

Summary of the Twenty-third Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 1–5 December 2025

“We can’t protect the land without protecting the people who care for it.”

This statement encapsulates a week that was in part a reflection of the core mandate of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD CRIC): assessing the Convention’s progress. But amid the exchanges on methodological issues, the Gender Caucus meeting, which focused on Indigenous women’s leadership and marked the first one convened at a CRIC session, brought a sense of urgency, as well as colorful energy to the discussions.

The Gender Caucus highlighted powerful testimonies of Indigenous women leaders and the reality that desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) impacts men and women differently. The discussions emphasized the need for direct financing, free prior informed consent, and decision-making spaces that genuinely include women and Indigenous and local communities.

These discussions, along with sessions on land tenure and land degradation neutrality (LDN) highlighted that restoration efforts cannot succeed without securing land and resource rights, enabling direct access to finance, and embedding community governance into national implementation plans.

Several countries emphasized that the ability to implement LDN hinges on governance reforms that link national planning with community realities. Many repeatedly called for a transition from short project cycles to long-term institutional strengthening, and the need for a dedicated, well-resourced capacity-building architecture, with regional hubs emerging as one of the preferred models.

Country presentations of the new generation of the voluntary LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP 2.0) showcased how integrated governance, cross-sector coordination, and spatially explicit planning can elevate national ambition. Delegates from diverse regions noted that LDN gains traction when anchored in national development strategies and linked to broader policy frameworks on drought, biodiversity, and climate.

Many delegates praised Panama’s Nature Pledge: a national effort to integrate planning, monitoring and reporting on the three Rio Conventions: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UNCCD.

Delegates welcomed the upgrades to the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System (PRAIS) platform to ease reporting for the 2026 cycle, but African countries and small island developing states (SIDS) underscored persistent data gaps that impede planning. Several warned against over-complexity: reporting systems must remain voluntary, interoperable, and realistic for national institutions with limited resources.

Political tensions also surfaced when the Russian Federation objected to having their scientific expert locked out “for political reasons.” There was concern that leaving out one of the most important agenda items of this session—recommendations of the Intergovernmental Working Group for a Future Scientific Framework (IWG-FSF)—would be detrimental to a strong outcome at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) in 2026, with just a few years left until the conclusion of the current strategic framework. This left many delegates urging a renewed commitment to the science–policy interface ahead of COP17.

CRIC 23 brought together roughly 430 delegates in Panama City, Panama, from 1–5 December 2025, and included more than 40 side events, the inaugural CRIC Gender Caucus, and informal exchanges feeding into the work of the IWG-FSF.

Opening Plenary

On Monday, 1 December, CRIC 23 Chair Philippine Dutailly (France) welcomed delegates, noting this session convenes shortly after the meetings of the subsidiary bodies to the CBD. She said this signals the host country’s commitment to coordinated action on land conservation and restoration. She looked forward to the first Gender Caucus meeting, as well as the opportunity to elevate the role of science in the work of the CRIC, and invited delegates to provide input to the IWG-FSF.

Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha, Deputy Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture, Saudi Arabia, described 2024 as the year of land, with key moments including: the “historic” resolution on land degradation by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6); World Environment Day celebrations on “Our Land Our Future”; the launch of the Riyadh Action Agenda and 38 aligned initiatives at UNCCD COP 16; and launch of the of the RAIZ Initiative (Resilient Agriculture Investment for Net Zero Land Degradation), an accelerator for global action on land restoration focusing on degraded agricultural land, at UNFCCC COP 30 in Brazil.

Batmunkh Dondovdorj, Chairman of the Office and Executive Secretary, COP 17 National Committee of Mongolia, said CRIC 23 was convening at a moment of intensifying land degradation, drought and water scarcity, affecting communities around the world. He underscored the importance of rangelands and pastoralist

ecosystems in land restoration efforts, decriing the limited policy attention they receive compared to forests or croplands. He expressed his country's commitment to deliver an inclusive and scientifically robust COP that reflects regional priorities.

Yasmine Fouad, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, observed that the closeness of one of the world's most important waterways reveals the interconnectedness of land, water, climate, and economies. She noted that as a non-negotiating session, CRIC 23 provides Parties with an opportunity to review progress, identify gaps, and accelerate solutions, in particular on drought, which is projected to affect three quarters of humanity by 2050. She thanked the COP 16 Presidency for initiating the Tafa'ul Process, an informal and voluntary dialogue platform on drought issue, and Panama's role in advancing these consultations on the margins of CRIC 23. She described the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership and related Drought Resilience Investment Fund (DRIF) as a model for a new UNCCD finance architecture to derisk private investments in land restoration.

Juan Carlos Navarro, Minister of Environment, Panama, said that all countries face the impacts of climate change, soil degradation, human pressure on watersheds, drought, and other interlinked crises. He said his country's Nature Pledge and associated Natural Panama Fund is responding to these complex challenges by driving integrated and long-term action with a focus on protected areas and the communities that manage these resources. He urged delegates to offer concrete guidance to countries on how to advance urgent and coordinated action at the national and international levels.

