does not reflect consensus," but reflects progress made at COP 16.

Gender: The Secretariat presented the document on gender (ICCD/COP(16)/17). CHILE, EU, AUSTRALIA, and others called for the promotion of gender equality throughout the Convention and gender parity in delegations. CHINA supported the continuation of the Gender Caucus at future UNCCD meetings. BAHRAIN and MONGOLIA supported including gender in environment and development strategies. CHILE, EU, and INDIA called for robust gender disaggregated data. Others supported developing gender-responsive indicators.

The COW contact group discussed the draft decision (ICCD/COP(16)/22) on Wednesday, 11 December, and Friday, 13 December. New text was introduced on women's access to land and natural resources and also on those in vulnerable situations, and in relation to halting biodiversity loss and achieving land restoration targets. There was a lengthy discussion on the word "intersectionality," which a number of parties opposed, and it was deleted. There was also a debate over the phrase "gender responsive" or "gender sensitive" policies and programmes. Eventually, delegates agreed to use "gender specific."

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.18), the COP:

- requests the Secretariat to monitor and promote full and effective gender parity across the Convention and report on this data;
- invites parties to collect sex-disaggregated data through their national statistics offices and systems;
- encourages parties, in the implementation of the Gender Action Plan, to pay special attention to all forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, when planning, designing, and implementing gender responsive policies and programming related to DLDD;
- requests the Secretariat and relevant bodies of the Convention to develop indicators for the next Strategic Framework to close the gender data gap in the UNCCD and better assess the differentiated impact of DLDD on men, women, boys, and girls;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM, in consultation with potential contributors and partners, to identify and apply, according to UNCCD rules and procedures, means for further

facilitating women delegates' capacity building and effective participation;

- requests the Secretariat to continue collaboration with other conventions and international organizations such as UN Women to support implementation of the Gender Action Plan and its roadmap, as well as on critical issues for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment;
- requests the Secretariat to facilitate the convening of the Gender Caucus as a part of the official programme of work of the COP and the CRIC on an annual basis; and
- requests the GM to continue to establish, strengthen, and evaluate partnerships to design flagship initiatives and projects that promote and integrate gender equality and women's empowerment in establishing land tenure, addressing DLDD, and achieving LDN.

Sand and Dust Storms (SDS): On Friday, 6 December, the Secretariat introduced the document on SDS (ICCD/COP(16)/16). Many, including the AFRICAN GROUP, SYRIA, INDIA, BAHRAIN, and GRENADA, supported regional and global cooperation for SDS management. The US asked for clarity on the progress to develop a global SDS information programme. The UNCCD Secretariat responded that the global SDS implementation initiative developed by the GM will be tailored to regional, national, and subnational circumstances.

IRAQ and VENEZUELA supported national and regional action plans. MEXICO said SDS should be part of national LDN strategies, and development plans across sectors regionally and nationally. The EU underscored the importance of bilateral and multilateral efforts. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA described cooperative efforts in Northeast Asia and called for support from the GM and the GEF.

The AFRICAN GROUP, TUNISIA, SYRIA, and MEXICO called for capacity building. VENEZUELA called for mobilizing financial resources to address SDS, with GRENADA specifying the need to invest in understanding the extent of social, health, environmental, and economic impacts of SDS. KENYA, the FAO, and CSOs called for addressing drivers of SDS, with KENYA identifying anthropogenic deforestation, overgrazing, and unsustainable agricultural practices.

The UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) encouraged sustainable agriculture and increasing vegetation. CHINA called for promoting sustainable land and water management practices. TAJIKISTAN promoted biodiversity, eco-friendly mindsets, and increasing forest coverage. The EU supported nature-based solutions and soil-loss mitigation measures.

The AFRICAN GROUP, CHINA, VENEZUELA, KENYA, TAJIKISTAN, and CSOs called for enhancing monitoring and early warning systems. SAUDI ARABIA praised the Early Warnings for All initiative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Middle East office.

FAO described the UNCCD-FAO Guideline on the Integration of Sand and Dust Storm Management into Key Policy Areas and drew attention to the UN Decade on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, 2025-2035. TURKİYE said the Guideline needs to be adapted to specific contexts by taking into account national circumstances. The COW forwarded the draft decision to the contact group on other matters.

The contact group discussed the draft decision (ICCD/COP(16)/22) on Tuesday, 10 December in the evening, and completed discussions on Wednesday, 11 December. Discussions

focused on, among others: technical and financial support from regional and multilateral financial institutions and relevant stakeholders; the development of global implementation initiatives for addressing anthropogenic SDS drivers and gaps; and proposed additional text referencing the Samarkand Declaration on SDS, presented at CRIC 21.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.13), the COP:

- urges parties to enhance the integration and cohesion of SDS impact mitigation measures, including those addressing anthropogenic sources at national and subnational levels, with a view to advancing integrated land use planning and landscape management;
- urges parties to strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms and regional initiatives that contribute to addressing SDS linked to DLDD;
- invites regional and multilateral financial institutions, technical agencies and organizations, institutions, and other relevant stakeholders to provide technical and financial support to source and affected country parties to design and implement national and regional policies and action plans;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to promote and refine the SDS Toolbox, including the Global SDS Source Base-map and other geographic information system platforms, data, and tools; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to support countries, regions, and subregions to develop SDS strategies and action plans as well as to implement and finance SDS-related projects and programmes.

Land tenure: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/19](#)) on Wednesday, [4 December](#).

The AFRICAN GROUP, supported by BOTSWANA, MADAGASCAR, and KENYA, called for the establishment of national focal points for land tenure. The EU and VENEZUELA called for expanded national consultations on land governance using an inclusive and participatory process.

The US highlighted gender equality and asked for more research on the link between land tenure security and good land governance, in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT). AUSTRALIA noted land security provides economic security, while enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls, and Indigenous Peoples. MEXICO stressed the need for integrating land tenure, gender mainstreaming, and programmes focused on women, Indigenous Peoples, and youth. GUYANA drew attention to their legislation on Indigenous land tenure, called for increased financial and technical support, and urged for the VGGT to remain voluntary.

The EU and BOTSWANA called for guidance on how to integrate land tenure in LDN target-setting efforts. CHINA noted land tenure is in their constitution. The UK described efforts to work with other governments to develop more transparent and effective land governance systems and land tenure. KENYA highlighted key entry points for integrating land tenure into land restoration initiatives and using land tenure data to inform LDN plans. BURKINA FASO noted, despite efforts, they are far from being on track with LDN. CHAD said limited progress on land tenure is due to the lack of investment.

FAO said it has mobilized partners with its own resources to support parties on land tenure and described the UNCCD-FAO joint initiative on land tenure launched in 2022. UN HABITAT and MEXICO underscored the importance of documenting land tenure rights through gender disaggregated data. CSOs and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called on parties to: respect and reinforce customary and informal rights; ensure land tenure alignment of the VGGT, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and the Paris Agreement; integrate indicators; and empower Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, and local communities to limit conflict.

The COW forwarded the draft decision to the contact group.

Delegates discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)) in the contact group on Friday, [6 December](#), and Monday, [9 December](#), focusing on the nomination of land tenure focal points, capacity building for those focal points, national consultations on land tenure, innovative digital approaches to map legitimate land tenure rights, and creating a land tenure toolbox on the UNCCD website. Subsequent discussions centered on land tenure as an enabling condition for synergies among the Rio Conventions and its integration with VGGT.

On Tuesday, [10 December](#), “land tenure security” surfaced in discussions as did linkages to achieving the SDGs. In response to diverging views on these issues, as well as on financial and technical support, a small group was formed to find convergence.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.12), the COP:

- encourages parties to continue integrating land tenure security in line with the VGGT;
- invites parties to integrate land tenure into their plans and activities to combat DLDD with the aim of proactively collecting data on legitimate land tenure rights in priority areas of voluntary LDN;
- invites parties to consider nominating a focal point for land tenure to coordinate the integration of land tenure into their plans and activities, without prejudice to existing UNCCD focal point frameworks;
- urges parties to explore ways and means to effectively integrate land tenure information into their capacity-building efforts and data analytic tools for evidence-based decision-making to support LDN implementation through integrated land-use planning;
- invites developed country parties and other parties, relevant UN entities, international financial organizations, and private sector institutions to support (i) the design and implementation of land tenure administration systems to improve responsible governance of land, and (ii) the delivery of national consultations for integrating land tenure into LDN; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM, and invites the GEF implementing agencies, to carry out awareness-raising actions on their existing accountability and grievance mechanisms related to land tenure to have the widest reach among all stakeholders.

