

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights: Wednesday, 19 August 2026

Parties continued to dodge puddles and rain showers while running between meetings on the third day of the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP17). In the morning, the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) addressed agricultural lands and the draft work programmes of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and the next session of the CST (CST 18). Meanwhile, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) discussed finance. After lunch, the Committee of the Whole (COW) addressed migration, land tenure, and private sector engagement, while a joint CRIC-CST session discussed improvement of country reporting. In the evening, the COW and joint CRIC/CST contact groups convened.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Discussions on the Global Mechanism's (GM) support on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention, matters relating to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.3 (land degradation neutrality (LDN)), and private sector engagement continued.

Many Parties stressed that simplified access to adequate and predictable finance is essential to translate national commitments into concrete actions on the ground. Several highly vulnerable countries outlined challenges in accessing finance to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD).

AFRICAN GROUP supported by BRAZIL and many others, called for strengthening resource mobilization by drafting and implementing a genuine strategy with clear-cut financial objectives.

The EU encouraged the GM to identify financing opportunities to: support affected Parties in developing robust resource mobilization strategies, including repurposing environmentally harmful subsidies contributing to DLDD; integrate LDN and drought-resilience objectives into development plans; scale up sustainability-linked bonds and loans; expand blended finance; and recognize land and drought resilience as a strategic asset class by development finance institutions.

ARGENTINA called for finance that responds to national circumstances to strengthen capacities of middle-income countries. They asked for clarity on financing for the second round of the LDN Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP 2.0). Responding, the GM said that 18 countries are supported under the second round and, as more resources become available, other countries will be included. SYRIA asked to be considered a priority country for financing, especially in LDN TSP 2.0.

Noting the private sector's reluctance to invest in high-risk environments, BRAZIL emphasized the importance of public finance in creating enabling conditions. They lamented that the current draft decision text is insufficient to address the finance gap and does not adequately recall developed country commitments.

CHINA recommended giving regional centers an active role in identifying data gaps, conducting LDN assessments, and developing land restoration projects. They supported the use of high-resolution remote sensing to enhance the reliability of project baselines and improve their bankability.

MONTENEGRO stressed the continuous development of country project pipelines and strengthening practical links between country mechanisms and financing agencies. The UN Development Programme outlined their collaboration with the UNCCD that connects LDN targets to broader development work at the country level.

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES urged Parties to recognize the unique vulnerabilities of small island developing states (SIDS) and ensure finance is responsive to their circumstances. TIMOR-LESTE lamented reliance on fragmented, short-term project cycles that jeopardize LDN target sustainability.

UGANDA called for increasing grant and concessional financing for land restoration and drought resilience. ZIMBABWE urged an appropriate technology-needs assessment to strengthen implementation.

DJIBOUTI called for transformative approaches to financing, new flagship programmes on rangelands, and initiatives to help farmers deal with climate change and drought. IRAQ called for prioritizing transboundary projects to address sandstorms.

The PHILIPPINES encouraged the GM to continue providing country-driven technology support, access to appropriate financing mechanisms, and support for science-based actions. They stressed that private sector funding should be responsible, transparent, and include environmental and social safeguards.

MOZAMBIQUE and the PHILIPPINES underscored that finance must go to local communities and small-scale farmers, women, and youth. CHAD appealed to the international community for increased access to climate and biodiversity financing to move from commitments to large-scale projects on the ground.

Emphasizing that Africa is in the greatest need of financing, ALGERIA hoped this session will lead to practical recommendations that bridge the financial gap.

Committee on Science and Technology

Avoiding, reducing and reversing land and soil degradation of agricultural lands: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/4](#)) in the morning. Barron Joseph Orr, UNCCD Chief Scientist, presented the Guidance "Living soils, productive lands, resilient landscapes," as well as its digital companion.

Regarding the digital companion, ARGENTINA and SWITZERLAND cautioned against the multiplication of tools and digital portals, with SWITZERLAND highlighting the considerable time and investment required to verify data presented by artificial intelligence (AI). MONGOLIA stressed that, while AI can make technical guidance more accessible, it cannot replace human judgement and scientific land-based assessments. ARGENTINA further underscored that the resources required for tools must be balanced with the benefits arising from them.