Opening Statements: Burkina Faso, for the AFRICAN GROUP, said it was regretful that many African delegates were unable to participate at CRIC 2023 due to problems with visas.

Bhutan, for the ASIA PACIFIC, drew attention to delays with the CRIC reporting process and suggested a greater support role for regional bodies, including in providing advice to the IWG-FSF process.

While welcoming the establishment of the women delegates fund, Paraguay, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), underscored the need for adequate, timely, and predictable financing, including for the newly established Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Caucuses.

Spain, for the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, supported GRULAC's call for strengthening the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) as an inclusive, independent, and permanent body of the Convention, noting Parties need strong scientific guidance in accessible formats to support decision making. They welcomed the work on gender indicators and inclusion of civil society organizations (CSOs).

Azerbaijan, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, called reinforcing UNCCD science-policy guidance to reflect the increasingly interconnected nature of DLDD, biodiversity loss, and climate change impacts. They expressed hope that the IWG-FSF would help to modernize the Convention with an ambitious response to emerging realities.

The EU said multilateral governance is critical in addressing DLDD challenges but must be anchored in national action programmes (NAPs) and local implementation realities. They looked forward to discussions on the future strategic framework, welcoming the participatory consultation approach of the IWG-FSF.

TURKMENISTAN outlined the work of a six-country interregional platform that has developed a 2030 roadmap to support coordinated action and thematic division of tasks among member countries.

BRAZIL requested clarification on the incorporation of regional group reports in the CRIC agenda, as decided at COP 16.

GUYANA and GRENADA underscored the unique challenges faced by low-lying states and expressed appreciation for support provided by the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) and other regional partners. GUYANA, with SAINT LUCIA, requested further support in developing high resolution Geographic Information System (GIS) data to tackle DLDD hotspots identified during the LDN process.

The UN Environment Programme said their focus on the triple planetary crisis underlines the importance of synergies, highlighting the Global Biodiversity Framework target to restore 30% of degraded landscapes by 2030.

CSOs decried the impact of budget cuts, shrinking civic space and other pressures on local-level action, especially in light of accelerating DLDD. They expressed concern about visa restrictions for CRIC delegates and listed key imperatives for the Convention including direct financing for local action, gender sensitive programmes, equitable land rights, and the meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Organizational Matters: Following an objection from the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the CRIC resolved to shelve discussion of agenda items relating to priorities for science-policy guidance ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/1](#)) to allow parties to carry out further consultations.

Charles Lange (Kenya) was confirmed as Rapporteur for CRIC 23 and 24. The Committee appointed Khalid Cherki (Morocco) and Anastasiia Gotgelf (Germany) as Co-Facilitators of the CRIC Contact Group.

Effective Implementation of the Convention at National, Subregional and Regional Levels

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention:

This interactive dialogue session took place on Monday afternoon and continued on Tuesday morning.

The Secretariat introduced the progress report ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/6](#)) noting it outlines initial considerations for a future capacity-building strategy that will also promote increased synergies across the Rio Conventions.

India, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, called for increased attention to innovative resource mobilization in a shrinking funding landscape. With SAUDI ARABIA, they suggested one approach to this could be to expand decentralized hubs at the regional and national level to deliver long-term technical backstopping. While calling for exploring artificial intelligence (AI) tools to optimize available knowledge but cautioned against contributing to a "two-tier" knowledge landscape.

Cameroon, for the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed that for the UNCCD to deliver on its core mission, capacity-building programmes must be linked to substantial, predictable, and timely financing. They requested the IWG-FSF to provide clear guidance on the establishment of a capacity-building unit to leverage knowledge from the SPI and other Convention structures.

Brazil, on behalf of GRULAC, stressed that a robust monitoring infrastructure and stable funding are critical in building institutional capacities at the national level to generate, validate, and track high quality data. They called for increased attention to initiatives focused on women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and promote sustainable land management (SLM) practices, adaptive

production systems, and nature-based solutions rooted in local and traditional knowledge.

MONTENEGRO emphasized the importance of moving away from project-based activities towards institutional learning and innovation.

SOUTH AFRICA said the Secretariat report is a good starting point for the discussions as it provides a clear synopsis of gaps, challenges, and opportunities.

TURKMENISTAN said the decision to invest in the regional knowledge sharing platform, drawing on niche expertise of each member country, is already showing promising results.

CHINA said they have invested heavily in increasing national capacities to achieve LDN and have thus accumulated a wealth of experience in monitoring technologies. They called for additional efforts to improve coordination among technical agencies and international programmes to avoid duplication of efforts, noting China will host a regional capacity-building programme in 2026 towards this end.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA outlined their extensive capacity-building projects in the region and beyond, noting they emphasize the link between SLM, food security, and other benefits for local livelihoods.