Rangelands and Pastoralists: On Friday, [6 December](#), the Secretariat introduced this item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/21-ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/9](#)), along with an addendum containing a letter from the Ministry of Environment of Uruguay ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/21/Add.1-ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/9/Add.1](#)). During initial discussions, delegates welcomed the Global Land Outlook (GLO) Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralists. CHINA recommended the Secretariat

carry out additional scientific analysis and mobilize additional resources. TANZANIA and BOTSWANA called on the GM to identify innovative and effective financial and risk management tools.

PERU indicated the need for a coordinated participatory approach to rangelands. The EU underscored the importance of aligning implementation with other relevant global goals. BOTSWANA, the US, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, and PERU discussed national policies. TANZANIA and FAO drew attention to the 2026 International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. Many countries highlighted synergies across biodiversity loss, climate change, water scarcity, and livelihoods.

BOTSWANA said grasslands and rangelands hold profound cultural importance to desert societies and Indigenous Peoples. TANZANIA emphasized social and cultural values. INDIA called for frameworks that protect pastoralist traditions. FAO advocated building capacities of pastoralists and communities and supporting participatory and gender-sensitive approaches. CGIAR supported sustainable and participatory tools for grasslands and rangelands. CSOs advocated for land tenure and ensuring grassland and rangeland are included in planning and decision-making processes.

UAE, INDIA, STATE of PALESTINE, and FAO emphasized food security and water scarcity, with UAE highlighting vertical farming methods to maximize resource utilization and enrich biodiversity. VENEZUELA discussed regenerative farming, pesticide- and herbicide-free practices for swift soil recovery, habitat restoration, and ecological balance. CSOs supported agroecological approaches.

In the COW contact group, which discussed the draft decision on Thursday, [12 December](#), discussions included: references to the importance of rangelands for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and people in vulnerable situations; the need to improve land tenure security in rangelands; and the development of initiatives for sustainable rangeland management.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.15), the COP:

- invites parties to prioritize policies and investments for the sustainable management of rangelands, recognizing their essential role in addressing key challenges related to food insecurity, DLDD, biodiversity loss, and climate change;
- invites parties to improve tenure security in rangelands in line with the VGGT;
- requests the Secretariat and GM to strengthen and contribute to public-private partnerships for implementing transformative projects and programmes that engage with relevant stakeholders and ongoing initiatives that support rangeland health and pastoralist resilience;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to support parties with awareness-raising, capacity-building, and resource mobilization through inclusive, community-based and participatory approaches that meaningfully engage pastoralist and other rangeland communities, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM, in collaboration with relevant intergovernmental organizations, to contribute to the development of initiatives for sustainable rangeland management, restoration, and conservation through, *inter alia*, multi-stakeholder dialogues and national consultations.

Programme and budget: Programme and budget for the biennium 2025-2026: On [Monday, 2 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/3](#); [ICCD/COP\(16\)/5](#) and [ICCD/COP\(16\)/6-ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/2](#)) and outlined two budget proposals: one for zero-nominal growth and a second that addressed existing budgetary shortfalls. The initial discussion focused on the pros and cons between the two budget options. The AFRICAN GROUP lamented that a zero-growth core budget cannot fund UNCCD's programmes and does not fulfill the needs of the Secretariat, noted the budget should commensurate with the two-year work programme, and supported an increase. CHINA said an increase in budget should be used to meet the unmet and urgent needs of parties. JAPAN expressed preference for a zero-growth budget to ensure funding is managed in a cost-effective manner and encouraged remaining activities be covered by voluntary resources. She indicated the UNGA scale of assessments be applied to assess contributions for 2025-2026.

The EU noted the two online consultations for the budget this year and underscored using the scenario notes of the Secretariat to take a consensus decision.

The COW budget contact group discussed the draft decisions on the multi-year programme of work and the budget ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22/Add.1](#)) and met throughout the two weeks, discussing the two options, including the ramifications of a zero-nominal growth budget versus a budget increase, acknowledging zero-nominal growth would effectively be a decrease in the budget due to inflation, and existing budget shortfalls.

The COW forwarded the decision to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary, since it was pending the outcome of the decision on drought and its budgetary implications.

Final Decisions: In the decision on the budget (ICCD/COP(16)/L.23), the COP:

- approves the programme budget for the biennium 2025-2026 in the amount of EUR 17,744,748, representing an 8% increase;
- allows the Secretariat to draw down from the available uncommitted balances to cover expenses in specified budget lines and activities;
- approves the staffing table, which includes no staff cuts;
- decides to maintain the level of the working capital reserve at 12% of the estimated annual expenditure in the Trust Fund for the Core Budget; and
- urges all parties to promptly pay their contributions to the core budget.

In the decision on the multi-year work plan (ICCD/COP(16)/L.10), the COP:

- approves the strategic orientation of the Secretariat and the GM, as contained in the UNCCD results framework for 2025-2028 in the annex to the decision;
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to utilize the UNCCD results framework for organizing their work in line with the guidance outlined in the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework; and
- requests the Secretariat and GM to prepare a multi-year workplan for the Convention for the 2027-2030 period, utilizing the results-based management approach, to be considered at COP 17.

Financial performance for the Convention trust funds: This item was first discussed in the COW on Monday, [2 December](#). The Secretariat presented the relevant documents ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/7](#) and [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/3](#)). This item was sent to the COW contact group on budget.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.23), the COP:

- authorizes the Executive Secretary, on an exceptional basis and without setting a precedent, to draw upon available uncommitted balances to, among other things, cover expenditures concerning contractual services, travel, equipment, vehicles, furniture, and operating and other direct costs, in an amount not exceeding EUR 1,161,949; and to support the IWG on the Future Strategic Framework, including temporary support staff, in an amount not exceeding EUR 280,000;
- urges parties that have not yet paid their contributions to the core budget for 2024 and prior years to do so without delay; and
- requests the Executive Secretary to continue engaging parties with outstanding contributions from past years with a view to the parties entering into a voluntary plan to pay the outstanding contributions.

Report of the Evaluation Office: On Monday, [2 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the report of the Evaluation Office ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/11](#)), which was discussed in the COW contact group on budget. The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary.

- Final Decision:** In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.23), the COP:
- welcomes the recommendations of the independent evaluations and assessments (ICCD/COP(16)/11), and requests the Secretariat and the GM to use these recommendations in planning and conducting their work; and
 - takes note of the proposed 2025-2026 workplan of the Evaluation office and requests the Executive Secretary to report to COP 17 on the outcomes of the evaluations that will be conducted during the biennium and on the action taken to meet the pending recommendations of earlier evaluations.

Procedural matters: Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the UNCCD: The Secretariat introduced this item on Monday, [9 December](#), outlining their work in the intersessional period ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/12](#)). Oyéoussi Charles Balogoun, Chair of the UNCCD CSO Panel, highlighted the urgent need for inclusive and transformative action, and called on parties to strengthen gender-responsive policies and to support and facilitate the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples Caucus.

BRAZIL argued the UNCCD should enable those most vulnerable to influence decision-making, highlighting the CBD's Indigenous Peoples and local communities caucus, and its recent decision establishing a permanent subsidiary body on Article 8(j) and other provisions related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities under the CBD. GUATEMALA agreed, arguing that the current UNCCD process neglects the insights of those who have sustainably managed lands for generations. The EU and MOROCCO highlighted the crucial role that CSOs play in decision making on land management.

Some parties expressed reservations regarding CSO participation. CHINA and ESWATINI urged caution with regard to contact groups, underlining that the UNCCD is an intergovernmental process. MALAYSIA argued that CSOs should engage as observers and not participate in contact groups. The UAE suggested that CSO participation should be limited to knowledge-exchange and awareness-raising. The draft decision was forwarded to the COW contact group.

The COW contact group discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)) on Wednesday and Thursday, 11-12 December, during

an overnight session. Discussions focused on the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples Caucus and a Local Communities Caucus, and whether CSOs should be allowed to observe contact groups.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.17), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages parties to engage with CSOs in UNCCD meetings and processes, and make efforts to enhance accredited youth representation;
- encourages countries with no or few CSOs accredited to facilitate and promote their involvement in the UNCCD;
- invites developed country parties and others to contribute to the Supplementary Fund and Special Fund of the Convention with the aim of ensuring wider, more balanced and more equitable geographical representation of CSOs; and
- requests the CSO Panel, through the Secretariat, to report on its activities to COP 17.

