

Summary of the Seventeenth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification: 17–28 August 2026

Land degradation is affecting up to 40% of the world's land, with far-reaching impacts on food and water security, livelihoods, and economic stability. Over three billion people live in areas that have experienced desertification and land degradation, and droughts are increasing in frequency and severity, exacerbated by climate change and unsustainable land management. Delegates to the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 17) arrived in Mongolia with the aim of accelerating and strengthening international collaboration to tackle these global challenges.

Against the dramatic backdrop of the Bogd Khan Mountains, delegates gathered to advance work on combating desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD). However, reaching agreement on key issues proved to be difficult. While Parties managed to compromise on some agenda items, agreement on others was ultimately unattainable, despite long days and late nights of negotiations.

An unprecedented number of agenda items were blocked from consideration, and several substantive issues were deferred to COP 18. This included the agenda items on gender, civil society participation, and synergies with other multilateral conventions. Parties were also unable to reach substantive agreement on critical issues including drought, migration, aridity, and knowledge sharing. However, Parties did agree to include the items on the agenda of the next COP, ensuring continuation of work.

Despite setbacks, Parties reached agreement on a 34 decisions covering a range of important substantive matters, including rangelands and pastoralists. This topic is at the heart of land degradation, as rangelands occupy 54% of the world's global land surface and host nearly 500 million pastoralists. Other key decisions addressed sand and dust storms (SDS), land tenure, capacity-building, resource mobilization, and the budget. Parties adopted a decision on the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) for strengthening the role of evidence-based knowledge in decision-making, while also providing Parties with sound advice and policy recommendations for supporting implementation of the Convention.

Even though many key issues were blocked from formal consideration, many delegates reiterated their commitment to seek collaborative solutions when addressing global challenges. COP 17 saw the first gatherings of the Indigenous Peoples and Local

Communities caucuses, both established at COP 16, who, alongside the Youth and Gender caucuses, ensured their voices were heard in every plenary meeting. Similarly, the Ministerial Dialogues held during the second week featured commitments and calls to action for strengthening synergies across the Rio Conventions.

UNCCD COP 17 convened in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17–28 August 2026 under the theme “Restoring Land. Restoring Hope.” Approximately 15,000 participants attended events in the Blue Zone, where negotiations and side events were held.

A Brief History of the UNCCD

The UNCCD is one of the three Rio Conventions, along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). UN Member States called for the development of a convention to address desertification and drought in Agenda 21, the programme of action adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit).

The intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, convened five times between May 1993 and June 1994. The

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UNCCD and regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean were adopted on 17 June 1994. The Convention entered into force on 26 December 1996, and currently has 197 Parties. A fifth regional implementation annex, for Central and Eastern Europe, entered into force in 2001.

The UNCCD COP has two subsidiary bodies: the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

Key Turning Points

The UNCCD COP convened for the first time in Rome, Italy, in 1997, in parallel with the first meeting of the CST. Delegates selected Bonn, Germany, as the location for the UNCCD's Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the organization to administer the Global Mechanism (GM). Established under Article 21 of the UNCCD, the GM assists countries in the mobilization of financial resources to implement the Convention and address desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD).

At **COP 5** in 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland, the UNCCD established the CRIC. COP 6, held in Havana, Cuba, in 2003, designated the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD.

Parties adopted the first ten-year UNCCD strategic plan at **COP 8** in Madrid, Spain, in 2007. Despite protracted negotiations, the session could not adopt a decision on the budget, leading to the first-ever UNCCD extraordinary session in November 2007 in New York. At **COP 10**, which convened in 2011, in Changwon City, Republic of Korea, delegates agreed to restructure the UNCCD GM by transferring accountability and legal representation of the Mechanism from the Rome-based IFAD to the UNCCD Secretariat in Bonn.

COP 11 took place in 2013 in Windhoek, Namibia. Discussions centered on the Convention's role in achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN) in the context of sustainable development, as agreed at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNFSD, or Rio+20). The session established a UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) for engagement with scientists, as well as an *ad hoc* working group to provide guidance on how to refine impact indicators for monitoring the Convention's implementation.

At **COP 12** in Ankara, Türkiye, soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, discussions focused on how to align existing programmes to the aspiration for LDN and other relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. Parties agreed to strive to achieve a single, unified objective, with a focus on how to establish and monitor national-level voluntary LDN targets.

Held in Ordos, China in 2017, **COP 13** adopted a new, SDG-aligned UNCCD Strategic Framework (2018–2030), as well as a set of thematic policy frameworks to guide programmes on gender, drought, SDS and migration. The COP also launched the LDN Fund—co-managed by the UNCCD's GM and investment management firm Mirova—to spearhead large-scale land restoration projects. Other key outputs focused on entry points for linking the new UNCCD Strategic Framework to the 2030 Agenda.