The EU called for capacity-building to be strongly embedded in the work of the IWG-FSF.

The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) highlighted the contribution their e-learning academy and other technical support focusing on land restoration and drought resilience in the agricultural sector.

The COOK ISLANDS said the current project-based approach makes it difficult for countries to apply for multi-year programmatic funding. They supported decentralized regional support hubs that resonate best with different realities and facilitate building on established networks.

The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) welcomed the Secretariat report's assessment that more coordinated and long-term actions are needed, expressing their readiness to partner with UNCCD and Parties to advance this approach.

The Secretariat welcomed the positive response to the pilot project on engaging regional centers in capacity-building activities and informed Parties that while there is urgent need to redesign and relaunch the UNCCD Capacity Building Marketplace as a unique global platform facilitating access to internship and training activities, progress has been hampered by limited human and financial resources.

Improving the Procedures for Communication as well as the Quality and Format of Reports to be Submitted to the COP: On Tuesday morning, the Secretariat introduced the progress report ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/2](#)), noting it responds to decision 4/COP.16 requesting the Convention institutions to enhance the functionality of the PRAIS platform for the 2026 reporting process, including through enhanced collaboration with data providers, financial and technical partners, and the Earth Observation community to support country capacity development.

Kicking off the panel discussion, Sara Minelli and Brian O'Connor, UNCCD Secretariat, walked delegates through improvements made to the 2026 UNCCD reporting process. They noted it is supported by an "evolving infrastructure" based on improved scientific collaboration, integration of PRAIS with other tools for seamless data flow, increased flexibility for Parties to

remove, adapt, or add new targets, and development of new context-specific decision support tools (notably for SIDS) that also allow for cross-country comparisons.

On data accessibility and communication, the Secretariat highlighted the addition of a new LDN Target and Actions page to the UNCCD Data Dashboard and improvements to the TRENDS. EARTH monitoring tool, with the latter providing new features as:

- enabling status updates building on the [Good Practice Guidance Addendum](#) to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 15.3.1 (proportion of land that is degraded over total land area) that addresses specific challenges reported by Parties;
- a revised algorithm to speed up high resolution land cover data processing; and
- providing greater flexibility in available datasets.

Ingrid Teich, WOCAT (World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies), provided an update of the country experiences shared at CRIC 21 that were subsequently published in a "Land Story" launched at COP 16. Ronen Francis, Partnership Initiative for SLM (PISLM) and César Luis Garcia, Apacheta, highlighted some ongoing capacity-building initiatives for SIDS.

Taylor Campbell, Creative Commons, outlined new guidance for nationally reported data and recommended that Parties make use of the "attribution as requested" (CC BY) option that safeguards knowledge creators while enhancing interoperability and access to data. She encouraged the CRIC to reflect on how to further explore and apply these licensing options to ensure that critical data can be freely shared while respecting attribution requirements.

In the ensuing discussion, many countries, including PERU, PALAU, and ARMENIA, noted the difficulty of generating common indicators in highly heterogenous contexts, stating this requires additional funding and technical support to develop more granular methodological frameworks. PERU called for further work on the soil organic carbon indicator at the national level as available information is derived from global datasets.

INDIA offered to share their expertise through South-South exchanges and regional capacity-building hubs. ARGENTINA welcomed the contribution of scientific partners and service providers, noting a pilot FAO-supported project will further enhance the quality of technical assistance.

PANAMA said ongoing efforts to make PRAIS more intuitive and interoperable would enhance policy and investment decisions. They stressed that the platform should be extended to enable analysis at the ecosystem level and should capture community-led restoration beyond forest cover alone.

PALAU expressed concern that most countries have not had an opportunity to test the updated portal. Supported by PAKISTAN and others, they called for better synchronization of such platform rollouts with capacity-building at the regional level.

UGANDA cautioned against the introduction of multiple frameworks and stressed that future improvements should enhance interoperability.

BRAZIL stressed that new monitoring and reporting systems must be compatible with country realities, voluntary, and focused on enhancing usability. They cautioned about undermining privacy of national data or imposing more burdens on countries. SAINT LUCIA stressed that many SIDS still lack complete 30m resolution data, making it difficult to build LDN trajectories. They encouraged consolidation of SIDS-specific tools building on existing initiatives such as PISLM and Apacheta.

Many speakers welcomed efforts to strengthen UNCCD capacity-building tools, including e-learning materials, technical backstopping, regional capacity-building workshops, and South-South and international cooperation.

CHINA stressed that the systems presented do not provide options for adding self-defined indicators and called for tools that allow the optimization of DLDD data based on national data sets. They further noted the importance of understanding long-term trends and dynamic changes in drought conditions

GUYANA said the availability of improved geospatial data sets and customizable tools based on open data are critical elements for improving reporting. They supported hybrid capacity-building approaches combining e-learning and regional training to foster ownership and collaboration.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION emphasized that language barriers continue to pose real barriers to technical capacity-building, calling for capacity-building programmes to be offered in all UN languages.