The decision further requests the Secretariat to:

- facilitate involvement of accredited CSOs and the provision of capacity building that also targets CSOs;
- support and guide parties and other stakeholders to implement the Youth Engagement Strategy, including by supporting the convening of the UNCCD Youth Caucus;
- include in the report an assessment of the engagement of youth in the implementation of the Convention;
- facilitate consultations on strengthening participation of Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities in the UNCCD;
- support the development of terms of reference for a Caucus for Indigenous Peoples and a Caucus for Local Communities; and
- subject to the availability of resources, compile rules of procedure and practices related to the participation of CSOs in multilateral environmental agreements and UN bodies for the consideration of COP 17.

Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the UNCCD and the business engagement strategy: On Monday, [9 December](#), the GM introduced the item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/13](#)). The EU expressed appreciation for the Business for Land Initiative, and said advancing engagement with the private sector should include strengthening the business case for UNCCD initiatives and its attractiveness to the private sector.

They also encouraged business and industry to become involved in UNCCD meetings and processes.

The COW contact group discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)) on Thursday, 12 December, in the evening. The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.16), the COP, *inter alia*:

- requests the Secretariat and the GM to collaborate with parties, the private sector, and partners on the development and improvement of best practices and guidelines that are relevant to addressing DLDD;
- requests the GM to further develop the private sector engagement strategy for protecting, restoring and sustainably managing land and for building resilience to DLDD;

- requests the Secretariat and the GM, in collaboration with relevant financial and technical partners, to accelerate efforts to support private sector engagement and promote innovation; and
- invites parties, business and industry entities to support to support the Business for Land Initiative.

Programme of work for COP 17: On Monday, [9 December](#), the Secretariat introduce the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#)). CSOs called for: prioritizing inclusive governance; promoting synergies across conventions; expanding capacity-building efforts at the local level; embracing gender-responsive strategies; expanding the scope of the SPI; and resources for community-driven projects.

The COW contact group discussed the draft decision [ICCD/COP\(16\)/22](#) on Friday, 13 December. They focused on proposed additional text related to exploring options for the participation and involvement of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities in the meetings and processes of the UNCCD.

The COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, which adopted it during the closing plenary.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(16)/L.19), the COP adopted a list of agenda items for COP 17, and agrees to include interactive dialogue sessions with relevant stakeholders, including ministers, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, the business community, and members of parliament.

COW Closing Plenary: On Friday, 13 December, the COW approved all of its draft decisions and forwarded them to the COP for adoption. They also adopted the report from the [Gender Caucus](#) (ICCD/COP(16)/L.14), as well as the:

- CSO Declaration (ICCD/COP(16)/L.4);
- Youth Forum Declaration (ICCD/COP(16)/L.5);
- Indigenous Peoples' Declaration (ICCD/COP(16)/L.6); and
- Declaration from the Business for Land Forum (ICCD/COP(16)/L.8).

CSOs called for developing and implementing governance frameworks for land degradation from industry, for accessible funding, and for CSOs to be silent observers in contact groups. The Youth Caucus called for promoting equitable land rights across the Rio Conventions, ensuring gender inclusion and flexible funding for youth initiatives, and training on the science-policy interface.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

CRIC Chair Mirko Knežević (Montenegro) opened the 22nd session of the CRIC on Tuesday, [3 December](#), and called on parties to provide inputs on: the report prepared by the IWG on the mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Framework (2018-2030); the procedure for communication and evaluation; and ensuring data consistency and making harmonized recommendations to the COP.

Andrea Meza Murillo, UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary, reminded parties that the CRIC represents the “heart of the Convention” where “data drives decisions.” Noting that the UNCCD Data Dashboard established since CRIC 21 has enabled a clearer picture, she called on parties to use CRIC 22 as a springboard for transformative actions.

The ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, noting the UNCCD Data Dashboard is a critical tool to address the region's DLDD challenge, reported that almost 58% of the region was able to submit their national reports, although some experienced challenges with the complexity of the national data submission methodology.

The AFRICAN GROUP stressed the need to upscale financial contributions and urged parties to adopt a legally binding instrument on drought.

The EU highlighted the importance of a range of CRIC 21 outcomes, including the call to enhance the flow of information, transparency, and accountability through reporting. They noted success will not depend on individual actions, but on the strength of global partnerships.

The IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN (Annex IV parties) said although significant progress has been made towards the achievement of SDG target 15.3, more needs to be done to close the gap on data collection, reporting, and national capacity.

ANNEX V parties underscored the importance of adequate, timely, and predictable financial resources to ensure parties can promptly meet their reporting obligations. Palestine, on behalf of the ARAB GROUP, called for global cooperation, stating that greater capacity building can help communities and countries make informed decisions and adopt progressive policies.

BOLIVIA and VENEZUELA called for an indicator to monitor drought and its impacts. BRAZIL expressed commitment to adopt voluntary targets for achieving LDN and called on others to do so.

The MARSHALL ISLANDS emphasized the challenges linked to land and water scarcity facing their country, and highlighted efforts to reduce land erosion and food security risks.

BURUNDI highlighted that land degradation hinders the wellbeing of their country, with over 90% of the population living in rural areas facing reduction in soil fertility.

TIMOR-LESTE noted their efforts to collect data on the status of land degradation and called for greater support.

TOGO, TURKMENISTAN, and LEBANON expressed regret at the rate of land degradation causing loss of soil fertility, forest and grassland ecosystems in their countries, with LEBANON highlighting the threat this poses to food security.

YEMEN hoped to continue rehabilitating 20% of the country by 2030, and restore 90,000 hectares of degraded land and 1 million hectares of rangeland. CUBA called for moving forward on the Strategic Framework's implementation through transparent, inclusive, and innovative approaches.

BAHRAIN outlined their approach to alleviating land degradation through an awareness-raising campaign aimed at reforestation; expanding green spaces; and reducing water pressures through their water management plan.

CSOs called for: strengthening the engagement of groups in vulnerable situations, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities; aligning UNCCD efforts with the objectives of the other Rio Conventions; and integrating disaggregated data on LDN indicators and land tenure security indicators.

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: On Tuesday, [3 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the agenda and organization of work ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/1](#)), which was adopted.

Election of officers other than the Chair: The Committee appointed Rodrigo Andrade Ramírez (Chile) as Vice-Chair and approved Mirko Knezevic (Montenegro) and Anait Khurshudyan (Uzbekistan) to replace the Chair and Vice-Chair from their countries. The Committee agreed to establish a Contact Group and appointed Alwin Dornelly (Saint Lucia) as facilitator.

Effective implementation of the convention at the national, subregional and regional levels: Assessment of the implementation of the Convention against strategic objectives 1-4 of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD: On Tuesday, [3 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the document [\(ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/3\)](#). The CRIC 21 Rapporteur introduced the CRIC 21 report [\(ICCD/CRIC\(21\)/11\)](#) and [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#).

Following contact group discussions, on Thursday, [12 December](#), the CRIC adopted the report of CRIC 21, containing its draft decision. The COP adopted the decision on Friday, 13 December.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.7), on Strategic Objective 1 (improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification/land degradation, promote SLM and contribute to LDN), the COP, *inter alia*, urges parties to:

- halt the conversion of natural areas and stop or significantly reduce land take and soil sealing to ensure the rapid expansion observed in artificial surfaces does not come at the expense of natural vegetated land and fertile soil;
- raise ambition levels for new and more developed LDN targets, and report these targets in the fourth generation of the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS) to enable a periodic stocktake of progress; and
- allocate activity funds from the GEF for data collection, in particular for soil organic carbon inventories, and report to the CRIC at the next intersessional session on whether additional resources are required to address the perceived data gap.

On Strategic Objective 2 (improve the living conditions of affected populations), the COP, *inter alia*: decides that, while implementing the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework, stakeholders and parties should take into account the need for gender-responsive policies and measures, striving to ensure the full and effective participation of both men and women in planning, decision-making, and implementation at all levels, and enhance the empowerment of women, girls, and youth.

On Strategic Objective 3 (mitigate, adapt to, and manage the effects of drought in order to enhance resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems), the COP, *inter alia*, calls on parties to emphasize the importance of:

- setting measurable targets and developing proactive and integrated national drought policies and plans for integrated risk management in an inclusive and participatory manner;
- recognizing the drought link described in the Drought Resilience, Adaptation and Management Policy; and
- allocating activity funds from the GEF to improve assessment, prediction, and forecasting, as well as interventions on, drought and report to the CRIC at the next intersessional meeting on whether additional resources would be required to adequately address the perceived data gap.

