

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights Thursday, 20 August 2026

Brighter skies and a drier venue welcomed participants to the fourth day of the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 17). In the morning, an open dialogue with civil society was held, where participants heard about the work needed to support pastoralists' sustainable land management (SLM) practices, as well as the importance of bringing their voices and perspectives into the work of the Convention. In the afternoon, the Committee of the Whole (COW) discussed the Convention's Strategic Framework, sand and dust storms (SDS), and rangelands and pastoralists. Contact groups met throughout the day to discuss, among others, the budget, migration, private sector engagement, drought, capacity-building, knowledge sharing, and the future work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI).

COP Plenary

Election of Officers: COP President Batmunkh Battsetseg announced the election Ulfat Machanov (Azerbaijan), and Biljana Kilibarda (Montenegro) as Vice-Presidents from the Eastern European Group, and Karomo Browne (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) as COP 17 Rapporteur.

Open Dialogue Session

In her opening remarks, UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad noted that the participation of more than 3,000 civil society representatives at COP 17 demonstrates their relevance in advancing the Convention through lived experiences, local and traditional knowledge, and expertise. She stressed civil society's role in connecting the global ambition of the Convention with land restoration and drought resilience.

COP 17 President Battsetseg noted that effective land restoration must draw on the knowledge and experiences of local communities and Indigenous Peoples, supported by science, innovation, and sustainable financing. She called for strong cooperation among governments, international organizations, the private sector, academia, civil society, and local communities to translate global commitments into action.

Panel: Ellen Otaru-Okoedion, Journalist Environmental Association, Tanzania, moderated the panel. In her introduction, she noted that restoring degraded pastures is both an environmental necessity and an economic opportunity.

In his keynote speech, Matti Goldberg, Woodwell Climate Research Center, stressed building bridges between the UNCCD and pastoralist communities on: knowledge, by connecting international organizations and the scientific community with pastoralists' knowledge and practices; finance, by bridging funds and market mechanisms with pastoralists' diverse local economies; and frameworks, by integrating land degradation

neutrality (LDN) targets with pastoralist-designed and community-led initiatives.

Noting that less than 1% of global climate and restoration finance reaches pastoralist communities, Basele Stephen Galgesa, Pastoralist Goals Foundation, called for direct financial access, secure land tenure and mobility rights, and support for Indigenous and local knowledge.

Garima Rajpal, The ClimAct Initiative, stressed the move from treating pastoralists as "vulnerable beneficiaries" to "land restoration partners" by: recognizing their landscapes; securing mobility; implementing existing rights; investing in communities; and bringing pastoralists to the decision-making table.

Tatiana Blanco Quiroga, Uru Uru Team, Bolivia, outlined the impacts of mining in their region and how using traditional knowledge and local nature-based solutions (NbS) has led to improved water quality and land restoration.

Hanieh Moghani, Center for Sustainable Development and Environment, called for safe, legitimate, and self-organized spaces that ensure full and effective participation in the Convention. She stressed finance that is accessible, flexible, and shaped around community-defined practices, free from discrimination, sanctions, and unilateral coercive measures.

Laurie Marker, Executive Director, Cheetah Conservation Fund, underlined the importance of community-based conservation and called for supporting ecosystem stewardship certifications that connect responsible land management to finance and public recognition.

Anders Oskal, Secretary General, Association of World Reindeer Herders, presented the [Global Pastoralist and Indigenous Pastoralists' Call for Action](#), the outcome of the Global Pastoralist Gathering held in Ulaanbaatar before the COP.

Dialogue: The EU, BRAZIL, PERU, AUSTRALIA, YEMEN, URUGUAY, and ZIMBABWE lauded the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advancing implementation of the Convention and expressed support to retain the agenda item on CSO participation. SENEGAL and EQUATORIAL GUINEA highlighted the work of CSOs in carrying the voices of vulnerable communities into international negotiations. BRAZIL further suggested discussions on the terms of reference for CSO participation to continue in open dialogue sessions if the item cannot be adopted as part of the COP 17 agenda.

CHINA agreed that CSOs play a vital role in assisting Parties to advance implementation of the Convention, but stressed the Convention is Party-driven, contact groups should be led by Parties, and CSO voices can be heard through delegations.

ARMENIA highlighted the importance of rangelands and pastoralists to biodiversity conservation and called for increased financing for SLM. IRAQ called for NbS to support forest restoration and vulnerable ecosystems, in addition to technology transfer to rural communities.

TURKMENISTAN expressed regret for the absence of interactions between scientists and pastoralists and emphasized the importance of forging these alliances.

The OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND UN WOMEN emphasized the importance of a gender-responsive approach to human rights and urged increased protection of environmental human rights defenders while advancing SLM and land stewardship.

CIVIL SOCIETY emphasized, among others, the importance of Parties embracing the Global Pastoralist and Indigenous Pastoralists' Call for Action. They further called for the establishment of a pastoralist caucus, in addition to the Indigenous Peoples and local communities caucuses.

Responding to Parties and observers, panelists stressed the importance of women and youth leadership and called for greater and more direct financial support for pastoralists.

The panel concluded with several recommendations: strengthening the recognition of pastoralism and mobility as a tool to address desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD); securing land rights for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth; extending gender responsiveness beyond reporting frameworks to the entire policy cycle; financing rangeland restoration through community initiatives; and connecting science-policy mechanisms with Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems.

Committee of the Whole

Enhancing the implementation of the Convention and its 2018–2030 Strategic Framework: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/5](#)).

CHINA said it is essential, in the final years of the Strategic Framework, to look at the needs of countries and support capacity-building, information sharing, and coordination to ensure an implementation path compatible with national circumstances.

The EU noted that the National Focal Points (NFPs) and Science and Technology Correspondents (STCs) are the backbone of Parties' implementation efforts. They called for a whole-of-society approach to implementation that includes the private sector and civil society and called for integrating scientific expertise into the Convention through collaboration between NFPs and STCs.

BANGLADESH welcomed the recommendation on the roles and responsibilities of NFPs and noted the importance of clear institutional mandates and a strong coordination mechanism between NFPs and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). BOTSWANA stressed government ownership of implementation, supported by partners like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and the Global Environment Facility, enables an environment for action.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES said the implementation pathway must recognize local communities as partners, not just beneficiaries, strengthen the role of youth in implementation and decision-making, and put gender equality at the center.

Sand and dust storms: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/9](#)).

Parties welcomed the update on the SDS Toolbox and the development of the Global Implementation Initiative for SDS. Noting the transboundary nature of SDS, many called for regional and international cooperation to manage SDS sources.

Algeria, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, underscored the importance of the new source detection module and, with IRAN, called for strengthened monitoring, forecasting, and early warning systems.

CHILE stressed linking monitoring, forecasting, and early warning systems with effective international coordination and

anticipatory action. The EU noted that NbS and sustainable land and water management can play a key role in mitigating the negative effects of, as well as adapting and building resilience to, SDS.

To combat SDS, CHINA recommended increasing dust monitoring, integrating stabilization and restoration measures into land management policies, and boosting local capacity using new technologies. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA invited interregional and subregional cooperation in source monitoring and management.

MOROCCO, TÜRKIYE, SUDAN, YEMEN, LIBYA, and IRAQ stressed improving monitoring, capacity-building, and land restoration. SYRIA called for cooperation on data management. SOUTH AFRICA welcomed the use of new monitoring and detection technologies but emphasized the need to complement them with ground observations. GUYANA called for increased support to receptor regions.

MONGOLIA outlined the effects of SDS on agriculture, noting the costs are borne by rural communities. TAJIKISTAN called for increased investment and strengthening scientific research.

The UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP) called for more coordinated country support, compatible indicators and reporting, and better alignment of finance and capacity-building. Noting that the agricultural sector is among the most affected by SDS, the FAO stressed restoration of degraded agricultural lands is one of the most effective pathways to mitigate SDS sources and impacts.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called on Parties to place vulnerable communities at the center of implementation as knowledge holders, data generators, and co-designers of response systems.

Rangelands and pastoralists: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/10](#)).

CHILE called for synergies with the Rio Conventions and the Ramsar Convention, and, with REPUBLIC OF KOREA, highlighted pastoralism as part of resilient food systems.

URUGUAY, OMAN, MONGOLIA, UZBEKISTAN, the EU, AFRICAN GROUP, INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN), and UNEP noted that rangeland conservation helps achieve LDN as well as nationally-determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and called for strengthening synergies. URUGUAY also added drought resilience and water security as additional synergies.

Many, including MOROCCO, ALGERIA, BENIN, IUCN, and UNEP, supported the Rangelands Flagship Initiative and its three components: knowledge, investment, and institutions.

The AFRICAN GROUP, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, ZIMBABWE, IRAQ, and CAMBODIA called for strengthening scientific research, monitoring and data, and sustained financial support. BRAZIL highlighted scientific cooperation and the development and dissemination of technologies. UZBEKISTAN stressed public-private partnerships.

CHINA, the EU, and ZIMBABWE noted the achievements of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. CHINA also supported an International Day of Rangelands and Pastoralists, as proposed by the Asian Group.

SUDAN called for resolving conflicts on rangelands as pastoralists move from one place to another, often across national borders. ZIMBABWE and SAUDI ARABIA said maintaining forests and trees alongside rangelands is essential to their management. BENIN said rangelands are a pillar of ecosystem resilience and food security.

CHILE stressed the importance of strengthening the livelihoods of people dependent on rangelands. MONGOLIA called for

the meaningful participation of pastoralists. TAJIKISTAN and BHUTAN called for the involvement of young people.

SOUTH AFRICA advocated for national strategies and implementation of sustainable rangelands management, with YEMEN noting land tenure and private land ownership issues as obstacles. BHUTAN stressed rangelands are not just grazing areas but living landscapes that sustain unique cultures and mountain communities. SYRIA called for preserving local pastoral traditions, lands, and knowledge.

PERU called for collaboration with Parties, international organizations, civil society, and others to ensure that the outcomes from COP 17 deliver.

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT called for land tenure as the foundation of rangeland health, protection of pastoralist mobility, and linking restoration to rights.

FAO called for holistic pastoralist-centered approaches that respect their rights and stressed the importance of partnerships. UNEP said the participation of pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities is important for food security.

The ARAB ORGANIZATION FOR AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT stressed the need for raising awareness. CGIAR welcomed public-private partnerships, secure land tenure, and working with all communities as leaders.

CIVIL SOCIETY called on Parties to implement pastoralist rights to land and mobility, develop land tenure data and monitoring systems, reframe LDN with pastoralist rights, and ensure any attempt at restoration and conservation should be carried out in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

Contact Groups

CST: In the morning, delegates began the first reading of the draft decision on **the future functioning of the SPI**. One delegation proposed reviewing the SPI procedures developed by the CST Bureau contained in the Secretariat's document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/5](#)), arguing that this was mandated under [decision 20/COP.16](#). Since other delegations had to review the procedures, the Facilitator postponed negotiations. Discussions continued in the afternoon revolving around intergovernmental oversight regarding the technical work of the SPI.

Addressing the draft decision on **knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and innovation**, discussions circled around the role of different groups of Parties in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and technology on the grounds of common but differentiated responsibilities, as well as the incorporation of Indigenous and local knowledge into scaling innovations. Regarding a paragraph on submitting cases of relevant best practices to strengthen the knowledge base on SLM and to enable evidence-based and coordinated implementation, one country requested removing reference to the Rio Conventions. Deliberations around artificial intelligence (AI) concerned the role of AI in addressing DLDD and advancing SLM, especially as it relates to AI-related risks.

When discussing the draft decision on **aridity and drought planning**, delegates did not get beyond the preambular paragraphs. Debates continued over formulation of references to the other Rio Conventions, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and other international organizations. After lunch, discussions were postponed due to ongoing consultations led by the Presidency regarding the blocked COP agenda items, which are linked to several paragraphs in the draft.

COW: In the morning, the COW contact group on other matters met to discuss the draft decision on **migration**. In the

preambular paragraphs, Parties discussed, among other things: proposed text on the multi-dimensional nature of human mobility; whether to reference relevant UN organizations that address migration, as well as other international and regional initiatives; and a proposal by one Party to mention the role of diaspora communities in supporting sustainable territorial development.

On the operative paragraphs, some Parties proposed deletion of subparagraphs referring to: responsible and sustained investment by the private sector in sustainable land and water management; integrating considerations of displacement and human mobility into national action programmes to combat DLDD; and strengthening early warning systems, drought preparedness, and anticipatory action frameworks to identify areas at risk.

After lunch, they discussed the draft decision on **private sector engagement**. On a paragraph calling on Parties to engage with the private sector in the implementation of the Convention, the group debated if this should be done under national government leadership. Delegates also debated, among others, whether to include environmental and social safeguards when "strengthening regulatory enabling conditions" for private sector contributions. Discussions will continue on Friday.

In the evening, the contact group returned to **drought** and discussed the new text assembled by the Facilitator. Parties proposed alternative text to most paragraphs in a quest to find common ground. Delegates debated on whether drought is a global challenge with increasing intensity across all continents or a local phenomenon occurring on a global scale that is intensifying in certain regions. One delegation, opposed by several others, suggested stating that responsibility for drought preparedness rests first and foremost with national governments. Discussions continued into the night.

CRIC: Parties met in the evening to address the draft decision on **capacity-building**. They discussed whether to include specific references to collaborating with, among others, the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative and the International Drought Resilience Alliance to strengthen partnership-based capacity-building and technical cooperation. One Party requested the deletion of these references and preferred the text to say "relevant initiatives." Parties also extensively discussed the responsible use of AI, with a group of Parties suggesting reference to trustworthy, ethical, human-centric, certified, and transparent AI. Some Parties expressed reservations, questioning what trustworthy and transparent AI would look like and who would be involved in this certification process.

In the Corridors

During the COW's discussions on rangelands and pastoralists, it quickly became clear that this is the perfect synergies issue. Delegations supported the need to invest in rangelands, noting that conservation and sustainable rangeland management brings benefits for the climate, biodiversity conservation, food security, and achieving LDN. Furthermore, as many stressed, this is a livelihood issue. As a representative of civil society noted, the UNCCD is about the wellbeing of humans and communities, "not just indicators and reports." In this light, Parties and observers alike acknowledged Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth, who rely on rangelands to support their livelihoods, cultures, and resilience.

Parties expressed a great deal of agreement, leading one participant to comment that the level of support was "heartening." However, as another said, the real issue in the negotiations to come is whether Parties will provide the necessary financial support to ensure the decision on rangelands and pastoralists can actually be implemented.

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