JAPAN said their contribution of USD 443 million for the 2022 reporting cycle was not reported in the dashboard.

The EU regretted that despite improvements to the PRAIS platform, persistent reporting gaps limit comparability. They called for integrating the various tools in an accessible portal and strongly encouraged the Secretariat to adopt open source technologies.

CSOs stressed that the quality of reporting directly impacts transparency, guides resource allocation and determines “who is excluded.” They called for targeted capacity building for CSOs, and co-development of simplified reporting formats at the local level.

Update on the Implementation of the Voluntary LDN Targets and Related Implementation Efforts: Discussion of this agenda item took place on Thursday.

Introducing the first segment in the morning, the Global Mechanism (GM) said the progress report ([ICCD/CRIC\(23/5\)](#)), provides an update on a COP 16 decision inviting Parties to refine their voluntary LDN by ensuring that they are “specific, time-bound, policy-coherent, quantitative, spatially explicit, gender-responsive and well-integrated into planning frameworks.” The decision further requested the GM and Secretariat to support voluntary LDN target setting beyond the current 18 countries in LDN TSP 2.0, including through expanding partnerships and coordination with other conventions.

Summarizing key results from the first phase (LDN TSP 1.0), the GM noted a total of 131 participating countries have set voluntary LDN targets to date, of which 107 final national LDN reports are publicly available on the UNCCD website. They noted that these voluntary LDN targets represent almost 600 billion hectares of degraded land globally.

Four countries involved in developing new generation LDN initiatives highlighted their experiences.

Melani Acosta Chin provided an overview of Panama’s Nature Pledge, noting it responds to challenges faced in managing different reporting cycles for the three Rio Conventions, which led to duplication of reporting systems and inefficient use of human and financial resources.

Among steps taken, she outlined:

- the transition from three reports to one integrated national report, the Nature Pledge;
- undertaking a broad national consultation process, including with Indigenous Peoples and local communities that enabled the consolidation of the original 100 targets to 30 crosscutting and ambitious national targets relevant to all three Conventions;

- integration of this synergies approach to the funding structure with the creation of the Panama Nature Fund; and
- developing a new governance model bringing together all relevant ministries and sectoral agencies to support integrated reporting.

Mmoto Leonard Masubelele discussed South Africa’s integration of national plans and targets across their LDN and NAPs (UNCCD), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (CBD) and nationally-determined contributions (UNFCCC) processes. He said their integrated biome-level planning approach is a promising model that can contribute to multiple benefits across environmental, social, and economic sectors, especially at the local level.

Maurille Elegbede, UNCCD National Focal Point, Benin, noted that 40% of agricultural land is degraded, especially in the cotton growing zones. She said this has necessitated evolving their LDN TSP approach from setting “simple” targets towards more complex indicators to guide planning, especially at the local level, and address gaps and overlaps in national policies.

Ulrich Apel, Global Environment Facility (GEF), provided an overview of their USD 352 million System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) portfolio that is funding 67 LDN implementation projects in 56 countries and has raised USD 2.5 billion in co-financing.

He underlined four key lessons learned:

- LDN is a scientific concept that needs to be tailored to national and local realities;
- thanks to the UNCCD programmes and efforts of countries, LDN is becoming a recognizable “brand” with new innovative financing mechanisms being leveraged for transformative projects and programmes; and
- the LDN TSP framework is a useful tool for enhancing policy coherence across sectoral ministries and a unifier across the Rio Conventions.

He concluded, however, that numerous challenges and information gaps still exist in setting, updating, revising, and monitoring voluntary LDN targets.

In the ensuing discussion, more than 30 countries highlighted lessons learned from their LDN processes.

ARGENTINA noted that a key lesson learned is the need for a range of consultant profiles to support the various stages of the LDN TSP 2.0 process.

BRAZIL called for the balanced treatment of all pillars of the UNCCD, cautioning that land degradation has been “disproportionately emphasized” in recent years, compared to desertification and drought.

Many speakers underscored that despite the advances made, countries require sustained technical and financial support to bridge gaps in data, institutional capacities and resource mobilization for transformative projects. Many welcomed the increased focus on large-scale, multi-country projects to support learning and knowledge exchange.

The PHILIPPINES recommended integrating LDN TSP 2.0 into programmatic long-term frameworks, with integrated land use planning providing one possible entry point.

SAINT LUCIA and several other SIDS expressed appreciation for the technical support provided by PISLM and Apacheta, particularly in filling data gaps around soil organic carbon and soil productivity.

PANAMA underscored the importance of anchoring LDN planning at the ecosystem or river basin level, recognizing community-led SLM actions beyond forest cover, and providing

targeted support for environmental defenders, women, Indigenous Peoples and other land stewards.