On Strategic Objective 4 (generate global environmental benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD), the COP, *inter alia*, requests the Secretariat to collaborate with the Secretariats of the other Rio Conventions on the organization of technical information exchange and encourages parties and observers to submit views for the attention of the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions to engage on the technical information exchange on options for minimizing the reporting burden by identifying relevant existing indicators connecting DDLDD, loss of biodiversity, and climate change.

Assessment of financial flows: The CRIC reviewed the report from its 21st session ([ICCD/CRIC\(21\)/11](#)) and forwarded the draft decision ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#)) to the contact group for discussion. The CRIC approved the decision, which was approved by the COW and adopted by the COP.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.2), the COP, *inter alia*: requests the GM to continue improving the tracking of financial flows through:

- integrating a good practice guide into the enhanced reporting template;
- developing comparative options that support parties to provide a more comprehensive overview of financial resources targeting DDLDD and comparability between sets of national data; and
- supporting parties to track public and private financial flows related to the implementation of the Convention.

The COP further invites parties to report on estimations of their financial needs, sharing the methodology used and lessons learned about closing the financing gap, while inviting the GEF to continue to include a specific output in its project titled “Strengthen national-level intuitional and professional capacities of country parties towards enhanced UNCCD monitoring and reporting.”

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention: On Monday, [9 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the documents [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/6](#). CRIC Chair Knežević invited the panelists to present their organizations’ capacity building strategies. Panelists discussed:

- key strategies for effective capacity building in SLM and LDN;
- complexities and misunderstandings regarding DLDD terminology through workshops and training sessions;
- the African Capacity Building Plan of Action;
- incubation platforms to nurture young scientists and practitioners within the SPI;
- digital literacy and infrastructure limitations;
- joint capacity-building programmes between the Rio Conventions;
- investment for training and capacity building for small island developing states (SIDS), least developed, and middle-income countries;
- focus on the three pillars of DLDD;
- developing a plan at national level;
- online tools that accommodate training courses;
- CBD regional capacity-building centers; and
- local leadership.

The contact group considered the draft decision [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#). The CRIC and the COW accepted the decision and the COP adopted it on Thursday, [12 December](#).

Final Decision: In its final decision on promotion of capacity-building to further implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.8), the COP, *inter alia*: requests the Secretariat, GM, and other relevant parties to provide general support for targeted capacity-building, including to:

- develop a capacity-building strategy;
- maintain an annual work programme for capacity development initiatives;
- reconceptualize and redesign the Capacity-Building Marketplace;
- expand online training and e-learning opportunities for parties; and

- pursue efforts directed at innovation-driven approaches, including making the full use of technological advances such as artificial intelligence.

The COP requests the Secretariat to develop, continue, and expand targeted capacity building to:

- support the empowerment of women and girls in line with the Gender Action Plan;
- provide on-demand media training activities for journalists and expand these to other regions and subregions; and
- develop an early and mid-career fellowship programme targeted at women and youth from the most vulnerable local communities, especially SIDS and least developed countries.

The COP further requests the Secretariat, together with data providers, financial and technical partners and the Earth Observation community to:

- support parties undertaking participatory mapping of degraded land and voluntary LDN targets;
- facilitate blended learning;
- enhance collaboration with regional institutions, initiatives, and organizations;
- facilitate South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation; and
- make available guidelines to standardize mapping approaches for relevant geospatial indicators.

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP: A joint session of the CRIC and CST met on Wednesday, [4 December](#), and the Secretariat introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(21\)/11](#); [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/7-ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/8](#)). In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted:

- research on drought reporting and Framework and Guiding Principles for a Land Degradation Indicator;
- contextualizing global and regional data sets with national and sub-national levels;
- validating research with stakeholders;
- Good Practice Guidance and challenges with calculating the extent of land degradation enhance resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems;
- ongoing initiatives and monitoring activities across different UN organizations and conventions, and outputs for monitoring information;
- the importance of working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities;
- the importance of regional data;
- discrepancies between national, UN, and NGO reporting; and
- methodology for monitoring and reporting for GBF Target 2 (restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems).

Discussion continued on the draft decision ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#)) in a joint CRIC-CST contact group. The CRIC accepted the decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption on Thursday, [12 December](#).

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.6), the COP, *inter alia*:

- requests the Secretariat to continue work with the CBD Secretariat and the FAO to facilitate data exchange, tool interoperability and joint capacity building on monitoring and reporting of land and ecosystem degradation and restoration;
- requests the Secretariat and GM to enhance the functionality of the PRAIS for COP 17;

- decides that the following indicators will be optional in reporting: sex disaggregated data; proportion of important sites by ecosystem type; international and domestic private resources; technology transfer; and future resources for activities;
- requests the Secretariat and GM to assess the feasibility of a digital transformation initiative to align the UNCCD with the vision for a UN 2.0;
- decides to establish an IWG on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention, within the scope and mandate of the Convention, to identify key elements for a post-2030 strategic framework; and
- conduct a thorough analysis of current indicators for national reporting on the strategic objectives of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework.

Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Update on the Global Support Programme to assist reporting by the UNCCD: On Wednesday, [4 December](#), the GEF introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/7-ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/8](#) and [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#)). Delegates heard updates from representatives of the GM, GEF, UNEP, and FAO. Parties emphasized flexibility around national reporting and strengthened financing mechanisms so reporting and LDN targets can be effectively reached.

Report by the GEF on the financing of programmes and projects concerning DLDD: On Wednesday, [4 December](#), Chair the GEF introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/4](#) and [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8/Add.1](#)) and the GEF noted that the GEF-8 replenishment achieved a record level of USD 5.33 billion, of which USD 618.37 million was allocated to the land degradation focal area (LDFA).

The EU discussed the importance of the GEF-9 replenishment and called for allocating additional resources to combat land degradation, support national reporting, and achieve LDN targets.

SYRIA described progress on existing projects and called on the GEF to support national reporting and achieving LDN targets.

CSOs recommended the GEF: increase funding for DLDD; support locally-led initiatives; ensure access to financing; align initiatives with the SDGs; strengthen monitoring and evaluation; and contribute to capacity building and knowledge sharing.

The CRIC discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8/Add.1](#)) in the contact group and the CRIC accepted the decision and forwarded it to the COP on Thursday, [12 December](#).

Final Decision: In its final decision on collaboration with the GEF (ICCD/CRIC(22) L.1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- welcomes the increased focus on land-based actions implemented through the GEF's integrated programmes, and the LDFA Strategy's emphasis on women, children, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local and traditional communities, and calls on the GEF to continue to provide opportunities to enhance synergies among all focal areas;
- encourages the GEF and the GM to mobilize new and additional financial resources by further collaborating with multilateral funds, including the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund, and the Climate Investment Funds;
- invites the GEF to strengthen its support for countries in programming LDFA resources and achieving their LDN targets;
- welcomes the efforts of the GEF to streamline its project cycle, to further simplify and accelerate the access of developing countries to GEF resources;

- invites the GEF to strengthen efforts to align the LDFA Strategy under GEF-8 with the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework of the Convention and the GEF's enhanced attention to drought mitigation and adaptation; and
- encourages the GEF to continue its efforts to harness opportunities to leverage synergies among the Rio Conventions and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Report by the Global Mechanism on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention and matters relating to SDG 15.3: On Tuesday, [10 December](#), Louise Baker, Managing Director, GM, introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/5](#) and [ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/INF.1](#)).

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 LDN targets and improved monitoring and reporting systems. They urged additional financial resources to promote innovation and strengthen national capabilities.

CSOs 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 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, LDN indicators, climate resilience, green jobs, sustainable economic initiatives such as agroforestry and ecotourism, protection of land defenders, and digital platforms.

The CRIC discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/CRIC\(22\)/8](#)) in the contact group. The CRIC accepted the decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption on Thursday, [12 December](#).

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.5), the COP, *inter alia*:

- invites parties to refine their voluntary LDN targets, ensuring they are specific, time-bound, policy-coherent, quantitative, spatially explicit, gender-responsive, and adequately integrated into planning frameworks;
- invites parties to translate recommendations in national drought plans into concrete programmes and projects; and
- encourages parties to further strengthen internal coordination with national focal points.

The COP requests the GM and Secretariat to:

- support the implementation of a resource mobilization strategy;
- develop and deploy a financing toolbox for resource mobilization;
- support setting and/or refining voluntary LDN targets;
- create an enabling environment to facilitate the implementation of national drought plans;
- collaborate with relevant institutions and forge specific partnerships;
- support capacity building for SDS;
- contribute to improving synergies with biodiversity and climate change processes; and

- focus on large-scale, high-impact, multi-country flagship initiatives.