CHINA, the EU, and MOROCCO underscored that diversification of productive agricultural systems is important to improve soil health, with the EU adding that this can help ensure sustainable water use, agricultural productivity, support for stable livelihoods, and reduce environmental and social risks.

KENYA, ZIMBABWE, and LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC called for increased investments in technology transfer and strengthened access to predictable financing to enable smallholder farmers to adopt resilient land management practices.

BANGLADESH, YEMEN, ALGERIA, SOUTH AFRICA, the INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN), and the FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) emphasized the relevance of the LDN response hierarchy for responding to land and soil degradation. The FAO further stated they will support countries in translating the guidance into action through, *inter alia*, capacity-building, knowledge exchange, and policy support, while encouraging Parties to continue using, and contributing the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) database.

INDONESIA stated that current reporting mechanisms under SDG 15.3 (LDN) require more accurate indicators to capture crop yields. BRAZIL highlighted the important role sustainable bioeconomy can play in supporting land management and sustainable livelihoods, while also creating incentives for avoiding, reducing, and reversing land degradation.

CAMBODIA noted their national target of bringing 30% of agricultural land under climate-smart agriculture by 2030. AUSTRALIA stated the need for international approaches to sustainable agriculture to recognize the diversity of landscapes and production systems.

CGIAR, FAO, and the UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME, among others, stressed the importance of strengthening the enabling conditions of inclusive governance, finance, and land tenure, with CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES underlining the fundamental importance of strengthening tenure rights for women, Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, and pastoralists.

Procedural matters: Work programme for the SPI (2027-2030) and Programme of work for CST 18: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/8](#)), with the draft work programmes featured in the annex.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES underscored that for the SPI to effectively serve the Convention, its work must be inclusive, accessible, and grounded in the realities of people facing DLDD. The COOK ISLANDS encouraged the SPI to give greater recognition to Indigenous and traditional knowledge and emphasized that scientific knowledge must be globally credible and locally relevant.

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for transparent and clear procedures to guide the future work of the SPI. BRAZIL cautioned against moving substantive oversight arrangements to the Bureau or other subsidiary structures, and supported an SPI work programme that responds to Parties' needs while also retaining clear accountability of the CST and COP.

The EU recommended enhanced coordination and partnerships with other international scientific bodies.

CHINA asked for more consideration to be given to experts from non-English-speaking countries. IRAQ asked that the SPI's work respond to the needs of developing countries. ALGERIA, KENYA, and KIRIBATI emphasized the importance of mobilizing sustainable financing, with KIRIBATI further urging the Secretariat and GM to support countries with low-cost technologies with scientific assessments.

Committee of the Whole

COW Chair Khalid Cherki announced that Poojanraj Khurun (Mauritius) will serve as the Facilitator of the budget contact group. Facilitator Marine Collignon of the contact group on all other matters provided an update, noting a new text on drought has been disseminated.

Policy frameworks and thematic issues: Migration: The Secretariat presented the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/8](#)).

Many Parties agreed that DLDD is a major driver of displacement. The AFRICAN GROUP and MOROCCO called for mobilizing financial resources and investing in green jobs for youth. The AFRICAN GROUP, IRAQ, and SWITZERLAND called for anticipatory action.

The EU said sovereign states have the right to control their borders and opposed referencing in the decision the right of people "to remain in the places where they choose to do so."

CHINA suggested tackling the root causes of migration by enhancing resilience and coordination among Parties and the Rio Conventions.

Noting that migration is a multidimensional phenomenon, BRAZIL stressed avoiding unidirectional links that reduce complex interactions to a linear causal relationship and hinder responses.

GUINEA supported adaptation in place and, where mobility is necessary, displacement should take place with dignity.

MONGOLIA noted traditional migration of pastoralists allows them to sustainably use rangelands and water resources and, with SWITZERLAND and CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, said mobility is an adaptation strategy.

