

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights Tuesday, 18 August 2026

Despite the objections to a number of agenda items at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 17), several negotiating tracks got underway on the second day. The opening of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) saw initial discussions on interfacing science, policy and knowledge sharing, moving to the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI). The Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) addressed capacity-building and relations with financial mechanisms. The Committee of the Whole (COW) contact group continued discussing drought, and the CRIC and CST contact groups met in the evening. Consultations also continued on the “blocked” agenda items.

Committee on Science and Technology

CST Chair Nicholas Webb opened the morning session. UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad emphasized the importance of strengthening the SPI and developing an institutional foundation for the SPI to serve Parties in a more responsive manner. She further called for strengthening reporting with more robust evidence, science, and knowledge that can be effectively translated into the decision-making process.

Egypt, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized science must be enriched by Indigenous and local knowledge to strengthen adaptation and support the development of locally-appropriate solutions.

Indonesia, on behalf of the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, stressed that the new strategic framework must be inclusive, interdisciplinary, and adaptable to differing ecological and socio-economic contexts.

Moldova, on behalf of CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, underscored that implementation hinges on scientific knowledge dissemination, calling for enhanced cooperation with relevant scientific bodies and international organizations.

Uzbekistan, for CENTRAL ASIA AND RUSSIA, called for: a review of the SPI to ensure it responds to country needs; the development of regional land degradation indicators; and the creation of an open-data platform for calibrating satellite information with land-based observations.

Adoption of the Agenda: CST Chair Webb presented the provisional agenda ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/1](http://iccd/cop17/cst/1)).

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION opposed including the SPI work programme (Agenda item 2). They further opposed the participation of the Ukrainian expert in the SPI but expressed willingness to lift their objection to the agenda item if the Russian expert is allowed to participate in the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework (IWG-FSF).

The EU and AUSTRALIA indicated their support for the provisional agenda. Following a proposal from Chair Webb, Parties adopted the provisional agenda, except for Agenda item 2, pending further consultations.

UKRAINE underscored that the independent scientists of the SPI are selected through a global open call by the Bureau based on scientific merit and science-policy expertise. They also noted that the Russian-nominated expert to the IWG-FSF remains under regional consultation.

Election of Officers: Chay Asdak (Indonesia) was elected as the CST rapporteur. A contact group was established, facilitated by Joseph Noel (Grenada).

Interfacing science, policy and sharing knowledge: The Secretariat introduced the report ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/2](http://iccd/cop17/cst/2)).

Lisa Hartmann, UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security, outlined the sections of the report, noting that aridity and drought are systemic risks, requiring holistic approaches and coordinated action.

CST Vice-Chair Michelle Alvarez, noted that existing planning instruments provide national planners with entry points, while the report helps translate science into practical tools.

Andrea Toreti, SPI Member, reflected on the complex challenges presented by aridity and drought, and highlighted different ways scientific innovation and knowledge can support understanding how risks and impacts propagate from the local to the regional and global levels.

Marcella D’Souza, Director, Watershed Organization Trust Centre for Resilience Studies, highlighted the importance of bottom-up approaches to developing synergies. She emphasized the importance of uniting scientific and traditional knowledge to empower communities.

ARGENTINA stated proposed activities must respect national sovereignty, circumstances, and capacities.

KENYA, ARGENTINA, and BANGLADESH reflected on national efforts and action plans for drought management and called for support to strengthen national capacities and institutions.

LESOTHO and the EU called for building on synergies and ensuring efforts are mutually reinforcing. KENYA asked for

support to align technical guidance, capacity-building, and access to finance. SURINAME underscored that aridity and drought are connected to land degradation, water security, biodiversity, climate change, and disaster risk reduction, and can provide entry points for integrated action.

CHINA called for the accelerated adoption of drought resistant crop varieties and unconventional water use technologies. They also stated the need for the mobilization of predictable and accessible financing for developing countries.

MONGOLIA, ALGERIA, SWITZERLAND, the EU and MEXICO expressed appreciation for the report's guidance on aridity and drought. The EU further called for promoting agroforestry, agroecology, and innovative technologies for drought early warning systems and resilient farming techniques.