SOUTH AFRICA and MOROCCO welcomed the launch of the Great Green Wall Accelerator for Southern Africa and called for increased funding for transformative projects and programmes.

ARGENTINA noted the need for countries to have access to a diverse set of consultant profiles to support the various stages of the target-setting process, and the role of regional exchanges in reinforcing technical capacities.

SAUDI ARABIA emphasized the need for LDN road maps to build national capacities and enhance the participation of diverse stakeholders and enhance institutional coordination and policy coherence.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC said Panama's Nature Pledge is an inspiration for the region. They stressed that the objective of LDN programmes should not only focus on measuring progress but addressing the structural causes of DLDD.

SOMALIA noted that while they have set ambitious LDN targets, they face institutional, capacity, and funding constraints in making progress.

CHINA offered to share their experience with big data, integrated land use planning, and spatially explicit monitoring with the Great Green Wall and other large-scale projects.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA outlined their contribution to the institutionalization of the LDN concept through the Changwon Initiative and related programmes.

FAO highlighted ongoing work to finalize guidelines on integrated land use planning in response to the need for more integrated and participatory approaches and enhancing synergies across environmental multilateral environmental agreements and food systems. The UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP) looked forward to supporting Panama to translate its Nature Pledge into concrete action on the ground.

IUCN observed that LDN has matured into an integrated planning instrument, highlighting that data governance and political leadership matter as much as technical capacities. Noting that a visible gap remains between revised targets and bankable projects, they called for a focus on enabling conditions, especially at the landscape levels.

Responding to a question from ARGENTINA, the GM said any country involved in revising targets is strongly encouraged to report via PRAIS4. They encouraged countries that would like to be included on the LDN TSP 2.0 support programme to send an official expression of interest.

Resource mobilization for land degradation and drought resilience: The second panel convened on Thursday afternoon.

In introductory remarks, Moderator Houtan Bassiri, GM, said the funding gap for land restoration and drought resilience is currently estimated at USD 1 billion a day. Despite an increasingly crowded global financing environment, he noted that additional funding can be mobilized by, among others, enhancing synergies across programmes, and repurposing financial flows away from unsustainable activities. He invited panelists to address three key questions: What's blocking your path from grants to investment? Which financing innovations fit your context? How can the GM best support you?

Ignacio Lorenzo Arana, Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), said the bank has established a floor of 40% for green investments, with a target of reaching USD 40 billion for UNCCD-relevant projects in the region, including for water and drought resilience, disaster risk reduction, and regenerative agriculture. He

underscored the need for proposed projects to demonstrate a clear economic rationale and explore innovative instruments such as sovereign guarantees to derisk private investments.

Virginie de Cauwer, Luxembourg, described the newly launched DRIF as an innovative blended finance instrument that offers a funding pipeline for drought, which until now has not been captured by standard funds due to its complex and cross-cutting nature.

Khalid Cherki, Morocco, said their experience highlights that governance is critical in attracting funding, including a clear strategic framework with buy-in at the highest policy level, and ensuring inclusion of all concerned sectors. Among other elements for success, he underscored the importance of data for building a strong business case, enhancing synergies across projects, mapping all available funding sources, and regular engagement with technical and financial partners.

Alla Ljungman, GEF, outlined programmes to encourage private sector finance towards issues related to LDN and drought, noting the GEF has been using blended finance instruments since 2008.

Fiona Flintan, International Livestock Research Institute, discussed the role of research and scientific institutions in developing bankable projects. She mentioned the Global Rangelands Standard, to be launched at COP 17, as a concrete example that is tailored to benefit pastoralist and community organizations.

Goulmara Aguiar, Ormex, offered insights on the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, noting it has the potential to become a global model on how to build an architecture where drought resilience becomes investible and accessible to frontline communities. She said Ormex can contribute their experience as a global certification agency for carbon farming that focuses on tangible environmental and social benefits in restoration programmes.

In the ensuing discussion, several speakers noted the need for equitable access to these emerging funds. Many also emphasized that for communities to benefit, there should be early investment in organizational capacity-building to manage such funds, as well as safeguarding their land rights in large-scale restoration programmes.

Policy Frameworks and Thematic Topics

Sand and Dust Storms (SDS): Consideration of this item ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/3](#)) began on Tuesday afternoon. The Secretariat introduced a report summarizing activities undertaken by the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism on the policy frameworks and thematic issues related to SDS, drought, land tenure, and gender.

China, for ASIA PACIFIC, underlined the increasing severity of SDS, noting in excess of half a billion tons of sand and dust are emitted each year. They called for explicit mechanisms to enhance analysis of this phenomenon, noting the framework must be implemented in close collaboration with affected countries and communities

MICRONESIA welcomed the UN Decade on Combating SDS, noting their impact in SIDS despite originating elsewhere. They called for high resolution data suited to SIDS' geography to drive action, and suggested that the Global Initiative on SIDS include case studies and regional pilots to better understand risks faced in these regions.

