

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights Friday, 21 August 2026

As the first week of the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) came to a close, the flurry of activity that filled the plenary halls earlier in the week shifted to the contact groups. Apart from a short morning session of the Committee of the Whole (COW), which addressed the UNCCD communication plan and the programme of work for COP 18, delegates' attention was squarely set on text-based negotiations.

In the morning, the joint Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and Committee on Science and Technology (CST) contact group continued discussing the draft decision on improving procedures for the communication of information. In the afternoon, COW, CRIC, and CST contact groups met, addressing, among other issues, migration, private sector engagement, communication and capacity-building, and procedures and technical support for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI).

Committee of the Whole

Rangelands and pastoralists: Discussion continued from [Thursday](#), with one final statement. The CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS (CMS) highlighted the opportunity to strengthen synergies between the CMS and the UNCCD on the topic of rangelands. They drew attention to a [decision](#) adopted at CMS COP 15 that extended the mandate of its Working Group on Pastoralism to cooperate with UNCCD.

Review of progress in the implementation of the UNCCD communication plan: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CRP.1](#)).

On the direction of the communication plan for the next biennium, the EU stressed: the core activities should focus on the implementation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework; mobilization of scientific and technical data; and the need for coordinated communication activities with climate change and biodiversity in light of the triple-COP semester.

To maximize awareness raising, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) recommended: enabling CSOs to become active partners by strengthening access to information, including in Indigenous and local languages; supporting a consistent narrative on the value of healthy land; amplifying CSO engagement in the fight against disinformation; and mobilizing new voices and strengthening the new caucuses.

BANGLADESH prioritized focusing on localization of scientific content, empowering women and youth, and integrating communication and outreach infrastructure to regular budget allocations.

THAILAND suggested global campaigns with local community-based support, ensuring the communication plan elevates soil health, and strengthens engagement with youth, women, and vulnerable groups. The PHILIPPINES stressed the importance of credible, accessible, locally appropriate, and timely communication for farmers and for promoting a common understanding of the Convention and its objectives.

Programme of work for the eighteenth session of the COP: Chair Khalid Cherki introduced the draft decision on the programme of work for COP 18, contained in [ICCD/COP\(17\)/12](#).

The EU supported adopting the agenda for COP 17 in its entirety, stressing it is essential that work continues on all items. They expressed hope that COP 18 will address all items from COP 17, including those that couldn't be discussed, noting they have heard the voices and concerns of CSOs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and other stakeholders, including the business community. They proposed adding an agenda item on the efficiency of processes, "which can help us to do our work in an important and effective way."

BRAZIL expressed concern about the blocked items on the COP 17 agenda and stressed that failure to adopt the full draft agenda agreed at COP 16 is not only a matter of substance but threatens the legitimacy of the UNCCD process. They hoped COP 18 can address all topics, including the participation of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, gender, and synergies. They also called for the inclusion of an agenda item on bioeconomy.

CIVIL SOCIETY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES called for their effective participation at both COPs 17 and 18. They noted it is not optional under the UNCCD since the current procedures for civil society participation were adopted at COP 9 and reconfirmed at every COP since. They called for COP 18 to expand civil society participation in the COP and contact groups, noting stakeholders bring solutions to address desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD).

Contact Groups

Joint CRIC/CST: During discussions on **improving procedures for the communication of information**, Parties exchanged views on how to acknowledge challenges faced, among others, in: the timely disbursement of funds; disparities in resources; data availability, coverage, and accessibility; and the application of standardized methodologies. One Party requested, to some disagreement, the inclusion of a paragraph recognizing that, among others, reporting requirements should remain responsive to national circumstances and capacities. Noting the challenges some Parties face with global default datasets, another Party requested a paragraph stating that reporting should be fit for purpose, making use of nationally-validated data and indicators, as well as appropriate spatial and temporal resolutions.

In an operative paragraph inviting Parties to use the existing features of the performance review and assessment of implementation system, one Party requested deletion of specific references to national and regional circumstances, as well as the involvement of CSOs, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and the private sector in these reporting processes. Many disagreed, with one suggesting the inclusion of a footnote exempting the Party in question from the paragraph. The Secretariat noted they will consult with legal counsel to see if there is a precedent for such a provision.

COW: The contact group on all other matters finished its first reading of the draft decision on **migration** in the afternoon. One Party suggested strengthening the collection of evidence on the relationships between DLDD and displacement. Delegates also debated whether to urge “developed” or “all” countries to provide predictable, adequate, and accessible financial resources, capacity-building, and technology transfer to developing countries in implementing integrated land restoration and drought resilience measures. One Party expressed reservations, suggesting language on resource mobilization be moved under the decision on resource mobilization.

Delegates then continued the first reading of the draft decision on **private sector engagement**. Some parties wanted to delete text on operationalizing private sector recommendations on agricultural lands at the national and subnational levels. On the facilitation of business and industry entities’ participation in the meetings and processes of the Convention, positions differed on whether to: encourage their integration into delegations of accredited organizations and national institutions; and ensure transparency regarding affiliations and potential conflicts of interest. Delegates also debated, among others, whether to specify that private capital should not be a substitute for public finance.

In the evening, they began discussion on the draft decision on **land tenure**.

CRIC: On **capacity-building**, Parties exchanged views on the inclusion or deletion of a number of preambular paragraphs including, among others, the close interlinkages between capacity-building, technical, and scientific cooperation and the importance of addressing them in a coherent and integrated, rather than isolated, manner.

Some Parties expressed reservations or requested the deletion of language recognizing the contribution of “social technologies” in strengthening capacity-building activities for the implementation of the Convention, noting the implication of such language is unclear.

Concerning an operative paragraph on the Global Mechanism (GM) “strengthening” capacity-building activities, one Party expressed concern about the feasibility of such efforts, highlighting budgetary constraints, and preferred to use the word “continuing.” Other Parties disagreed, noting such activities are already underway, with another stating that the word “strengthening” does not necessarily have budgetary implications, but rather, could entail the GM working to expand partnerships to support capacity-building. Discussions continued into the night.

CST: Parties resumed consideration of the draft decision on **procedures and technical support for the future functioning of the SPI**. They completed the first reading of the draft and immediately started a second reading, beginning with the chapeau.

When they resumed consideration of the three tables containing the SPI procedures developed by the CST Bureau in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/5](#), Parties reached a tentative agreement to indicate that these are “initial” procedures to be reviewed at the next meeting of the CST.

Discussion ensued on the procedure for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the SPI for its work programme and whether it should be approved by the CST or the CST Bureau. If the requests have to be adopted by the full CST, they can only be approved every two years, but the Bureau operates during the intersessional process, one participant explained.

The second issue was whether the CST or the CST Bureau should be responsible for the procedures for the preparation of flagship reports and the development of fast-track assessments, information products, and advice. Some delegations expressed concern that a special session of the CST will be required to adopt a summary for policy makers (SPM) for flagship reports. This would, in turn, require a significant amount of financial resources similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Discussions ranged from eliminating the SPM to limiting its length or having the Bureau approve it, as in the original document. One proposal put forth was to review the SPM line-by-line during a regular meeting of the CST and to limit its length to between 5,000-7,500 words.

In late afternoon, delegates deliberated in length on the differences between fast-track assessments and flagship reports, including their nature and intended audiences. The fast-track assessments are meant to quickly respond to the needs of decision-makers at all levels, while the flagship reports are aimed at policy-makers. Parties also discussed the procedures to request fast-track assessments and related budget implications. Some delegates maintained that the SPI is not an intergovernmental body and not all SPI products need to be negotiated by Parties. The discussion continued into the night.

In the Corridors

Negotiations at COPs always seem to start slowly and end in a flurry of motion. Parties hold their lines for as long as possible, and it sometimes feels like the gaps are too wide to bridge midway through the conference. This seems to be the case for COP 17, while geopolitical tensions and changes in national priorities are exacerbating disagreements. Agenda items remain blocked after a week, and rumors that the entire decision on migration might also be blocked spread in the corridors outside the contact group rooms.

In a sign that things might be picking up, the contact group dealing with a possible response to drought, after three meetings with little progress, seemed to stumble forward on Thursday night. The group has been trying to find a way forward, with one Party refusing to base negotiations on the progress made at COP 16. Big picture discussions have been more sincere, but key positions are still far apart. Additional options have also been thrown into the mix: in addition to the COP 16 discussions on whether to negotiate a legally binding protocol or a non-legally binding framework on drought, there are now murmurs of a voluntary target-setting process (similar to land degradation neutrality) and toolbox, or a list of voluntary options. With talks on drought scheduled to resume Saturday morning, perhaps those returning after the weekend will be met with good news.

There are also signs of progress in other discussions, thanks to delegates thinking outside the box. In response to the perpetual insistence by one Party to, among other things, delete all references to the Rio Conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals, one frustrated delegate proposed the insertion of footnotes in decision texts that would exempt the Party blocking them, sending legal officers to check for precedents.