Programme of work for the twenty-third session of the CRIC: On Tuesday, [10 December](#), the CRIC introduced the draft decision on the programme of work (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.4). The CRIC adopted the decision on Thursday, [12 December](#).

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.4), the COP, *inter alia*, includes the following items on the agenda of CRIC 23 for parties to review and discuss:

- inputs from regional meetings;
- updates on the implementation of voluntary LDN targets;
- development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building;
- procedures for the communication of information;
- reporting tools;
- default data for the strategic objectives;
- progress in reporting on strategic objectives;
- timelines and modalities for reporting; and
- follow-up on policy frameworks identified by the COP.

Date and venue of the twenty-third session of the CRIC

Final Decision: In its decision on the date and venue of CRIC 23 (ICCD/CRIC(22)/L.3), the COP decides that CRIC 23 will be held in Panama the last quarter of 2025.

Election of officers other than the Chair: The CRIC approved the election of three Vice-Chairs for its twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions: Charles Lange (Kenya), Xiaoxia Jia (China), and Pablo Hernán Viegas Aurelio (Argentina).

Closing Plenary: During final meeting of the CRIC on Thursday, [12 December](#), Chair Mirko Knežević presented, and the CRIC adopted eight draft decisions. The CRIC also adopted its report.

Committee on Science and Technology

CST Chair Héctor Manuel Arias Rojo (Mexico), opened the CST on Tuesday, [3 December](#).

Andrea Meza Murillo, UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary, encouraged parties not to lose sight of the impact of their work and praised the CST for its hard work.

The AFRICAN GROUP commended the Committee for improving efficiency of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and highlighted the achievement of the drought report. They called on the Committee to recognize regional and global scientific bodies, enhance data collection methodologies, and support integration of Indigenous knowledges.

ANNEX IV parties emphasized the importance of the SPI to engage, exchange scientific findings, and enhance synergies with IPBES and the IPCC, particularly on SLM. They called for establishing the SPI as a permanent body.

The ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP highlighted the critical need for SPI to expand on science-based approaches to tap into the best available science, while also including Indigenous knowledges.

ANNEX V parties said to achieve SDG target 15.3, UNCCD parties need to expand the scope beyond arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid lands to consider the full extent of the planet's ecosystems. They suggested enlarging the SPI work programme to also include social and economic scientists.

The EU expressed support for science-based evidence, endorsing all initiatives that strengthen the role of science and the SPI. They noted scientific knowledge and the SPI are key for parties to

adopt locally and regionally appropriate solutions for climate and biodiversity.

SYRIA supported the exchange of scientific knowledge and praised the efforts of the SPI in preparing relevant scientific reports.

The FAO noted the increased degradation of agricultural lands is putting agri-food systems under unprecedented pressure. He said participatory and integrated approaches to land management and restoration tools are critical for enhancing food security and advancing sustainable land use systems.

The US detailed the importance of scientific representation, stating “there is an awful lot of science in this Convention that is not considered within the CST.” The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC noted those who lack access to scientific information face more difficulties, underscoring the importance of engaging in participatory research.

CSOs called on parties to develop evidence-based strategies that suit local contexts at the scale of landscapes or territorial systems and to ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES acknowledged the advances of Western science and technologies in addressing land degradation and land grabbing, adding this should not undermine the value of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledges, innovations, sciences, and technologies.

Organizational matters: The CST adopted the provisional agenda ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/1](#)).

Election of officers other than the Chair: The CST appointed Nana Bolashvili (Georgia) as a replacement Vice-Chair and Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed Ali (Egypt) as Rapporteur. The Committee established a contact group and appointed Joseph Noel of Grenada as facilitator of the contact group.

Items resulting from the work programme of the SPI for the triennium 2022-2024: Science-policy recommendations on sustainable land-use systems (SLUS): On Tuesday, [3 December](#), the Secretariat presented the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/2](#)) and the SPI-Co Leads presented scientific findings.

Responding to the reports, parties: emphasized ensuring the results are feasible and applicable for every country; considering SLM alongside SLUS; expanding SPI reports, especially on operationalizing the voluntary LDN target; and developing culturally-relevant strategies.

In the contact group, delegates discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/10](#)), including integrating SLUS into LDN planning and implementation; and integrating SLUS into existing national and local management systems. Delegates also discussed references to categories of land use systems and building technical capacity to assess and track individual land use systems. Many proposals were on the enabling environment for SLUS.

The decision was approved by the CST, the COW, and forwarded to the COP for adoption on Friday, 13 December.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/COP(16)/CST/L.1), the COP, *inter alia*: encourages parties to create an enabling environment for SLUS by:

- fostering multistakeholder partnerships;
- implementing participatory governance in planning, executing, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure the engagement of all legitimate land tenure rights holders and land users;
- fostering multi-sectoral coordination to ensure synergies and the harmonization of agricultural, environmental, social, economic, and development policies, integrating SLUS principles and approaches;

- creating and promoting incentives that encourage long-term investments in transdisciplinary research, collaborative monitoring, and the provision of data and tools to support the development and implementation of SLUS;
- identifying and supporting community leaders and/or representatives who will adaptively sustain SLUS;
- facilitating transformative multi-stakeholder learning to cope with uncertainty, barriers, and change; and
- sharing local experience and knowledge to support the upscaling and achievement of LDN targets.

Science-policy recommendations on aridity trends, projections and impacts: On Tuesday, [3 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/3](#)) and the SPI Co-Leads presented scientific findings. Party statements centered on holistic approaches to resilience, integrated approaches to land, water, and soil, and interlinking recommendations of the SPI under the Convention. Delegates engaged in a discussion about: holistic approaches to resilience strategies; establishing an integrated approach to land, water, and soil to support robust agri-food systems; and the need to connect the recommendations of the SPI with other recommendations under the Convention.

In the contact group, progress on the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/10](#)) was initially swift, but the paragraph on collaboration with other bodies proved contentious, with some parties preferring to include specific reference to the UNFCCC 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. The group agreed to move the paragraph related to technology transfer to the CST draft decision on knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and innovation.

The draft decision was approved by the CST, approved by the COW, and forwarded to the COP, which adopted it on Friday, 13 December.

Final Decision: In its final decision on science-policy recommendations on aridity trends, projections and impacts (ICCD/COP(16)/CST/L.3), the COP, *inter alia*:

- invites the WMO, the Global Water Partnership, and other technical and scientific partners to integrate aridity information into existing drought monitoring and early warning systems;
- invites the Integrated Drought Management Programme to facilitate the development of science-based standards and guidelines for assessing the socio-economic and environmental impacts of increasing aridity and drought; and
- requests the CST Bureau and Secretariat to explore the development of a supplement to the National Adaptation Plan technical guidelines that support aridity adaptation and drought planning.

Science-policy recommendations emanating from the SPI analysis of the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report (AR6): On Thursday, [5 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/4](#)) and the SPI Co-Leads presented key messages from the report of the two SPI working groups on IPCC AR6.

Citing the potential risks and co-benefits of large-scale mitigation efforts, SPI Co-Lead Emma Archer cautioned that land is both a source and sink for greenhouse gas emissions, and that the agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU) sector offers significant short-term mitigation potential at relatively low costs.

SPI Co-Lead Nijavalli Ravindranath highlighted the report's recommendations, including: enhancing land use efficiency and land restoration; adopting an integrated landscape approach to minimize trade-offs; and increasing efforts to promote SLM.

VENEZUELA called on the SPI to incorporate their country's experiences to broaden the science base. The EU recommended the SPI strengthen interactions with IPBES and the IPCC. SENEGAL requested the SPI to adopt an integrated approach by focusing on SLM and to bolster private funding.

SWITZERLAND warned that issues such as biofuels can present both benefits and risks for food security. CSOs stressed effective collaboration in fostering and enhancing synergies with other scientific bodies is key and encouraged including local and Indigenous knowledges alongside scientific findings.

In the contact group, delegates discussed the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/10](#)). They debated whether to encourage parties to increase efforts to promote SLM, especially on agricultural land. They also discussed minimizing tradeoffs between different ecosystem services and biodiversity, and between socio-economic objectives, including climate change mitigation and adaptation. Discussions on how the paragraphs align with IPCC and IPBES definitions continued in informal consultations.

The decision was approved by the CST, forwarded to the COW, and adopted by the COP on Friday, 13 December.