SOUTH AFRICA noted that soil degradation and reduced vegetation cover in croplands are a growing source of SDS in arid and semi-arid landscapes. They stressed the need for transboundary monitoring and knowledge sharing for early warning and building local resilience to SDS hazards.

The EU noted that climate change and unsustainable land and water use have increased the severity and frequency of SDS, especially in urban environments and vulnerable ecosystems. They noted the Global Initiative on SDS could also contribute to strengthening core DLDD areas, while also contributing to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Gender and SDS: At the close of the Gender Caucus segment on Wednesday afternoon, a research team from UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) presented findings from a scoping study on the gender dimensions of SDS conducted in Mali, Egypt, and Australia.

Introducing the session, Moderator Rukaia Parveen Tuba, UNU-EHS, noted that men and women experience, respond to, and adapt to SDS differently, shaped by daily roles, livelihood activities, and in some cases even by biological differences that influence health impacts. She said that applying a gender lens helps us understand how SDS shapes behavior, what adaptation approaches work best, and how we can design gender-responsive policies and actions.

Among some of the patterns observed were varying coping strategies among women and men such as reducing travel, use of clothing and physical protection, participation in community awareness raising activities, or migration. The study team emphasized that a key takeaway is not to debate who is affected more but recognize that women and men are affected differently.

Among suggestions for deepening this analysis in future research, they proposed looking into:

- how men and women's land use practices contribute to the drivers of SDS;
- how SDS reinforce or reshape existing gender roles within households and communities;
- how SDS affect the mental health of women and men;
- SDS mitigation and recovery strategies in the informal sector where women are overrepresented; and
- specific adaptation and coping mechanisms employed by men and women during SDS events.

Rokiatou Traore, Herou Alliance, Mali, outlined how affected communities in the Sahel are adapting and innovating in response to accelerating impacts of SDS. She highlighted efforts to create natural buffers against SDS, and linking such initiatives to sustainable livelihoods and value chains for local communities.

In response, the EU noted that this is a complex topic that also requires additional work on intersections among the many complex SDS impacts and drivers. They suggested that such work build on lessons learned from previous gender studies by specialized institutions, and aligned with the UNCCD Gender Road Map.

Land tenure: The Committee began consideration of this agenda item ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/3](#)) on Thursday evening.

In their introduction, the Secretariat highlighted ongoing work by the UNCCD and FAO to develop a Land Tenure Toolbox and a Compendium of Accountability and Grievance Mechanisms related to Land Tenure as part of the Joint Initiative on Land Tenure.

While welcoming these new tools, Madagascar, for the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed that to apply them effectively requires building sufficient institutional and governance capacities.

SENEGAL underscored the need for multi-stakeholder dialogue at all levels.

The UK welcomed [renewed pledges](#) made by 35 governments and philanthropies at UNFCCC COP 30 to commit USD 1.8 billion over five years to support Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant communities to secure land rights and halt

deforestation. They noted this commitment has also expanded the focus from forests to drylands and rangelands.

SOUTH AFRICA stressed that asking the question: "Who owns land and who has rights to use the land?" has a significant influence on how land is managed.

AUSTRALIA said land and tenure security is critical for empowering women and girls. Panama noted the link between effective environmental governance and territorial governance, as the latter requires empowering the communities who manage land and natural resources.

GUYANA highlighted the close link between land tenure security and forest governance, noting that Indigenous and local communities manage more than 18 million hectares of land and have maintained deforestation rates of less than 1%.

The EU welcomed the development of the land tenure guidance tools, calling for efforts to extend support to the remaining 28 countries who have requested support to conduct national consultations on integrating land tenure into LDN programmes.

Special Segment: Gender Caucus

Leadership and worldviews of Indigenous women for sustainable land management: Taking place for the first time at a CRIC session, the Gender Caucus convened on Wednesday. In the morning, a plenary session facilitated by Adrian Sigüenza, British Embassy, Panama, brought together Indigenous women leaders to discuss land governance, ancestral knowledge systems, and current land-related challenges.

Opening the discussions, Sigüenza said the theme of the segment was in direct response to the Sacred Lands Indigenous Peoples Declaration adopted at UNCCD COP 16.

Edel Moraes, National Secretary for Traditional Peoples and Communities and Sustainable Rural Development at the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change of Brazil, stressed that women stand at the frontlines of overlapping vulnerabilities, yet are also guardians of ancestral knowledge and leaders of innovation. She noted "it is not a coincidence" that large-scale social programmes in Brazil prioritize women.

Aulina Ismare Opuá, National Chief of the Wounaan Nation of Panama, said that despite their role as custodians of land, forests, and biodiversity, Indigenous Peoples are often sidelined in both national and global processes. She posed the question: "How can we talk about women's access to financing without making us part of the process that gives us access to that funding and allows us to manage our territories?"