BOTSWANA said land should not be a driver of displacement but a source of prosperity. SOUTH AFRICA and ALGERIA called for an integrated approach to address the underlying drivers of displacement. LEBANON stressed the impact of conflict. RWANDA called for local adaptation and resilience.

FAO stressed the positive role agrifood systems can play in minimizing forced migration. The INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION called for strengthening early action, noting human mobility is not a security risk in itself.

UN WOMEN noted women and girls are disproportionately affected by DLDD and investments are most effective when they advance gender equality and empowerment. The ARAB CENTER FOR THE STUDIES OF ARID ZONES AND DRY LANDS called for empowering and enabling local communities.

Land Tenure: The Secretariat presented the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/9](#)). Parties welcomed the development of the Land Tenure Toolbox.

The AFRICAN GROUP called for incorporating land tenure into COP 17 decisions, where appropriate, and, with the EU and GUYANA, encouraged ensuring land tenure is an important pillar of the post-2030 Future Strategic Framework (FSF). CHILE proposed developing tools and indicators to facilitate the incorporation of participatory policies for women and Indigenous Peoples in the FSF.

The EU encouraged Parties to continue integrating land tenure considerations into relevant national plans, in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT). SWITZERLAND and the FAO called for strengthening the effective implementation of the VGGT and integrating responsible land tenure into all UNCCD activities.

BRAZIL urged recognizing the diversity of different land tenure systems, including in Indigenous and communal lands, and underscored the historical role of environmental racism in tenure insecurity and unequal land access. AUSTRALIA encouraged practical, inclusive, and country-led efforts to strengthen land rights for women and Indigenous Peoples.

MADAGASCAR and BOTSWANA stressed accountability and the importance of transparent data. THAILAND called for financial and technical support to strengthen land administration systems and expand stakeholder involvement. CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called on Parties to commit to tenure rights, develop indicators, and integrate community-generated data into national reporting.

UK emphasized the importance of land tenure for smallholder farmers, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities. TUNISIA proposed linking sustainable development to secure land tenure.

SOUTH AFRICA stressed inclusive land governance while respecting diverse land tenure systems. IRAQ called for capacity-building, knowledge exchange, and enhancing accountability and grievance mechanisms.

UN WOMEN said 2026 marks both the International Years of the Woman Farmer and Rangelands and Pastoralists, but lack of tenure rights hinders women's participation in land efforts.

Participation and involvement of the private sector: The GM Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/4](#)).

Many, including CHILE, the EU, the AFRICAN GROUP, BRAZIL, and CHINA, supported greater private sector participation for advancing finance and sustainable land use. The AFRICAN GROUP said the Business4Land initiative could play a formative role and welcomed a sustainable financial sector focused on drought resilience.

BRAZIL said private sector participation should not undermine the state leadership, and private sector resources should not substitute public finance. SOUTH AFRICA urged harnessing the expertise, innovation, and financial resources of the private sector. JAPAN urged a whole-of-society approach.

BRAZIL, MONGOLIA, and CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES stressed that private-sector engagement should be transparent and include strong environmental and social safeguards. BOTSWANA called for restoration finance to reach those most in need.

To unlock private sector engagement, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, speaking for the PRIVATE SECTOR, urged: creating coherent and stable policy environments; derisking investments; and strengthening accountability and impact measurement frameworks.

Joint CRIC and CST Sessions

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/4-ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/7](#)).

The Panelists – representatives of the regional Support Hubs that provide technical backstopping and quality assurance to countries during the 2026 UNCCD reporting process – presented their work, which included: launching webinars; running regional capacity-building workshops; and providing one-on-one technical assistance to countries.

The FAO highlighted, among others, their work in providing direct support to 21 countries through the Pilot Project for GEF-8 Enabling Activities for National Reporting.

The EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY emphasized reporting challenges are not limited to data availability and quality, but also how effectively data can reach countries. They further noted the importance of regional Support Hubs in providing technical assistance in this regard.

WOCAT stressed that reporting is not an end in itself, but an opportunity to build national capacities, strengthen institutions, connect science with policy, and move from data to decisions.