Final Decision: In its final decision on science-policy recommendations emanating from the SPI analysis of the IPCC AR6 ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/L.5](#)), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages parties to enhance land use efficiency and restoration, especially on less productive, degraded or marginal lands, while also considering the promotion of ecosystem services and the conservation of biodiversity;
- encourages parties to adopt the ecosystem approach and other integrated landscape approaches to seek to optimize environmental and socio-economic objectives;
- recommends that parties strengthen integrated land management strategies to reduce losses from climate hazards in landscapes where degradation has increased vulnerability; and
- encourages parties and invites scientific, financial and technical partners, and CSOs working at local, national, and regional levels to strengthen collaboration on the development of transdisciplinary Communities of Learning and Practice on the nexus of land, climate, and drought to focus on the inclusion of traditional underrepresented knowledge and practitioner groups.

Review of the work conducted by the SPI: On Thursday, [5 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the item ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/6](#)) and participants heard CST Bureau recommendations that the SPI should be established as a continuous, standing body, which was generally supported.

In the contact group, initial interventions on the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/10](#)) focused on the composition and budgetary implications of a future SPI, and definitions underpinning terms such as “sound science” and “rapid response information products.” Delegates asked about review procedures and how to apply elements of the midterm evaluation of the Strategic Framework 2018-2030. Calls for exploring the idea of establishing a Global Science-Policy Alliance on Land for more integrative Earth observation and scientific assessment, and supporting and strengthening newly-established national and international scientific institutions,

regionally-specific scientific events and networks were readily agreed. Further discussion took place on how the SPI will coordinate with intergovernmental science-policy bodies, as well as the period of the future work programme.

The decision was approved by the CST and the COW, and forwarded to the COP, where it was adopted on the final day.

Final Decision: In its final decision on the future functioning of the SPI ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/L.2](#)), the COP, *inter alia*:

- decides to establish a standing SPI to ensure the delivery of policy-relevant information, knowledge, and advice in a manner that is equitable and transparent to support the implementation of the Convention;
- decides that the SPI will take the scientific lead in the production of the Global Land Outlook products and similar high-profile science-based reports, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure these products are supported by a comprehensive and innovative communication strategy;
- decides that future work programmes of the SPI will be fixed for a duration of two intersessional periods starting at COP 17;
- decides to expand SPI membership to comprise thirty members and five observers consisting of: five members of the CST; fifteen independent scientists; five independent early-career scientists; one independent scientist nominated from each of the five UN regional groups; and five observers, four representing UN system organizations and other international organizations, and one representing CSOs nominated by the UNCCD; and
- all SPI members and observers will be nominated for four years, with the exception of the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the CST, whose election should be performed in line with the rules of procedure of the COP.

Interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge: Interfacing science and policy, knowledge sharing and technology transfer: On [Friday, 6 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/5](#)).

The EU and CHINA welcomed the updated recommendations from the Secretariat, with the EU suggesting closer collaboration with the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative to further incorporate economic and business aspects into the SPI and CST. CHINA described their efforts to scale up public investment and mobilize the private sector to support ecological reconstruction and rural revitalization.

VENEZUELA expressed appreciation for the SPI's work, noting it has enabled them to set LDN and drought management targets. They queried how the recommendations can be implemented on the ground.

CSOs highlighted the critical importance of bridging the science-policy divide to address DLDD and called for the continued removal of barriers to technology transfer, particularly for developing countries.

UN HABITAT, on behalf of UN SPECIALIZED AGENCIES, noted that, during the COW, a number of parties underscored the importance of land tenure data, while the Gender Caucus called for gender disaggregated data to better understand the gender gap in land tenure rights. They noted the significant strides made to support monitoring data but cautioned that findings reveal mixed progress on land tenure. The CST forwarded the draft decision to the contact group.

In the contact group discussions on the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/10](#)), a proposal to explore the benefits, costs, and procedures of having CST sessions take place in parallel or back-to-back with intersessional meetings of the CRIC faced strong opposition.

The CST and the COW approved the decision and forwarded it to the COP, where it was adopted on Friday, 13 December.

Final Decision: In its final decision on knowledge sharing, technology, and innovation (ICCD/COP(16)/CST/L.8), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages the SPI to continue fostering partnerships with scientific bodies and institutions, international organizations, and CSOs, and invite representatives of these entities to its meetings as observers;
- requests the Secretariat and GM to continue exploring options for knowledge and technology transfer with relevant academic and private sector partners;
- invites parties, international bodies, and the private sector to facilitate knowledge transfer and technology to developing country parties;
- encourages parties to support, by means of voluntary technology transfer, organizations and practitioners of agroecology and other sustainable agricultural approaches in achieving SLM and LDN;
- invites parties to coordinate and harmonize LDN planning and practices with climate change adaptation planning and implementation, as well as biodiversity planning, at the national level; and
- invites developed and other country parties and institutions to support the implementation of the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies strategy (WOCAT 2020+) through the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies Multi-donor Basket Fund.

Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface beyond 2024: On [Friday, 6 December](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/7](#)).

CSOs called for expanding the mandate of the SPI; equipping the SPI to address its work programme effectively; including perspectives from women, youth, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples; and developing user-friendly tools and guidelines that present actionable solutions to policy makers and relevant stakeholders.

The US requested adequate time during the COP to consider the priorities and impacts of the SPI work programme to avoid one that is challenging to implement.

The EU suggested a transition period of no more than two years beyond 2024, during which the SPI should operate in an advisory capacity and called for a proper stocktake across the three Rio Conventions. They recommended disseminating syntheses of technical reports, and amplifying country examples.

JAPAN requested that the third edition of the GLO be subject to proper peer review and suggested SPI strengthen its coordination with the GLO.

ARGENTINA suggested the SPI work programme should include fewer concepts and themes and instead address broader scientific developments that are concise and adapted to the country context, while bearing in mind that developing countries have fewer people able to implement the work.

WMO sought clarity about a phrase in the document termed “rapid response information products,” noting that “periodic response information documents” is more appropriate.

The Committee forwarded the decision to the contact group.

In the contact group discussions on the draft decision ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/10](#)), the text was swiftly agreed following a reminder from the Secretariat that it is standard text used at all previous COPs.

The CST and the COW approved the draft decision, and forwarded to the COP, where it was adopted on the final day.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/COP(16)/CST.L.4), the COP, *inter alia*:

- provisionally adopts the SPI work programme for the biennium 2025-2026, with a priority to scientifically lead the third edition of the GLO;
- invites parties and technical and scientific institutions to provide data, expertise, knowledge, and technical assistance to support the activities of the SPI; and
- requests the Executive Secretary at CST 17 to present: a synthesis report on the third edition of the GLO; a list for fast-track assessments and information products, including policy-oriented recommendations; and a synthesis report of SPI coordination activities.

Innovation and technology in ecologically sustainable agrifood systems: Avoiding, reducing and reversing land and soil degradation of agricultural lands: This item was presented in the CST plenary on Thursday, [5 December](#), as a new agenda item proposed in advance of COP 16 by the US. The Secretariat introduced the document containing the US proposal as an annex ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/21-ICCD/COP\(16\)/CST/9](#)). The Secretariat indicated it had interpreted and prepared a draft text based on this proposal that would be forwarded to a contact group.

The US noted the draft text was developed in consultation with stakeholders, the FAO, CST Bureau, and other parties. There was broad support to consider the item with delegates drawing attention to linkages to climate change, agrobiodiversity and restoration, environmental and social safeguards, microenterprises, and land tenure, among other issues.

The contact group discussed the draft decision throughout the day on Thursday, [12 December](#). Parties diverged on how to refer to contributions of agricultural land to degradation as well as to the scope of contributions of agriculture to potential solutions for DLDD, climate change, and biodiversity conservation. General convergence was found on how to introduce and refer to agricultural crops and cropping systems.

The decision was adopted by the CST plenary and forwarded to the COW on Friday, 13 December. The US called attention to ensuring an integrated approach for SLM. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) emphasized the importance of nature-based solutions for restoration.

The decision was approved by the CST and the COW, and forwarded to the COP, where it was adopted on 13 December.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/COP(16)/CST/L.7), the COP encourages parties to:

- invest in the development of innovative science-based sustainable solutions and partnerships and in the promotion of nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches, in conjunction with local and traditional practices;

- make full use of opportunities to improve the health of agricultural lands and soils, taking into account Target 10 of the GBF; and
- promote integrated water resources management in agriculture to address water stress, adapt agricultural systems to promote overall water-use efficiency and resilience to water stress, as well as transition to sustainable food systems.

It further:

- requests the Secretariat, and invites the FAO and other relevant partners, to provide guidance to parties on promoting sustainable land use and responsible governance and on promoting sustainable and diverse cropping systems and crops to improve food security and nutrition in the context of climate change and environmental degradation; and
- decides that the development of any future approaches to land degradation monitoring and assessment will consider how to more effectively reflect changes in the health of agricultural lands and soils.

Programme of work for the seventeenth session of the

CST: The draft decision was considered in the contact group on Wednesday, 11 December. It was approved by the CST and the COW, and adopted by the COP on the final day.

Final Decision: In its final decision (ICCD/COP(16)/CST/L.6), the COP, *inter alia*, decides CST 17 should:

- focus on operationalizing the SPI processes and mechanisms developed, as well as the coordination of activities identified in the SPI work programme; and
- be organized in such a way that facilitates a thematic dialogue between the parties and the SPI regarding the policy implications of the scientific outputs and to enable the formulation of concise policy-relevant recommendations.

CST Closing Plenary: During the closing plenary on Friday, 13 December, CST Chair Arias Rojo presented, and the CST adopted eight draft decisions and the report of the meeting.

The LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC) acknowledged the essential role of the SPI to enhance scientific engagement, support knowledge exchange, foster innovation, and facilitate technology transfer. He noted the need for increased financing to mobilize resources for sustainable land use initiatives and to ensure that strategies are supported by sound and relevant scientific data that centers the needs of local populations and Indigenous Peoples.

ANNEX V parties expressed their appreciation to the SPI and the GM for creating the basis for stimulating national research and knowledge exchange in support of the SDGs, specifically target 15.3 on land. They encouraged further intersectoral research under the framework of the SPI and called for the organization of regional and national scientific conferences for continued collaboration.

GRENADA thanked parties for the “rigorous debates” in the CST contact group and endorsed the decision on avoiding land and soil degradation. He noted the significance of this decision for Caribbean SIDS, and looked forward to its successful implementation at regional and national levels.

Noting challenges in maintaining their natural environment, the STATE OF PALESTINE said 25% of its territory is officially termed a desert, a difficulty that is compounded by human rights abuses and occupation of their land. He said they are keen to implement

projects to restore degraded lands and ecosystems, including through proper water management, and thanked parties for sharing their technologies and experiences.

VENEZUELA, supporting GRULAC, expressed delight at the work of the CST through the exchanges on science and technology that underpin DLDD, in particular by including Indigenous knowledges that will allow local communities to withstand drought and the lack of abundant water. He urged parties to continue strengthening and fostering research at national levels to allow countries to benefit from all the hard work done.

Noting CST 16 as historic in scope, size, and ambition, the US expressed appreciation for the collaborative manner in which CST brought everyone together to improve the science of the Convention. They called attention to ensuring an integrated approach for SLM, thereby laying the foundation for avoiding, reducing, and reversing land and soil degradation of agricultural lands.

IUCN welcomed the decision on sustainable land use systems and emphasized the need for nature-based solutions and assisting smallholder farmers to develop ecosystem-based solutions.

ALGERIA commended the adoption of eight science-based decisions, and said it reflected an ambitious approach to facing the critical challenges of DLDD through equitable technology access and innovation.

CSOs provided a series of recommendations to the CST, including: equipping the SPI to address emerging challenges such as urban land degradation, dryland restoration, and the intersection of DLDD with migration and public health; facilitating platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement; embedding gender equality in the CST; and including local and Indigenous knowledges in CST decision making.

Closing Plenary

The final COP plenary first convened at 8:30 pm on Friday, 13 December. Delegates elected Jeffrey Herrick (US) as Chair of CST 17 and Philippine Dutailly (France) as Chair of CRIC 23 and 24. They also adopted all of the draft decisions submitted by the COW to that point, as well as the report of the High-level Segment (ICCD/COP(16)L.3), the Riyadh Declaration (ICCD/COP(16)/L.1), the report on credentials (ICCD/COP(16)/L.11), and the Expression of Gratitude to the Government and People of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (ICCD/COP(16)/L.2). The COP then suspended pending the outcome of ongoing consultations on the decision on drought.

The COP plenary resumed at 1:45 am on Saturday, 14 December, to adopt the remaining decisions, including on enhancing the implementation of the Convention and the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD, drought, and the programme and budget for the biennium 2025-26. The COP also adopted the report of the meeting (ICCD/COP(16)L.7).

UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw expressed his “immense gratitude and deep reflection” on what he called a “historic” COP. He noted how drought is a “constant challenge woven into the daily lives of communities” and called on parties to remember the resilience of women and farmers to survive against all odds. He said the 39 decisions adopted at COP 16 will serve as guidance to governments, the private sector, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities.

COP 16 President AlFadley noted the record number of participants and events that took place at COP 16. He commended the announcement by the Arab Coordination Group for allocating over USD 12 billion to support DLDD projects. He declared COP 16 closed at 2:04 am on Saturday, 14 December 2024.

A Brief Analysis of COP 16

“Together, we can reverse the trends of land degradation and build a more resilient world to drought. Together we can make a real difference in peoples’ lives. Together, we can unlock the true potential of our land and protect our Planet and Home.”
Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification

Land lies at the heart of the environmental crises addressed by the Rio Conventions: its sustainable management is crucial for addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), mitigating climate change, and stemming the devastating loss of biodiversity across the world. It is therefore fitting that the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) marked the end of the Rio Conventions’ triple-COP marathon, starting in Cali in October, continuing in Baku in November, and ending in Riyadh in December. Land degradation has a devastating impact on the health, security, and livelihoods of people around the world, resulting in residual effects on the global economy, international security, and migration.

In trying to address these challenges, delegates at UNCCD COP 16 had a busy schedule, addressing the functioning of the Convention, such as the budget and Strategic Framework, as well as the integration of science into decision making and policy frameworks and thematic issues ranging from migration to drought, gender, and land tenure. As the first UNCCD COP to be held in the Middle East, the host country’s hospitality was ubiquitous and helped fuel participants with coffee, dates, and pastries during critical moments of the negotiations, which ran late into the night during the second week.

Entering COP 16, many delegates had high hopes for a strong decision on drought. Due to the compounding effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, drought is increasing in severity and frequency, and it is estimated that by 2050 it will affect over three-quarters of the world’s population. Yet, despite the Herculean efforts by the host country to help the parties find common ground, delegates left Riyadh without an agreement on whether to begin negotiations on a new drought framework or a legally-binding protocol. As a result, this issue will be taken up again at COP 17.

Despite the disappointment at not reaching consensus on a future protocol or framework on drought, COP 16 adopted a number of robust decisions, including many that referenced drought, that will take the Convention forward. Over the course of two weeks, they engaged in four contact groups to turn a daunting list of agenda items into 39 decisions. After the closing plenary, a seasoned delegate noted that, while there were difficult negotiations, some of the decisions were the strongest and most groundbreaking ever coming out of a UNCCD COP.

This analysis reflects on the achievements of COP 16, including how they position the Convention for the coming decades in terms of science, finance, and synergies, as well as its relationship with those on the ground who are not only the most affected by DLDD,

but who are also paving the way for reversing its negative trends and building community resilience.

The Bedrock of Science

COP 16 confirmed that science must be at the core of the UNCCD by making the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) a permanent standing body of the Convention. While the SPI facilitates bidirectional science-policy dialogues and delivery of policy-relevant information and recommendations on DLDD, such as on land degradation neutrality (LDN) indicators, its new permanent status will enable an ongoing scientific presence and response.

Parties also agreed to equip the SPI to deepen its expertise and accelerate its work by expanding its size with five additional independent scientists and five independent early-career scientists. This decision strengthens the SPI, especially now that it is responsible for the production of the Global Land Outlook. Delegates anticipate that this outcome will enable the UNCCD to further raise the profile of land issues around the world, both in other international fora as well as among a wide range of scientists and in conjunction with other bodies, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). The possibilities for synergies between scientific bodies is a theme that came up multiple times throughout the meeting.

Working Together

The presence of the Executive Secretaries of the other two Rio Conventions, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), along with high-level officials from other UN agencies and international organizations signaled that collaboration shapes the way forward. Many voiced that synergies can enhance the delivery of national commitments, plans, and strategies under separate multilateral environmental agreements. The importance of synergies was prominent in the High-level Segment, the Gender Caucus and CSO Dialogues, and throughout negotiations across many decisions.

However, while many debates centered on how to link the science and practice of the Conventions, they also began to demonstrate that to do this, UNCCD parties may increasingly face the same politics that weigh down progress at the UNFCCC and CBD. The UNCCD may need to learn to manage an increasingly diverse set of interests and priorities held by actors across evolving and new issue areas.

An example of how the UNCCD can pursue synergies came during the discussions on agriculture. This topic is, as one delegate stated, the “great unifier” across the Rio Conventions. Therefore, many welcomed the proposal by the US for a new agenda item on agriculture. While some of the intent of the decision was to create space for “agrifood” and an entry point for the agriculture sector to engage in the UNCCD, as they do in the UNFCCC and CBD, the final decision shifted its focus to a broader scope of “agricultural land.”

As a result, delegates produced an inclusive decision that balances the need for innovation and traditional practice, alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, food security and nutrition, and a focus on preventative approaches to the management of land, soils, and water, crops, and cropping systems. As another delegate noted, “Including agriculture as a focus will bring ministers of agriculture into the room.” From a synergies

perspective, this UNCCD decision contributes to both global food systems governance and to fundamental aspects of other multilateral environmental agreements.

The Ripple Effects of Implementation

COP 16 made progress on a number of thematic areas. The Convention's thematic work is oriented towards supporting and enabling small- and large-scale land restoration initiatives. In doing so, the Convention's implementation has the potential to transform land use systems, and in turn address the causes of DLDD that shape people's lives. Some examples are the discussions on gender, land tenure security, and drought.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Thiaw highlighted the “shocking figure” that women produce up to 80% of food in developing countries but only own 13% of agricultural land in the world. During the Gender Caucus dialogue, participants heard stories that highlighted the role of women in mitigating land degradation and building community resilience to the effects of DLDD. Participants also called for closing the gap on gender-disaggregated data to enhance decision makers' understanding of not only the different ways that women and men are impacted by DLDD, but also how women's empowerment can pave the way towards more sustainable land management systems.

These revelations illuminate the gender disparities concerning land tenure, which in turn undermines both women's leadership and implementation of the Convention. Therefore, by inviting parties to tackle the gender data gap in the decision on gender, policy makers will hopefully gain a solid basis for better informed and more inclusive policies that can reduce poverty, improve food security, and build community resilience to drought.

Financing for Land

Without urgent financial support, the socio-economic impacts of land degradation will worsen, driving instability and forced migration. The “Investing in Land's Future: Financial needs assessment for UNCCD” report launched during COP 16 says at least USD 1 billion in daily investments between now and 2030 are needed to meet land restoration targets and combat desertification and drought. But where will the funding come from?

Currently, about 72% of financing for land comes from domestic budgets, with an additional 22% from official development assistance and only 6% from the private sector. At COP 16, the Business for Land Forum highlighted private sector commitments and best practices for sustainable land use. Participants encouraged private and philanthropic investments in land restoration and transition from harmful to sustainable practices.

Furthermore, COP 16 secured over USD 12 billion in funding pledges to the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership that will support the world's most vulnerable countries in building resilience to drought. This amplifies the role of governments, international organizations, financial institutions, and the private sector in combating DLDD. Although many saw the COP's inability to adopt a substantive decision on drought as a disappointment, they were still buoyed by the fact that COP 16 launched an important financial legacy that will ensure enhanced work on drought.

The People's Convention

The UNCCD is the only multilateral environmental agreement that dedicates a full day to dialogues between civil society and governments on the official agenda. At COP 16, these dialogues

featured inspiring stories about what local communities, Indigenous Peoples, youth, women, and small organizations are doing to foster land restoration, sustainable land management, and other activities. From tree planting to enhancing the capacity of young people to be farmers, these endeavors reveal how people can implement the Convention through everyday actions.

In the negotiations, efforts to expand the role of civil society organizations in the UNCCD's work both at the local and international levels were successful. Many applauded the creation of two new UNCCD caucuses: one for Indigenous Peoples and one for Local Communities.

The decision on civil society also confirmed support for convening the Youth Caucus, implementing the Youth Engagement Strategy, and supporting the Land Youth Negotiators Programme. At COP 16, young people were a visible presence, as nearly forty youth sat on official delegations, underscoring the engagement of the next generation of land stewards.

In addition, the Gender Caucus high-level dialogue was standing-room only, even running out of time for all the parties who wanted to speak.

While the decision did not give civil society access to contact groups, which was a major priority for many, delegates agreed to ask the Secretariat to study how other multilateral environmental negotiations allow civil society access to the negotiations and report back to COP 17.

Looking Ahead to Mongolia

COP 17 in Mongolia in 2026 coincides with the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. With the first-ever UNCCD decision on rangelands and pastoralists in place, and a basis for negotiations on drought affixed in an annex, delegates reflected that the wins of COP 16 create a strong basis for progress leading up to COP 17.

Delegates left the conference venue under a nearly full moon at 2:00 am on Saturday morning. Exhausted after hard-fought discussions on drought, many delegates expressed support for the other decisions taken in Riyadh. Ultimately, they shared the belief that the UNCCD is on the right path. With the science, Strategic Framework, and participation of civil society and governments in place, the “people's convention” is better positioned to address DLDD, build a more resilient world, and make a meaningful difference in peoples' lives.

Upcoming Meetings

Resumed Session of CBD COP 16: The second resumed 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will convene to adopt all outstanding decisions from COP 16 in Cali, Colombia. The first resumed session adopted the CBD Secretariat's budget by silence procedure from 3-6 December 2024. **dates:** 25-27 March 2025 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** cbd.int/meetings/COP-16-R2

CGRFA 20: The 20th regular session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture will address a range of issues related to its Multi-Year Programme of Work. **dates:** 24-28 March 2025 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** fao.org/cgrfa

UNFF20: The UN Forum on Forests will review progress in implementing the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, progress in implementing mid-term review outcomes, UNFF's inputs to the

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), and other international forest-related developments. **dates:** 5-9 May 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/esa/forests

Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD): This conference will address new and emerging issues, the urgent need to fully implement the SDGs, and reform of the international financial architecture. **dates:** 30 June-3 July 2025 **location:** Seville, Spain **www:** financing.desa.un.org/ffd4

HLPF 2025: The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will address the theme of “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind.” The SDGs to be reviewed in-depth are Goals 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17. **dates:** 14-23 July 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP 15): The 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands will review the Convention’s implementation. **dates:** 23-31 July 2025 **location:** Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe **www:** ramsar.org/meetings

IUCN World Conservation Congress: Held once every four years, the IUCN World Conservation Congress brings together leaders and decision-makers from government, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, business, and academia, with the goal of conserving the environment and harnessing the solutions nature offers to global challenges. **dates:** 9-15 October 2025 **location:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates **www:** iucn.org/our-union/iucn-world-conservation-congress

ITTC-61: Among other things, the Council is due to discuss the re-negotiation of the ITTA, and ITTO cooperation and collaboration with other bodies. **dates:** 20-24 October 2025 **location:** Panama [TBD] **www:** itto.int

Second World Summit for Social Development 2025: The Second World Summit for Social Development will address the gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action and its implementation and give momentum towards implementing the 2030 Agenda. **dates:** 4-6 November 2025 **location:** Doha, Qatar **www:** social.desa.un.org/second-world-summit-for-social-development

ITPGRFA GB 11: The 11th Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is expected to conclude the revision of the Treaty’s Multilateral System (MLS) of access and benefit sharing and will address other issues, including on farmers’ rights. **dates:** 24-29 November 2025 **location:** Peru **www:** fao.org/plant-treaty

UNFCCC COP 30: The 30th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 30), the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 20), and the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 7) will convene to review implementation. **dates:** 10-21 November 2025 **location:** Belém, Brazil **www:** unfccc.int

UNEA-7: The seventh meeting of the UN Environment Assembly will set the global environmental agenda, provide overarching policy guidance, and define policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges. **dates:** 8-12 December 2025 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unep.org/environmentassembly/unea7

UNCCD CRIC 23: The next session of the UNCCD CRIC will convene to review implementation of the UNCCD Strategic Framework, reporting, and other issues. **dates:** last quarter, 2025 (TBC) **location:** Panama (TBC) **www:** unccd.int

UNCCD COP 17: The next session of the COP, the CST and CRIC will convene to adopt decisions to further the implementation of the Convention. **dates:** July 2026 (TBC) **location:** Mongolia **www:** unccd.int/

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

CBD	Convention on 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
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GLO	Global Land Outlook
GM	Global Mechanism
GRULAC	Group of Latin American and Caribbean States
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
IWG	Intergovernmental Working Group
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
PRAIS	Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDS	Sand and dust storms
SIDS	Small island developing states
SLM	Sustainable land management
SLUS	Sustainable land use systems
SPI	Science-Policy Interface
STCs	Science and Technology Correspondents
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
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
WMO	World Meteorological Organization