Aluki Kotierk, Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), drew attention to the UN Decade on Indigenous Languages, noting Indigenous women play an invaluable role in keeping alive diverse cultures, languages, and worldviews and add diversity and richness to global discussions.

A panel discussion offered perspectives on how to advance gender-responsive and community-led land restoration and drought resilience efforts by Indigenous women.

Hindou Ibrahim, Coordinator, Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, opened by celebrating the announcement of the International Day of Indigenous Women and Girls to be marked on 6 December. She emphasized that Indigenous women are doing a lot on the ground "without knowing what the UNCCD or CRIC is." With accelerated DLDD in the Sahel region, she noted that women are left to take care of children, elders, and livestock when men are forced to migrate in search of jobs. She stressed that women depend on their ancestral knowledge to survive and hence need to be part of

dialogue processes, as well as receive direct financing to act on the solutions they hold.

Orkhon Battumur, a nomadic herder from Khujirt, a soum in Övörkhongai Province, Mongolia, said that despite facing many hardships, women herders make significant contributions to sustainable land management, and improving nutrition and incomes for their communities.

Yanel Venado Jiménez, Gender and Youth Coordinator at the National Coordination of Indigenous Peoples of Panama, said that while Indigenous women are central to maintaining communities and natural resources, they do not have control over land and other economic resources that they need to play this role.

During the subsequent discussion, PERU described the adoption of the Lima Work Programme and, most recently, the Belém Gender Action Plan (2016–2034) as decisive steps towards ensuring the full and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous women and girls in climate solutions, that also opens new opportunities for mainstreaming a gender approach across the Rio Conventions

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA said one third of rural women in the country do not own any economic assets, which impacts their ability to invest in SLM.

FIJI observed that while women are often at the frontline of climate impacts they do not control the tools to intervene. They noted that empowering Indigenous women is not only about social equity but an imperative for achieving LDN by incorporating their unique knowledge. They proposed four key actions towards this: securing women's land and resource rights; investing in initiatives at the local level that channel finance directly to women-led organizations; integrating Indigenous knowledge systems with scientific processes in order to find locally appropriate solutions; and creating safe and accessible spaces for Indigenous women to meet and strategize for influencing change at all levels.

While welcoming the formalization of the UNCCD Gender, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Caucuses, Brazil said further work is needed to develop their operational modalities. They also noted the need to enhance gender balance within country delegations.

The EU stressed that all caucuses must be open, transparent, and participative.

Closing Plenary

Adoption of the report of the meeting: On Friday afternoon, Chair Dutailly informed delegates that no consensus was reached on how to proceed with the two agenda items on science-related matters. She thanked Parties for their input and said the matter would be forwarded to COP 17.

CRIC Rapporteur Charles Lange, introduced the draft report of the meeting (ICCD/CRIC(23)/L.3) and explained that it is organized in five separate sections corresponding to the programme of work. Delegates proceeded to adopt the following sections of the report:

- Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building to further the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(23)/L.1);
- Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP (ICCD/CRIC(23)/L.2);
- Policy frameworks and thematic topics: sand and dust storms (ICCD/CRIC(23)/L.4); and
- Special Segment: Gender Caucus (ICCD/CRIC(23)/L.5).

The Committee agreed to forward the draft report of CRIC 23 to the Secretariat and CRIC Bureau for finalization.

Reiterating their position on the CRIC 23 provisional agenda, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION asked that the CRIC 23 report include a note stating that they were “forced to object” to the inclusion of Items 4 (on the interim report of the IWG-FSF) and 5 (consideration of priorities for science-policy guidance) since participation of the Russian candidate “is being blocked for political reasons.”

Closing statements: Bhutan, for ASIA-PACIFIC, said common themes that emerged during the discussions included: the urgent need for equitable, timely and predictable financing; targeted support for DLDD action; and instruments to derisk private sector investments in drought, SDS, and other challenges. They called for support for LDN TSP 2.0 transformative programmes to be extended to more countries, and underscored the importance of strengthening regional centers to enhance capacity-building efforts. They expressed support for calls to designate an International Day for Rangelands, and elevating the UNCCD SIDS Forum into a formal UNCCD SIDS Caucus.

The EU expressed their “deep regret” that the Committee did not discuss agenda items relating to science, stressing these are existential topics for the future of the Convention. They welcomed progress on the new Global Land Outlook report, and noted the need to ensure its visibility, while calling for the future strategic framework to be ambitious, science-based, inclusive, and aligned with the Convention. Noting the importance of strengthening synergies across the Rio Conventions as demonstrated by Panama's Nature Pledge, they highlighted further opportunities to enhance collaboration with CBD regional centers, improving interoperability of reporting systems based on Earth Systems data, and resource mobilization efforts

Burkina Faso, for the AFRICAN GROUP, underscored the growing urgency of drought impacts and welcomed ongoing initiatives such as the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership and the Tafa'ul Process facilitated by the COP 16 Presidency. They reiterated the region's position that a strong drought regime is the best way to drive the paradigm shift from reactive to proactive drought action. They expressed hope for an amicable solution to the IWG-FSF agenda ahead of COP 17.