APACHETA FOUNDATION highlighted their efforts to support SIDS in the reporting process through high-resolution mapping, and the work they are doing to use similar techniques to support non-SIDS as well. CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL pointed to their role in supporting 21 countries in advancing LDN goals and the implementation of the UNCCD's 2018-2030 strategic framework.

Many appreciated the support provided through regional Support Hubs. Regarding their future role, the UNITED ARAB EMIRATES underlined the need for the Hubs to remain demand-driven and responsive to regional needs.

LIBERIA stated that reporting should be an investment in long-term national capacities and equip countries with stronger institutions and national experts, as well as improved monitoring systems and datasets. ARGENTINA noted challenges remain in reporting due to disparities in national capacities and long processing times of big datasets.

BURUNDI, BURKINA FASO, BRAZIL, URUGUAY, and ZIMBABWE called for strengthening access to finance, technology, and quality data. The EU, BRAZIL, KUWAIT, SUDAN, and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC emphasized the need to enhance South-South and peer exchange.

ALGERIA and LESOTHO noted the importance of expanding the role of reporting beyond merely fulfilling obligations to generate national data to address land degradation. REPUBLIC OF KOREA, BRAZIL, and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC underlined the role of reporting in supporting national decision-making for LDN implementation.

ZIMBABWE, MEXICO, and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC called for the prioritization of existing national data and related systems. URUGUAY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, and TÜRKIYE urged strengthening national ownership over data.

On data-related challenges, ALGERIA further noted that harmonizing methodologies should not lead to the standardizing of ecological realities. BANGLADESH lamented that advancing coastal erosion and salinity present a challenge to updating national data.

KUWAIT emphasized the importance of strengthening monitoring, early warning systems, satellite imaging, and remote sensing tools for arid environments.

The ARAB ORGANIZATION FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT stressed the protracted unrest and conflict in the region is undermining land restoration efforts and called for special attention and support.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES emphasized: inclusive and participatory reporting mechanisms; recognition of the value of community-generated data; accessible and user-friendly reporting; extending capacity-building beyond national institutions to the grassroots; transparency and open access for reporting and data; balancing scientific rigor with practical realities; and the importance of gender responsiveness.

Contact Groups

COW: The COW contact group on all other matters continued discussions on drought. The Facilitator presented new text with alternative options for contested paragraphs in the COP 16 text ([ICCD/COP\(16\)/24/Add.1](#)). Following disagreement on whether to use this text as a basis for negotiation, the group decided to entrust the Facilitator to revise the text, which will be presented in the contact group on Thursday.

Joint CRIC/CST: Parties met in the evening to discuss a draft decision addressing, among others, the regional Support Hubs. Some Parties proposed a draft paragraph recognizing the persistent limitations of global default datasets and standardized methodologies in capturing changes in countries, particularly in SIDS, low-lying atolls, mountainous countries, and hyper arid areas. Discussions then continued in separate contact groups.

In the Corridors

Those waiting for positive news on the “blocked” agenda items on gender, civil society, and synergies were left disappointed. In the morning, a group of “implementation partners” released a declaration calling out the contradiction between wishes for this to be *the* action COP and the failure to adopt agenda items at the heart of implementation.

The declaration details the key role of Indigenous Peoples in building community resilience through land stewardship, and argues that local communities, women, pastoralists, and youth are essential partners in ensuring action on the ground.

Equally, they point out that the continued fragmentation of discussions across the Rio Conventions on land, biodiversity, and climate will directly undermine effective responses to these crises.

Their argument is clear – deferring consideration on these items means deferring implementation of the Convention. Parties made similar arguments in the COW, as seen in the discussions on land tenure. Nevertheless, as a member of the Women's Caucus said, “It doesn't look like we will be able to change the mind of the one Party opposing these agenda items.”

**Follow daily coverage and photos of the
17th Session of the Conference of the Parties
to the UNCCD**



enb.iisd.org



subscribe at bit.ly/enbupdate



[@enb.iisd.org](https://twitter.com/enb.iisd.org)



[/earth-negotiations-bulletin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/earth-negotiations-bulletin)