MONGOLIA, ZIMBABWE, SENEGAL and others stressed that guidance must be supported by accessible finance, technology, and capacity-building, with BRAZIL noting that recommendations must be realistic. URUGUAY underscored that equitable and timely access to data is essential for effective implementation. SUDAN called for targeted finance to support countries facing conflict and humanitarian crises.

NIGER noted the report should do more to highlight the impacts of aridity and drought in Africa and reflected on interlinkages between combatting land degradation, food insecurity, and poverty.

DJIBOUTI stressed moving from reactive to proactive approaches grounded in resilience, prevention, and anticipation by bolstering early warning systems, and addressing water and soil management.

Knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and innovation:

The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/3](#)).

GRENADA noted the potential of digitization and artificial intelligence (AI) -> GRENADA noted the potential of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI) to facilitate knowledge sharing and technology transfer but cautioned that AI may inadvertently deepen existing inequalities. They urged the Secretariat to remain mindful of the expanding digital divide and, alongside MONGOLIA and ALGERIA, called for the responsible and equitable use of AI.

BRAZIL suggested incorporation of social technologies into draft decisions, and emphasized the role locally adapted solutions play in sustainable land management (SLM). CHINA stated efforts should be made to facilitate the sharing and application of remote sensing data, and to promote machine learning in priority regions.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION proposed establishing international and interregional centers of excellence whose functions are dependent on the specific capacities and knowledge of countries and institutions.

The EU encouraged the continued improvement of key tools like the Drought Toolbox, welcomed continued collaboration between the Secretariat and the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), and emphasized the importance of regionally-specific technical knowledge.

MOROCCO stated that bolstering the SPI depends on developing accessible knowledge solutions adapted to local realities. Stressing the local dimensions of knowledge sharing, JAPAN and CAMBODIA noted the importance of bridging Indigenous and local knowledge with scientific information. FIJI and SOUTH AFRICA called for two-way knowledge flow

between developed and developing countries. CIVIL SOCIETY urged local participation in the generation, sharing, and using of information.

SOUTH AFRICA promoted locally contextualized solutions, enhanced South-South knowledge exchange, and moving from knowledge sharing to knowledge uptake. ARGENTINA noted that the use of global data platforms for national analysis requires political validation. SWITZERLAND encouraged Parties to contribute to the WOCAT basket fund to support its activities. CIVIL SOCIETY cautioned that digital technology and AI should complement community knowledge, not replace it.

Future functioning of the SPI: The Secretariat introduced the documents ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/5](#) and [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/INF.2](#)).

BRAZIL underscored that: timelines for the fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook should be aligned with the procedures for the preparation of flagship reports; the topic of flagship reports and themes for the SPI work programme should remain a substantive decision by Parties; and future changes to procedures should be agreed to by Parties and not amended by the Bureau.

ARGENTINA emphasized the need for greater regional representation of scientists and suggested the creation of regional nodes that can support equitable participation. MOROCCO stressed taking into account the needs and priorities of Parties from arid and semi-arid states.

The EU welcomed the establishment of the SPI as a permanent body and commended the transparency of the selection process. They welcomed efforts to strengthen collaboration with intergovernmental scientific bodies and encouraged the establishment of synergies in common areas of interest that could lead to joint assessments and reports.

SWITZERLAND expressed support for strengthening the SPI but asked: whether different modalities for a technical support unit have been investigated; for more information on access to continuous and sufficient funding; and if there are other options beyond flagship reports as the main output of the SPI.

ZIMBABWE called for greater participation of African scientists in the SPI, and stronger linkages between the SPI and African universities. CIVIL SOCIETY stated that the future success of the SPI depends on how inclusive, transparent, accessible, interdisciplinary, and responsive it is.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/3](#)) in the morning.

Wagaki Wischniewski, Group of 20 Global Land Initiative (G20 GLI), described: training parliamentarians on sustainable land restoration policy development; supporting youth-led startups; developing technology platforms to assist governments on monitoring and reporting; and public outreach.

Muralee Thummarukudy, G20 GLI, highlighted the disparity between land restoration commitments and the available global pool of experts. He outlined collaboration with universities to add land restoration to their curricula, the development of online courses, and the use of AI. He stressed, however, that AI and data centers increase the strain on land, including through energy generation and critical mineral mining.

Daniel Tsegai, UNCCD Secretariat, drew attention to the Communities of Learning and Practice (CLPs) for drought management. He highlighted that CLPs are global and regional collaborative networks that unite more than 560 experts and promote knowledge exchange.

Catherine Mutambirwa, Global Mechanism (GM), described how they are supporting countries, including with capacity-building for nature-based solutions, financing for the Southern Africa Great Green Wall initiative, and by harnessing green investment opportunities for young entrepreneurs in the Sahel region.

In the ensuing discussion, many Parties called for a demand-driven approach that considers national priorities, alongside adequate and predictable financial and technical resources.

CHINA described regional centers and cooperation platforms for sharing remote sensing data. They called for greater guidance and technical assistance with monitoring systems and indicator conversion. MONTENEGRO encouraged the Secretariat of the GM, financial institutions, and partners to mobilize dedicated funding for CLPs to ensure their long-term impact and upscaling.

The EU called to set up a clear process and timeline for the establishment of regional centers for capacity-building, including lessons learned, options for modalities, and a clear proposal to be decided at COP 18.

The PHILIPPINES described their approach to capacity-building that begins at an early age with a programme that introduces soil health and responsible stewardship to students. GUYANA noted the lack of long-term financing in their region, calling for investments in connectivity and digital literacy that meet the realities of small island developing states (SIDS).

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC said capacity-building requires cross-sectoral coordination to facilitate access to finance, technology transfer, and knowledge exchange. MONTENEGRO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, MOLDOVA, and the COOK ISLANDS all praised the Youth Negotiators Academy and its Land Youth Negotiator Programme.

BRAZIL supported unfreezing Secretariat positions to enable it to fulfil its capacity-building mandate, and with UGANDA, called for South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation. SUDAN supported strengthening: national institutions; monitoring and information systems; local community, farmer, and pastoralist capacities to adopt sustainable land management (SLM) practices; and national implementation and reporting capacities. UGANDA said capacity-building should be treated as an investment.

Drawing attention to the Ankara Initiative, TÜRKIYE outlined their contributions to enhancing the capacities of the Northern Mediterranean countries in land degradation, drought, and SLM. SURINAME emphasized continued support for capacity-building in national reporting, geospatial information, Earth observation technologies, land degradation monitoring, and drought early warning systems.

SOUTH AFRICA, with KIRIBATI, highlighted the opportunities that lie in informal capacity-building approaches. HAITI underscored their need for increasing local technical capacity. ZIMBABWE supported a country-driven approach that empowers women and youth, and advances South-South cooperation.

Drawing attention to the recently adopted [resolution](#) on conservation and sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralism, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) cautioned against creating a “two-tier” technological landscape. UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP) emphasized that capacity-building must: close the digital divide; recognize the value of regional support hubs and CLPs; provide practical support on the ground; and align with the post-2030 Strategic Framework.

DJIBOUTI recommended, *inter alia*, the development of national action plans for drought and rangelands, and teaching young people how to harness AI to ensure there is no digital divide.

PANAMA stressed the importance of building capacities so countries can generate and use their own data. INDONESIA noted the need for community and local training. SOLOMON ISLANDS indicated they need to strengthen human capacities to enhance SLM practices.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called on Parties to, among others: develop a people-centered capacity-building strategy and prioritize community innovation; recognize Indigenous and community knowledge and practices as scientific assets; invest in youth as land restoration leaders; and strengthen regional knowledge networks.

The UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME described anew Global Environment Facility (GEF) project, together with WOCAT, which will strengthen national capabilities to plan, monitor, and report on land degradation neutrality (LDN) using co-produced practical knowledge.

Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Report by the GEF on the financing of programmes and projects concerning DLDD: Ulrich Apel, GEF, presented the report ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/INF.1](#)) on activities in the GEF Land Degradation Focal Area.

The EU commended the USD 3.9 billion initial pledges for GEF-9, noting that it is 27% lower than GEF-8, and stressed the need for new and non-traditional donors. They welcomed the adoption of the new strategy on climate adaptation under the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund, and called for identifying and reducing harmful subsidies that contribute to DLDD.

Noting the reduction in financial resources for GEF-9 and the USD 278 billion annual finance gap, BRAZIL, supported by SOUTH AFRICA, stressed that developed countries must mobilize new and additional resources, including grants, and concessional loans.