Speaking for GRULAC, Paraguay stressed that LDN requires holistic approaches with effective involvement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. They echoed concern about delays in operationalizing the IWG-FSF despite the urgent need for robust science-based advice to Parties, and underscored the need for clarity in the Convention's rules of procedure. Welcoming the launch of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026, they said coordinated action on rangelands is vital for food security, biodiversity, and rural livelihoods.

Spain, for the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, said capacity-building and women's leadership are essential enablers of transformative change and should be reflected in IWG-FSF proposals. They welcomed efforts to enhance reporting via the PRAIS4 platform, and called for a more holistic approach to tackle SDS.

Azerbaijan, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, welcomed the progress made in enhancing reporting procedures and data quality on the PRAIS4 platform, and noted the community of learning for drought is an effective tool for drought planning. They welcomed the establishment of dedicated funding streams to support the participation of women and youth, while calling for more predictable funding to tackle the persistent financing gap for the Convention.

In other remarks, AUSTRALIA commended the terms of reference for the Indigenous Peoples Caucus, noting this body will provide a vital conduit to inform the UNCCD’s work.

CANADA highlighted their contribution to the Gender Action Plan and applauded UNCCD progress in strengthening science and enhancing synergies with other multilateral processes.

Stressing that “our communities deserve to hear that their voices were heard,” the COOK ISLANDS highlighted three priorities: capacity-building that lasts, equipping national systems and guardians of the land, and directing financial flows to those who need them the most.

Several speakers joined calls to establish the UNCCD SIDS Caucus. Other issues raised included the need to integrate LDN actions across food, land, and water, and investing in more granular data systems to support decision making in complex geographical terrains.

CHINA expressed regret that procedural matters had affected the work of the IWG-FSF and emphasized the importance of fair and balanced rules of procedure to avoid triggering a chain of adverse reactions.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC said that two of their LDN targets are directly linked to rangelands, noting that a more coordinated approach to rangelands in the lead up to COP 17 will enhance access to technology transfer and resources.

TÜRKIYE highlighted their intention to enhance Rio Conventions’ synergies as host of UNFCCC COP 31 in 2026.

In their recommendations to Parties, CSOs and YOUTH called for, *inter alia*:

- prioritizing long-term institutional capacity-building for the UNCCD staff, CSOs, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, as well as local communities;
- reflecting civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ inputs in national reports;
- securing equitable land rights and strengthening legal recognition for all;
- providing targeted support to youth-led initiatives, and land and human rights defenders; and
- supporting the implementation of the Youth Engagement Strategy at the national level.

In her closing remarks, Chair Dutailly stressed that the fight against DLDD is a formidable challenge, and said she was proud to be part of a community that did not shy away from difficult discussions. She thanked Anja Thust, UNCCD Secretariat, for her long service with the CRIC and wished her a well-deserved retirement.

UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary Andrea Mezza expressed appreciation to Government of Panama for their inspiring leadership. She stressed that as DLDD poses ever more existential threats, multilateralism must deliver and find solutions, no matter how difficult. Noting that restoration and regeneration begin with people, she praised the engagement on non-state actors at the session for bringing the voices of frontline actors to the discussions. Mezza described the first in-person consultation for the Indigenous People’s Caucus and the focus on Indigenous women’s leadership during the Gender Caucus as key highlights, informing delegates that efforts are underway to similarly establish the Local Communities Caucus. She also welcomed the convening of the first steering meeting of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, noting that 74 countries will soon receive support for their national drought plans.

Chair Dutailly gaveled CRIC 23 to a close at 5:27 pm.

Upcoming Meetings

UNCCD COP 17: Set to take place during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, UNCCD COP 17 will bring Parties together to build on efforts to promote the sustainable management, restoration, and conservation of rangelands while accelerating action against desertification, land degradation, and drought. **dates:** 17–28 August 2026 **location:** Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia **www:** unccdcop17.org and unccd.int

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

Glossary

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
CSOs	Civil society organizations
DLDD	Desertification, land degradation, and drought
DRIF	Drought Resilience Investment Facility
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GM	Global Mechanism
GRULAC	Latin American and Caribbean Group
IWG-FSF	Intergovernmental Working Group for a Future Strategic Framework
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
NAPs	National action programmes
PISLM	Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management
PRAIS	Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System
SDS	Sand and dust storms
SIDS	Small island developing states
SLM	Sustainable land management
SPI	Science-Policy Interface
TSP	Target Setting Programme
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies