

UNCCD COP 17 Highlights Wednesday, 26 August 2026

During “Land Day” at the 17th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 17), participants gathered in the morning for the Ministerial Dialogue on rangelands and pastoralists. Elsewhere, the contact groups for Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), Committee on Science and Technology (CST), and the Committee of the Whole (COW) were suspended following a request by a group of Parties but resumed after lunch. The COP Plenary was also able to open the previously blocked agenda item on the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on the Future Strategic Framework (FSF). In the afternoon, a session of the Gender Caucus was also held. Contact group negotiations continued into the evening.

Special High-Level Segment

Ministerial dialogue on restoration of rangelands and well-being of pastoralist communities: COP 17 President Battmunkh Battsetseg opened the dialogue, noting that the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists is an opportunity to place the sustainable management of rangelands higher on the international agenda. She urged stronger policies and institutions, improved monitoring, greater access to sustainable finance, and closer cooperation among stakeholders.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme, stressed the importance of rangelands for food and water security, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. She highlighted three key areas for action: promoting well-governed pastoralism; shifting to integrated and inclusive rangeland governance; and moving finance towards stewardship, resilience, and sustainability.

Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, called for proactive action to build rangeland and pastoralist resilience, better governance and land-use planning, and providing economic opportunities to pastoralists, especially women.

During interventions, several Parties described efforts to support pastoralists and restore rangelands. They also highlighted linkages between rangelands and pastoralism with food and water security, rural livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and cultural identities.

MONGOLIA stressed combining traditional knowledge with modern science, technology, and monitoring systems. LESOTHO and SUDAN highlighted rangelands are productive landscapes and not marginal lands. NAMIBIA, COSTA RICA, ICELAND, along with BHUTAN and others, noted pastoral communities are custodians of land, as well as rights and knowledge holders to be placed at the center of decision-making.

BANGLADESH and MAURITANIA stressed strengthening livestock value chains; and FRANCE highlighted their labels of excellence for meat, dairy products, and wool to stop the rural exodus from areas lacking economic opportunities. NAMIBIA, PAKISTAN, FIJI, and TAJIKISTAN called for predictable and accessible financing and investments in sustainable rangelands.

FIJI and CAMEROON underscored regional cooperation and partnerships. NIGERIA reflected on their national plan of moving to settled livestock production to increase productivity, disease control, and animal management.

UGANDA called for inclusive governance that ensures land rights, attracts investment, and uplifts pastoralist livelihoods, with the EU urging strengthening women’s land tenure. SENEGAL stressed that investing in rangelands is economically viable, environmentally effective, and socially equitable. ESWATINI and IRAQ urged mobilization of technical and financial resources for rangeland restoration and stronger cooperation on knowledge exchange.

CHAD called for securing livestock corridors, protecting water sources, and, with EQUATORIAL GUINEA, putting women and youth at the heart of action. MALI highlighted restoring rangelands is an investment in rural economies, resilience, and peace.

TÜRKIYE and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC noted sustainable rangeland management can only succeed through a people-centered approach.

IRAN called for linking rangeland management with land degradation neutrality targets. CHINA stressed placing rangelands at the heart of national priorities, promoting technological innovation for rangeland restoration, and implementing subsidies to protect pastoralists and rangelands.

KAZAKHSTAN drew attention to their principle of public rangelands where land cannot be privatized. MEXICO emphasized solutions tailored to national capacities, priorities, and land tenure systems.

SAUDI ARABIA noted [Decision 29/COP.16](#) on rangelands and pastoralists that highlighted inclusive, community-based, and participatory approaches.

Civil society and international organizations also called for: recognizing mobility as a necessary adaptation strategy; securing customary tenure rights; respecting the free, prior, and informed consent and Indigenous Peoples’ rights; and adhering to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure.

Plenary

Adoption of the Agenda: COP 17 President Battsetseg presented the [previously blocked agenda item on IWG-FSF](#) (Agenda item 3). The agenda item was sent to the COW.

Committee of the Whole

Final Report of the IWG-FSF: COW Chair Khalid Cherki introduced the documents ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/4, Add.1](#) and [ICCD/COP\(17\)/2](#)). The COW agreed to send this agenda item to the contact group on other matters.

Gender Caucus

COP 17 President Battsetseg opened the session and explained its focus on strengthening the role of women pastoralists as key stewards of rangelands, biodiversity, and resilient rural livelihoods. She underscored gender considerations must remain

integrated in land restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable development.

Session Chair Tarja Halonen, Former President, Finland, called for: recognition of women's skills and knowledge on local ecosystems and livestock management; genuine opportunities for women to benefit from their work and knowledge; and women's increased representation at all decision-making levels.

Ana Paula Chantre Luna de Carvalho Pereira, Minister of Environment, Angola, cautioned against seeing women only as victims but rather as part of solutions and decision-making.

Alicia Jaramillo Cabo, Vice Minister of Environment and Coastal and Marine Affairs, Ecuador, said empowering women is the smartest investment in global sustainability and called for concrete options for increasing finance, land tenure, and partnerships.

Yasmine Fouad, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, highlighted women's role as custodians of rangelands and culture, and the need to move the UNCCD Gender Action Plan forward.

Åsa Regnér, Deputy Director-General, UNESCO, noted that women's organizations are more underfunded than ever and called for increased resources.

Chimguundari Navaan-Yunden, National Security and Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister of Mongolia, noted, among others, that gender policies remain decoupled from national treasuries and called for the institutionalization of performance-based budgeting.

Ibrahim Thiaw, former Executive Secretary, UNCCD, painted a mental image of a pastoral woman fetching water in the Sahel and lamented these women are often excluded from education and decision-making.

Two panel discussions followed. The first panel of speakers focused on the [Kathmandu Declaration](#). Panelists emphasized it is the outcome of a global woman-led process, their political and collective voice, and the inspiration for a practical roadmap for keeping rangelands alive. They called on policymakers to place pastoralist women at the center of decision-making, establish rangeland monitoring programs that combine local observations with remote sensing, and for flexible climate financing.

The second panel brought together women innovators from different regions. Discussants stressed that women are leading change by restoring ecosystems, designing and implementing local solutions, and innovating collectively. They called for integrating community action plans in local and national policies, direct and flexible financing windows for women-led Indigenous pastoralists, securing women's rights to land, and connecting local action to global commitments.

In interventions from the floor, the EU lauded the Gender Caucus as a key platform to identify bottlenecks in gender equality. ZIMBABWE called for mainstreaming gender across all rangeland initiatives. CANADA highlighted gender equality is critical for peace, prosperity, and sustainable development and expressed concern over efforts to roll back women's and girls' rights. SPAIN and BENIN stressed effective participation of women in the decision-making processes, with ESWATINI and SUDAN also calling for women's increased access to land, finance, and technology. AUSTRALIA stressed supporting gender-responsive action for the successful implementation of the UNCCD Work Programme. UN WOMEN underlined that the new strategic framework must reflect women's realities. CIVIL SOCIETY lamented the declining UNCCD budget allocated on gender, with INDIGENOUS PEOPLES regretting the removal of agenda item 8(a) and urging COP 17 to put Indigenous women and girls at the center of land restoration.

Contact Groups

During morning negotiations, a group of countries called for their suspension. Following consultations with the COP Presidency, talks resumed after lunch.

COW: The contact group on other matters resumed discussing **land tenure**, finishing the second reading. Lengthy discussions ensued on, *inter alia*, whether Parties' efforts to collect, analyze,

and disseminate reliable land tenure data should be "in accordance with national laws, priorities, needs, and circumstances." Parties also struggled to find a way forward on whether such data should be disaggregated by sex, age, race, and ethnicity, with preferences spanning some, all, or none of these specificities.

Regarding the **final report of the IWG-FSF**, Parties asked for time to review the text presented by the Presidency following "delicate consultations."

The Parties then addressed **private sector engagement**. Delegates agreed to delete reference to the costs and losses associated with desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD). Following lengthy debate on the modalities of engagement, Parties agreed to a general text to promote, as appropriate, the participation and engagement of the private sector in the implementation of the Convention. Negotiations continued.

CRIC: The contact group met briefly to address **mobilization of resources and financial flows and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15.3 matters** before discussions were suspended.

When discussions resumed, Parties turned to the **programme of work for CRIC 25**. On an operative paragraph listing agenda items, one Party requested the deletion of a special segment for the Gender Caucus, while several other Parties wished to maintain it. Two Parties suggested the special segment be "part of the formal agenda but conducted in parallel with other substantive discussions." Several Parties requested the inclusion of another item on the efficiency and effectiveness of procedures and processes of the COP and Subsidiary Bodies. One Party expressed their reservation, while others requested its deletion.

CST: Discussions continued on the **work programme for the SPI for the 2027–2030 quadrennium**, with Parties exchanging views on "relevant thematic reports" "where available and appropriate" to be presented alongside the fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook. The Secretariat also provided an overview of a revised table on the objectives and deliverables of the SPI under the work programme.

Parties discussed the implications of whether progress on the work of the SPI should be presented as a synthesis report or information document, with the Secretariat noting that the former would be subject to negotiations by Parties, whereas the latter would not. Several Parties expressed their support for an information document, while one Party, supported by another, suggested the presentation of a status report that would provide a summary of completed and outstanding work.

The Secretariat also presented revised paragraphs pertaining to, among others, the development of a time-bound strategy to increase funds mobilization based on the financial needs assessment to support Parties in the implementation of the Convention. Some Parties expressed support for this paragraph, while others expressed reservations.

Parties then began the first reading of a draft decision on **avoiding, reducing, and reversing land and soil degradation of agricultural lands**. Discussions continued.

In the Corridors

"This is an unprecedented move," prompted a response from one delegate to another, "this is an unprecedented COP!" Tensions that have been simmering over blocked agenda items and Party redlines reached a boiling point Wednesday morning when a group of Parties requested the suspension of all contact group negotiations. While the move made some jaws drop, delegates were able to recompose themselves when negotiations suddenly resumed after a tense lunch break.

It didn't take long, however, for faces to contort yet again, this time into furrowed brows, as the distance between Party positions remained apparent across negotiation rooms. High-level consultations continue to address these cross-cutting issues. "There are so many informal consultations taking place it is hard to keep track," noted one delegate. Another expressed hope in seeing "slow acceleration" on some items and noted that once agreement is reached on contentious language "we may see the pieces fall into place."