SYRIA requested lifting international sanctions to be able to access financial resources to address DLDD. AUSTRALIA underscored the importance of unlocking private investment and welcomed increased focus on drought resilience under GEF-9.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA stressed the need for robust SLM, adding that SIDS need approaches that reflect their limited resources and strengthen their resilience. IUCN reminded Parties that they are a GEF implementing agency and described two land restoration projects they are involved in. UNEP described its support for UNCCD Parties during the 2026 national reporting process.

TÜRKIYE noted development of high-resolution tools for assessment are important for building sustainable capacity, and explained how GEF-supported projects helped translate LDN targets to the field level. INDONESIA thanked the GEF for their support in restoring mangroves.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said GEF funding should be more accessible and support land restoration according to national priorities. The PHILIPPINES called for greater support for scaling up local SLM programmes and investments to sustain effective practices.

CIVIL SOCIETY and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called for long-term and flexible financing for community-led projects, including sustainable agriculture. They added that public finance should not support activities that lead to land degradation, and private finance should respect human rights.

Report by the Global Mechanism on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention: In a video message, Louise Baker, Managing Director, GM, introduced the report ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/2](#)). She said the picture is one of mounting ambition set against a financing gap, noting that increasing demand is outpacing available resources.

In the panel discussion, Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha, Saudi Arabia, discussed the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, highlighting that 600 million small farmers who produce 30% of global agriculture do not have enough financial tools.

Ki-Hyung Park, Korea Forest Service, described the Greening Drylands Partnerships, noting they need to: move beyond pilot projects to large-scale investment; better engage research institutions and the private sector; build institutional capacity; and demonstrate the effectiveness of private finance.

Oyun Sanjaasuren, Green Climate Fund, underscored the approaches they are pursuing to achieve systemic change: creating enabling environments for investments; supporting early-stage innovation; derisking investment; and strengthening domestic financial institutions.

On scaling investments to address land degradation, Victoria Crawford, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, stressed three barriers: incoherent and complex policies; misaligned financial incentives; and measuring and accountability systems that fail to capture the full range of sustainability impacts.

Al-Hamndou Dorsouma, African Development Bank, underscored how their cooperation with the GM has helped them move from fragmented priorities to investment-ready programmes that attract innovative financing.

Valentin Aich, World Meteorological Organization, described the three-pillared approach of the Integrated Drought Management Program on monitoring and early warning, impact assessment, and risk mitigation preparedness and response.

The GM Secretariat recognized the urgent need to close the finance gap for LDN and drought resilience with new and innovative approaches to resource mobilization.

Contact Groups

COW: The COW contact group on all other matters continued discussions on drought. The facilitator urged Parties to express their expectations for the drought decision, and any key elements they would like to see in the draft resolution. Delegates went through the annexed text ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/24/Add.1](#)) highlighting important ideas and principles and any major disagreements. The group agreed to entrust the Facilitator and the Secretariat to produce a new text that consolidates the points of agreement and provides options where disagreements were identified.

CRIC: The CRIC contact group met in the evening, beginning discussions on capacity-building. Parties addressed several newly proposed paragraphs, prompting exchanges on whether they went beyond the core focus of the Convention, and the value of explicitly mentioning specific elements and initiatives.

CST: The CST contact group met in the evening to discuss draft text for synergies across the Rio Conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. One Party called to remove explicit references to the Rio Conventions and the Sendai Framework, and replace them with “multilateral organizations.”

In the Corridors

Objections to agenda items risk not only delaying negotiations but, more crucially, can stifle progress on issues of importance to certain countries. However, progress on supposedly controversial items can still be made based on what has been agreed at prior meetings. This was the case in the CST, where the agenda item on synergies with other Conventions and international organizations, which the US objected to in the opening COP plenary, was still discussed.

A synthesis report presented by the Secretariat on technical guidance to support aridity and drought planning and adaptation across the Rio Conventions and Sendai Framework highlighted, for example, the legal, policy, and technical foundations already in place to support synergies between LDN and national adaptation plans under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). “Even though some Parties are trying to block discussions on synergies, work is already underway,” observed one delegate. Identifying synergies can help support shared aims and address overlaps, such as drought and climate change adaptation. “The siloing of the work in different conventions actually reduces the function of all conventions,” quipped one observer. While contestation over agenda items may cast a shroud of uncertainty over COP 17, participants have found some solace in previous decisions that keep discussions going on issues at the heart of the Convention.