At **COP 14** in New Delhi, India in 2019, delegates established an intergovernmental working group (IWG) to explore effective policy and implementation measures. The COP also agreed to include land tenure as a new thematic area under the Convention. In anticipation

of the launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), discussions at the High-level Segment further explored how to build momentum towards a global movement on land restoration.

Recent Meetings

COP 15 took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in May 2022. The COP adopted 38 decisions, including one that established a new IWG on Drought to support a shift from reactive to proactive drought management. New commitments adopted during the COP included the [Abidjan Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality for Successful Land Restoration](#), which emerged from the Gender Caucus; and the [Land, Life and Legacy Declaration](#), including the Abidjan Legacy Programme, a five-year, USD 1.5 billion comprehensive and innovative approach to fight against deforestation through forest restoration, and aims to restore 20% of the Ivorian forest cover by the end of the decade. The [Business4 Land Initiative](#) was launched to showcase commitments made by participating companies towards land degradation neutrality, both in supply chains and corporate social responsibility activities;

COP 16 took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in December 2024. Despite two weeks of intense negotiations, delegates were unable to agree on whether to negotiate a framework or a legally binding protocol for addressing drought worldwide. However, a major milestone on drought was still achieved with the launch of the [Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership](#), which had received over USD 12 billion in pledges by the end of COP 16. Key outcomes included a decision on the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs), which paved the way for the establishment of two new caucuses: one for Indigenous Peoples and another for local communities. Decisions on agriculture and rangelands expanded the scope of ecosystems addressed by the Convention. COP 16 also expanded the work of the SPI—both in the number of independent scientists and its mandate—deepening the knowledge base and expertise to reinforce implementation of the Convention.

UNCCD COP 17 Report

COP 16 President Osama Ibrahim Faqeeha (Saudi Arabia) opened COP 17 on [Monday, 17 August](#). Faqeeha called on Parties to build on the international momentum following COP 16, which he described as a historic turning point in enabling a broad participation of stakeholders, with a focus on water and food security, biodiversity, climate adaptation, and social welfare.

The COP then elected Batmunkh Battsetseg, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia, as President. She highlighted the profound relevance of the Convention to Mongolia. Noting that “we are united by our care for the Earth,” she called on Parties to work together to restore hope. Citing Mongolia's role in initiating the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), she underscored the global value of rangelands, as well as the knowledge and livelihoods of pastoralists.

Drawing attention to recent extreme droughts, UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad stressed that drought presents a systemic risk to food and water security, international commerce, energy supply, stability, and prosperity. She called for inclusive and people-centered implementation that guarantees water and food security, a healthy ecosystem, and community livelihoods.

Opening statements from regional groups and CSOs followed.

Adoption of the Agenda: COP 17 President Battsetseg presented the draft agenda ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/1/Rev.1](#)) for adoption. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION objected to agenda item 3 (IWG on the

Future Strategic Framework (IWG-FSF)), saying that the Central and Eastern Europe experts did not get to participate in the work of the IWG-FSF. They said they would withdraw their objection if Russian scientists were permitted to take up their “rightful roles.”

BRAZIL requested including an agenda item on bioeconomy and its relevance to drylands. India, on behalf of the IMPLEMENTATION ANNEX FOR ASIA, opposed adding a new agenda item due to time constraints, prompting BRAZIL to withdraw its proposal.

The US objected to three agenda items: synergies (Agenda item 4); gender (sub-item of Agenda item 5); and civil society (Agenda item 8(a)). The EU and BRAZIL expressed support for the draft agenda, including work on gender and synergies.

COP 17 President Battsetseg proposed provisionally adopting the agenda, deferring adoption of items 3, 4, 5 and 8(a), which would require further consultations. There was no objection.

On Wednesday, 26 August, COP 17 President Battsetseg announced that Agenda item 3 on IWG-FSF was no longer blocked. The COP agreed to send this item to the Committee of the Whole (COW) for further discussion.

Election of Officers: On Monday, 17 August, the COP elected the following as Vice-Presidents: Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon (African Group); Cook Islands (Asia-Pacific); Brazil and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC)); and France and Switzerland (Western European and Others). On Thursday, 20 August, COP President Batmunkh Battsetseg announced the election Ulfat Machanov (Azerbaijan), and Biljana Kilibarda (Montenegro) as Vice-Presidents from the Central and Eastern European Group, and Karomo Browne (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) as COP 17 Rapporteur.

On Friday, 28 August, the COP elected Charles Lange (Kenya) as Chair of CST 18, and Berexford Saylee Jallah (Liberia) as Chair of CRIC 24 and 25.

Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers: The COP adopted [ICCD/COP\(17\)/INE.6](#), taking note in the report of AZERBAIJAN’s objection to the accreditation of two NGOs.

Establishment of Subsidiary Bodies: The plenary agreed to establish the COW, to be chaired by Khalid Cherki (Morocco).

Committee of the Whole

COW Chair Cherki opened the Committee’s first meeting on Monday, 17 August, asking delegates to be open and adopt a collaborative approach. The COW agreed to establish two contact groups. The COW approved Marine Collignon (France) as Facilitator of the contact group on all other matters. Cherki said he would facilitate the contact group on budget until a Facilitator was approved. On Wednesday, 19 August, COW Chair Cherki announced that Poojanraj Khurun (Mauritius) would serve as the Facilitator of the budget contact group.

2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD: Report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and its recommendations to the COPs: On Friday, 28 August, CRIC Chair Philippine Dutailly presented the report to the COP closing plenary, which adopted it.

Enhancing the implementation of the Convention and the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework of the UNCCD: The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/5](#)) on [Thursday, 20 August](#).

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 CST. BOTSWANA stressed government ownership of implementation, supported by partners like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and the GEF, 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.

The COW took note of the document.

Review of the report of the Committee on Science and Technology and its recommendations to the COP: On Friday, 29 August, CST Chair Nicholas Webb presented the report of CST 17 to the COP closing plenary, which adopted it.

Review of progress in the implementation of the UNCCD communication plan: On [Friday, 21 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CRP.1](#)).

On the direction of the communication plan for the next biennium, the EU stressed: core activities should focus on the implementation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework; the importance of 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 recommended: enabling them 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 their 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, and called for 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.

During the COW closing plenary on Friday, 28 August, Chair Cherki said that this agenda item was covered in the budget and no further consideration was needed.

Final report of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention: After this agenda item was initially blocked by the Russian Federation, on Wednesday, 26 August, the COP was able to add it back on

the agenda, Chair 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.

In the **contact group** on Wednesday, 26 August, Parties asked for time to review the text presented by the Presidency following “delicate consultations.”

On Friday, 28 August, the COW approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption. The EU encouraged the IWG to work on monitoring and indicators, including on gender and land tenure, lessons from the 2026 reporting process, the recommendations of the midterm evaluation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, and strengthening synergies with other multilateral monitoring frameworks.

BRAZIL called for operationalizing the key elements identified in the report with clear recommendations, sound indicators, and a credible approach to the means of implementation, and lamented the politicization of environmental issues. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION emphasized their intention to ensure progress in combating DLDD but reserved their right to respond to any “destructive actions” towards them.

Final Decision: In the final decision (ICCD/COP(17)/L.7), the COP takes note of the final report of the IWG-FSF, and renews and extends the mandate of the IWG-FSF for the duration of the 2026–2028 biennium, in line with the terms of reference contained in Annex I to the decision. The COP also requests the IWG-FSF to:

- present an interim report for consultation to Parties, intergovernmental organizations and regional groups at CRIC 25; and
- present its proposal in a final report to Parties for their consideration and action at COP 18.

Promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies: This agenda item was not discussed, as the US objected to its inclusion on the agenda.

Policy frameworks and thematic issues: Migration: On [Wednesday, 19 August](#), 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 over crisis response when addressing DLDD as a driver for migration.

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 the importance of 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, said displacement should take place with dignity. MONGOLIA noted the 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.

SOUTH AFRICA and ALGERIA called for an integrated approach to address the underlying drivers of displacement.

LEBANON stressed the impact of conflict on desertification and migration.

On Thursday, 20 August, the COW **contact group** on other matters discussed the draft decision. In the chapeau, 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.

On Friday, 21 August, the contact group finished its first reading of the draft decision. 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 to the decision on resource mobilization.

In the group’s discussions on Tuesday, 25 August, two delegations requested postponing discussions until the next COP, prompting parties to reflect on ways forward. After lengthy discussions, delegates agreed to ask the Secretariat to draft text on postponing discussions to COP 18.

Final Outcome: No decision was adopted on migration. Instead, this issue was included in the programme of work for consideration at COP 18.

Drought: On [Monday, 17 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/11](#) and [ICCD/COP\(16\)/24/Add.1](#)).

South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized that a dedicated global protocol is necessary to address drought.

The EU expressed the importance of advancing the global response to drought, called on Parties to be flexible, and affirmed their commitment to a balanced outcome. SURINAME called for better drought monitoring, integrated land and water management, and technical capacity, arguing that drought policies and instruments under the Convention should be flexible and country-driven, rather than one-size-fits-all.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA expressed hope that Parties would pool their wisdom and adopt a decision that contains practical measures and actions on the ground to address drought under the Convention. OMAN supported international efforts to improve capacity to respond to droughts, taking into account the national contexts of each state, and noted the importance of regional cooperation and exchange of knowledge and expertise.

BRAZIL said drought is no longer an exceptional event, but a structural development challenge. They called for Parties to take this opportunity to strengthen the response to drought and leave Ulaanbaatar with a strong commitment. SYRIA, with SENEGAL and BHUTAN, noted the main challenge is to shift from drought

management to a proactive response through prediction, early warning, and early action. They stressed the response to drought should address the needs of local communities.

The UK did not support a legally-binding protocol and encouraged Parties to explore alternative options. SAUDI ARABIA encouraged stronger action on drought, calling for Parties to build on the foundation achieved in COP 16. CHINA stated the procedural resolution adopted at COP 16 is a good basis for discussion. AUSTRALIA encouraged building the COP 17 drought outcome on existing tools and initiatives, while they did not support a legally binding instrument.

Noting the increased drought effects on small island developing states (SIDS), SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS emphasized the need for continued financial, scientific, and technological support. BHUTAN called for regional cooperation, capacity building, technology transfer, and predictable and accessible finance.

COOK ISLANDS cautioned that a legally binding protocol could increase country obligations without necessarily increasing their capacities, and supported a flexible, country-driven framework. The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) suggested that a framework on drought should embed high-integrity nature-based solutions (NbS) on drought planning and response.

The COW **contact group** on other matters first discussed drought on Monday, 17 August. While most delegations agreed to use the bracketed text that was annexed to the COP 16 decision on drought, one delegation reiterated its rejection of this text. After a lengthy procedural discussion, Facilitator Collignon proposed, and participants eventually agreed, to begin on Tuesday with a higher-level discussion on what they want from this decision and use the text from COP 16 simply as an aide to the discussion and not begin line-by-line negotiations on that text.

On Tuesday, 18 August, 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 highlighted important ideas and principles and any major disagreements. Ideas ranged between a legally binding protocol, a non-legally binding framework, and a global voluntary target. One Party opposed any global governance solution, proposing instead a list of voluntary options. The group agreed to entrust the Facilitator and the Secretariat to produce a new text that consolidated the points of agreement and provided options where disagreements were identified.

On Wednesday, 19 August, the Facilitator presented new text with alternative options for contested paragraphs in the COP 16 text. The options included the language from COP 16, a “no text” option to delete the paragraph, and a possible alternative text. One Party reiterated their disagreement with using the COP 16 text as a basis for negotiation for any paragraph, including those with substance they have not opposed, and requested the “no text” option to be added as an option to all paragraphs instead of only the contested ones. The group entrusted the Facilitator to revise the text.

On Thursday evening, 20 August, Parties proposed alternative text to most paragraphs in a quest to find common ground. Delegates debated 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.

On Monday, 24 August, Parties resumed discussions on the basis of three text options: the bracketed text from COP 16 that aims to establish an international instrument; one focusing on national efforts; and another which launches a programme that would seek to strengthen the implementation of existing provisions, identify gaps, and their underlying causes. Despite lengthy debates and extended informal negotiations, delegates did not reach agreement. Discussions continued on a bilateral basis between the Presidency and the Parties.

On Thursday, 27 August, the Presidency indicated that, following intense consultations with relevant Parties, a “delicate” agreement had been reached to continue discussions at COP 18 under a stand-alone agenda item.

On Friday, 28 August, the COW approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption. In taking the floor, Montenegro, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, expressed readiness to explore voluntary country-driven approaches to support international cooperation and to allow that cooperation to evolve over time. They urged countries to take practical action now, while leaving the door open for greater ambition in the future. BRAZIL thanked the Mongolian Presidency for its tireless efforts.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(17)/L.15), the COP:

- decides to continue discussions at COP 18 based on the progress made at COPs 16 and 17 (annexed to the decision), with a view to adopting a decision on the proactive management of drought at all levels;
- decides that the COP will include drought as a stand-alone agenda item at COP 18 and at each ordinary session thereafter; and
- requests the Secretariat and the GM to continue supporting Parties in implementing the Convention as it relates to drought, through existing tools and innovative mechanisms, and to hold participatory consultations, subject to the availability of resources, on the proactive management of drought at all levels, during the intersessional period, including in parallel with CRIC 24.

Gender: This item was not discussed as the US objected to its inclusion on the agenda. It was placed on the agenda for COP 18.

Sand and Dust Storms: On [Thursday, 20 August](#), 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 (GI-SDS). Noting the transboundary nature of SDS, many called for regional and international cooperation to manage SDS sources.

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 the importance of 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 the importance of 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 increasing investment and strengthening scientific research.

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.

The **contact group** completed a second reading on Tuesday, 25 August. Parties agreed on, *inter alia*, recalling the UN General Assembly Decision to proclaim 2025–2034 the UN Decade on Combating SDS. Regarding a preambular paragraph on the exacerbating factors to SDS, one Party wanted to replace a reference to climate “change” with “variability.” Regarding a proposed paragraph on effective SDS management responses, Parties agreed that addressing both natural and anthropogenic sources should be strategic priorities but disagreed on whether addressing these should be “subject to the availability of financial and technical resources.”

On Thursday, 27 August, Parties continued negotiations. Regarding the preambular paragraph on the exacerbating factors to SDS, one delegation proposed, with many disagreeing, referring to the climate change factor as either climate “variability” or “shocks.” Parties eventually decided to omit all the factors. The group agreed on most paragraphs, with only cross-cutting issues remaining. The “cross-cutting issues” discussions spanned, *inter alia*, whether to “recall” or “note” past decisions, whether and how to reference synergies among the Rio Conventions and other international initiatives, and the inclusion of gender-related concerns.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group met and concluded discussions on the agenda item. In the evening, the COW approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(17)/L.20), the COP, *inter alia*, urges Parties, as appropriate, to:

- enhance policy coherence and sectoral coordination to more effectively address sources and impacts of SDS, specifically by designing and implementing integrated land management projects and programmes that attract the necessary technical and financial resources;
- strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms and regional initiatives that address SDS linked to DLDD, including through source area monitoring and the enhanced mitigation of their negative impacts, taking note of the regional and subregional nature of the impacts and with particular attention to involving people in vulnerable situations, giving consideration to women and girls; and
- increase efforts to better understand the differentiated socioeconomic impacts of SDS on populations, notably by disaggregating relevant data and developing corresponding indicators through their national statistics offices and systems, as appropriate.

The COP invites the UN Coalition on Combating SDS and regional and multilateral financial institutions, technical agencies and organizations, institutions, and other relevant stakeholders

to provide technical and financial support to source and affected country Parties to design and implement national and regional policies and action plans, including early warning systems.

The COP requests the Secretariat and the GM, subject to the availability of resources, to:

- strengthen cooperation with other UN entities and programmes, within the framework of the UN Coalition on Combating SDS, as well as with regional and international organizations and other relevant partners, donors, and civil society stakeholders, to continue developing and implementing the GI-SDS;
- continue updating and improving the SDS Toolbox;
- further engage in advocacy, awareness-raising and related communication activities for the UN Decade on Combating SDS (2025–2034); and
- collaborate with the World Meteorological Organization and its SDS Warning Advisory and Assessment System and support the implementation of the international early warning initiative for SDS.

Land Tenure: On Wednesday, [19 August](#), 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 called for 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 the importance of accountability and 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.

The 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 the importance of inclusive land governance while respecting diverse land tenure systems.

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

Contact group discussions began on Friday, 21 August. Parties commenced the second reading on Tuesday, 25 August. Among other issues, they discussed text supporting smallholder farmers, family farmers, pastoralists, and other rural groups in accessing

knowledge and technologies. One Party, opposed by several, insisted on the inclusion of “on voluntary and mutually agreed terms.”

On Wednesday, 26 August, delegates finished the second reading. Lengthy discussions ensued, including on 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.

On Thursday, 27 August, in an operative paragraph encouraging Parties to continue integrating land tenure considerations into their plans to combat DLDD, one country disagreed with giving special consideration to women and girls and other vulnerable groups. Similarly, in a paragraph encouraging Parties to support inclusive and participatory dialogues on land tenure with the aim of improving the livelihoods of people in vulnerable situations, the same country opposed specifying that these should include Indigenous Peoples, local communities, people of African descent, women, youth, and people with disabilities, preferring to refer to “all people.”

Following lengthy discussions, it was agreed to move the list of vulnerable groups to the end of a preambular paragraph noting that strengthening tenure security contributes to enhancing resilience among populations affected by DLDD.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group concluded discussions on the agenda item. In the evening, the COW approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(17)/L.18), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages Parties to continue integrating relevant land tenure considerations into their plans and activities to combat DLDD;
- invites developed country Parties and other Parties, relevant UN entities, international financial organizations, and private sector institutions to support (i) the design and implementation of land tenure administration systems to improve responsible governance of tenure, taking into account the VGGT, and (ii) the delivery of requested national consultations for integrating land tenure into LDN; and
- invites Parties to increase their efforts to better understand the differentiated impacts of land tenure insecurity on populations, by disaggregating relevant data and developing corresponding indicators through their national statistics offices and systems, as appropriate.

The decision further requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to continue, *inter alia*:

- exploring the ways and means, in collaboration with the FAO and other key partners, to support Parties that wish to integrate land tenure considerations into the implementation of the Convention and LDN initiatives, and the achievement of drought resilience;
- raising awareness of the importance of responsible and inclusive land governance for combating DLDD;
- considering the options developed by the Technical Reference Group for the report “The status of land tenure and governance” to use existing global and national indicators and data relevant to land governance and tenure security to inform future UNCCD reporting processes; and
- launching a consultative and participatory process to facilitate the review and update of relevant action plans, initiatives, and toolboxes related to land tenure.

The COP also requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to support the convening of all four caucuses of the UNCCD.

Rangelands and Pastoralists: On [Thursday, 20 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/10](#)).

CHILE called for strengthening 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, the AFRICAN GROUP, IUCN, and the UN Environment Programme (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 (GBF), and called for strengthening synergies. URUGUAY cited 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 the importance of public-private partnerships.

CHINA, the EU, and ZIMBABWE noted the achievements of the IYRP. CHINA also supported an International Day of Rangelands and Pastoralists, as proposed by the Asia-Pacific Group.

SUDAN called for resolving conflicts on rangelands as pastoralists move from one place to another, often across national borders. 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 citing 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 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 the outcomes from COP 17 deliver.

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.

The **contact group** completed its first reading of the draft decision on Tuesday, 25 August, where discussions covered: whether and how to reference the GBF; whether language on tenure should include reference to “secure land tenure rights and equitable access to land and water in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure” and be “in accordance with national laws”; and possibilities for establishing an International Day of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

On Thursday, 27 August, Parties finished their second reading of the draft decision. On a paragraph recognizing the critical role of

pastoralists as stewards of rangeland ecosystems, Parties eventually agreed to mention the importance of transboundary mobility. In a preambular paragraph on welcoming national measures, Parties agreed not to reference the GBF and LDN Targets.

In the same paragraph, Parties also exchanged views on whether to enhance climate resilience, as well as adaptation and mitigation. In the end, adaptation and mitigation were removed. On building the evidence base to address knowledge and data gaps, countries disagreed on whether to take into account “traditional” or “local” knowledge, in the end agreeing with “the knowledge accumulated by pastoralists.”

Brackets remained on a paragraph inviting Parties to improve tenure security in rangelands in line with the VGGT, following one Party’s request that it be deleted. The same Party also requested deleting mention of “Indigenous Peoples” and “local communities” in a paragraph on raising awareness and demonstrating the importance of pastoralists and other stakeholders’ practices for combatting DLDD.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group concluded discussions on the agenda item. During the evening plenary, the COW approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(17)/L.19), the COP, *inter alia*:

- recognizes the Coalition of Rangeland States as a strategic implementation partner for decision [29/COP.16](#), and encourages strengthened collaboration between the Coalition, the UNCCD Secretariat, the GM, the SPI, regional organizations, research institutions, development partners, and civil society, subject to the availability of resources, to conserve, sustainably manage, and restore rangelands;
- encourages Parties to develop and implement policies and legal frameworks for the sustainable management, conservation, and restoration of rangelands;
- invites Parties, donors, partners, civil society and other stakeholders to support the Rangelands Flagship Initiative; and
- invites Parties to improve tenure security in rangelands in line with the VGGT.

The COP further requests the Secretariat and the GM, subject to the availability of resources, to continue, *inter alia*:

- raising awareness and demonstrating the value of healthy rangelands, and their sustainable management through the development of strategic communication products and outreach campaigns, including exploring with Parties the possibility of establishing an International Day of Rangelands and Pastoralists;
- building the evidence base to address knowledge and data gaps, the development of good practice guidance, tools, and other capacity-building measures, and to inform the design of projects and programmes that conserve, sustainably manage, and restore rangelands, taking into account the knowledge accumulated by pastoralists; and
- developing a pipeline of rangeland projects and programmes that improve food security and nutrition, drought resilience, local livelihoods, the engagement of women and youth, education and the stewardship of rangeland resources.

The COP also requests the Secretariat and the GM to continue engaging the private sector in the sustainable management, conservation, and restoration of rangelands and the empowerment of pastoralists, including through the Business4Land Initiative; and provide support to Parties, upon request, for the formation of a

country-led Coalition of Rangeland States, utilizing funds already committed under the GEF-UNCCD Mongolia COP17 Legacy Project.

Programme and Budget: On Monday, [17 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the programme and budget for the biennium 2027–2028 ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/7](#) and [ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.1](#)), financial performance for the Convention trust funds ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.3](#)), report on the status of contributions to the Convention trust funds (2025–2026) ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.7](#)), and the report of the Evaluation Office ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.2](#)). The Secretariat noted three budget scenarios: a zero nominal growth scenario, a zero real growth scenario, and a 28.69% increase to include three additional positions. The UN Board of Auditors provided an overview of its [financial and performance audit reports](#). Next, the Secretariat introduced the report of the Evaluation Office ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.2](#)).

The EU urged that current shortfalls in budget contributions be addressed. BRAZIL stressed that while budget discipline is necessary, it should not lead to freezing necessary posts. They noted that financial sustainability requires full payment of contributions but should avoid additional burdens on developing countries.

CHINA suggested the Secretariat should reform and standardize its financial processes to ensure the effective use of resources. They proposed that the COP urge Parties with payments in arrears to fulfill their obligations.

JAPAN supported the zero nominal growth budget, stressing the importance of cost-effective and efficient management of funding, and proposed that additional operational costs be covered by voluntary contributions and external mechanisms.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, underscored that an adequate budget is essential for delivering on commitments, and stressed that the region cannot accept an increased mandate without commensurate additional resources. MOROCCO stressed that voluntary contributions cannot substitute for regular budget funding and called for a balanced, results-based budget.

CIVIL SOCIETY called for stronger financial commitments and underscored the importance of investing directly in local actors and grassroots organizations.

Chair Cherki proposed, and delegates agreed, to send this agenda item to the budget contact group, which met throughout the two weeks to negotiate the budget and related decisions.

On Friday, 28 August, the COW approved the draft decisions and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decisions: In the final decision on the financial rules (ICCD/COP(17)/L.16), the COP adopts the updated financial rules, as contained in the annex. The financial rules govern the financial administration of the UNCCD COP, its Subsidiary Bodies, the Secretariat, and the GM, and are based on and consistent with the UN Financial Regulations and Rules.

In the final decision on the budget (ICCD/COP(17)/L.17), the COP adopts a zero nominal growth budget in the amount of EUR 17,744,748, which retains the core budget at the same nominal value as for the biennium 2025–2026. The decision also, *inter alia*, urges all Parties who have not paid their contributions for 2026 to do so without delay.

Procedural matters: Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: This agenda item was not discussed, as the US objected to its inclusion on the agenda.

Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the UNCCD and the business engagement strategy:

On Wednesday, [19 August](#), 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 in 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 state leadership, and private sector resources should not be a substitute for public finance. SOUTH AFRICA called for harnessing the expertise, innovation, and financial resources of the private sector. JAPAN encouraged 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.

In the **contact group** on Thursday, 20 August, the draft decision was discussed. 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, *inter alia*, whether to include environmental and social safeguards when “strengthening regulatory enabling conditions” for private sector contributions.

On Friday, 21 August, some Parties called for deleting 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 other things, whether to specify that private capital should not be a substitute for public finance.

On Wednesday, 26 August, Parties agreed to delete a reference to the costs and losses associated with DLDD. Following lengthy debate on the modalities of engagement, Parties agreed to text to promote, as appropriate, the participation and engagement of the private sector in the implementation of the Convention. Negotiations continued into the evening.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group concluded discussions on the agenda item. In the evening, the COW approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision, the COP, *inter alia*:

- calls upon Parties to engage actively with the private sector in the implementation of the Convention;
- encourages Parties to strengthen the regulatory enabling conditions necessary for substantive private sector contributions to LDN;
- invites Parties to consider how the private sector recommendations on agricultural lands, contained in the annex

to document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/4](#), may be operationalized at the national and subnational levels;

- invites Parties to support the establishment of Business4Land Hubs at the national or regional level;
- encourages Parties to facilitate the participation of representatives of business and industry entities in the meetings and processes of the Convention;
- calls upon Parties to expand the use of blended finance approaches and de-risking instruments and to recognize land and drought resilience as a strategic asset class, in order to mobilize private capital for the implementation of the Convention.

The decision further asks the Secretariat and the GM to:

- continue implementing the Private Sector Engagement Strategy 2021–2030 and to further develop the Business4Land Initiative as the principal vehicle for private sector engagement under the Convention;
- continue the work on corporate disclosure and land-related target-setting;
- continue to expand the drought resilience components of the Business4Land Initiative;
- continue to support the Business4Land Champions’ Council and to support its members in translating corporate sustainability commitments into concrete land-positive and drought-resilient action across supply chains;
- establish and progressively expand the network of Business4Land Hubs at the national and regional level;
- develop additional pathways for private sector entities to contribute to flagship initiatives, transformative projects, and programmes;
- continue to build on blended finance approaches and innovative financial instruments; and
- facilitate the organization of the Sustainable Land Management and Drought Resilience Business Forum and related forums at future sessions of the COP.

Programme of work for the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties: On Friday, 21 August, Chair 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 that 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 could not be discussed, noting they have heard the voices and concerns of civil society, 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 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 this is not optional under the UNCCD since the current procedures for civil society participation were

adopted at COP 9 and reaffirmed 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 DLDD.

In the **contact group** on Thursday, 27 August, Parties discussed the draft decision. One delegation suggested adding an agenda item on the efficiency and effectiveness of procedures and processes of the COP and the Subsidiary Bodies, noting it has proposed a similar agenda item under the CRIC. One group of Parties expressed reservations, pending regional consultations and an explanation from the legal advisor regarding its addition under both agendas.

Under policy frameworks and thematic issues, one delegation, supported by some and opposed by others, proposed to add a sub-item on sustainable bioeconomy. Following the agreement on the way forward on drought, a separate agenda item on drought was added. While disagreements remained over which stakeholders to hold interactive dialogue sessions with, Parties agreed to convene all four caucuses, while observing geographical representation.

Delegates also agreed to request the Secretariat to continue implementation of all COP decisions related to the agenda items specified on the work programme, which includes agenda items blocked during this COP.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group concluded discussions. In the evening, the COW approved the draft decisions and forwarded them to the COP for adoption.

Final Decisions: In the decision on the date and venue for COP 18 (ICCD/COP(17)/L.2), the COP decides that COP 18 shall be held in Egypt in 2028, at a date to be determined.

In the decision on the programme of work for COP 18 (ICCD/COP(17)/L.21), the COP adopts a list of agenda items for COP 18 and agree to include interactive dialogue sessions with relevant stakeholders, including ministers, civil society organizations, the business community, the scientific community, and members of parliament. The COP further decides to convene all four caucuses, while observing geographical representation.

COW Closing Plenary: On Friday, 28 August, the COW forwarded all its draft decisions to the COP, except for the draft decision on migration, which will be included in the programme of work for consideration at COP 18.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

On Monday afternoon, [17 August](#), CRIC Chair Philippine Dutailly opened the meeting. UNCCD Executive Secretary Fouad stressed that Parties face a decisive moment for implementation and highlighted three priorities: mobilizing resources at scale to deliver on the implementation of the Convention and SDG 15.3 (land degradation neutrality); strengthening capacity-building for women, youth, and local communities; and enhancing monitoring and reporting.

Following opening statements, the CRIC adopted the agenda and organization of work ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/1/Rev.1](#)) and agreed to the establishment of a contact group, appointing Charles Lange (Kenya) as Facilitator.

Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels: Review of the report of the CRIC on its twenty-third session: On Monday, 17 August, Rapporteur Lange presented the report ([ICCD/CRIC\(23\)/8](#)). He highlighted conclusions and recommendations to further the implementation of the Convention and the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, including

on, *inter alia*: voluntary LDN targets; policy frameworks and thematic issues for SDS, and land tenure; and the development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building.

CIVIL SOCIETY expressed their appreciation to the CRIC for its efforts to support implementation. However, they stressed that success must not be measured only by policies, reports, and strategies, but by results on the ground that empower communities and improve living conditions.

The CRIC took note of the report.

Performance of Convention Institutions and Subsidiary Bodies:

The Secretariat presented the report ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/INF.4](#)) and highlighted, *inter alia*, that 116 countries have completed their LDN targets, and 22 projects to implement action toward those targets were supported with a total of USD 1.48 billion in financing.

The CRIC took note of the report.

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity-building: On [Tuesday, 18 August](#), The Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/3](#)). Following a panel discussion, including representatives from the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative (GLI), the UNCCD Secretariat, and the GM, many Parties called for a demand-driven approach that considers national priorities, alongside adequate and predictable financial and technical resources.

CHINA called for greater guidance and technical assistance with monitoring systems and indicator conversion. MONTENEGRO encouraged the GM, financial institutions, and partners to mobilize dedicated funding for Communities of Learning and Practice 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 for a further process to be decided at COP 18.

The PHILIPPINES described their approach to capacity-building, which 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 SIDS.

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

BRAZIL and 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.

DJIBOUTI recommended, *inter alia*, the development of national action plans for drought and rangelands and teaching young people how to harness artificial intelligence (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 the need to strengthen human capacities to enhance SLM practices.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called on Parties to, *inter alia*: 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.

On Tuesday evening, 18 August, the CRIC **contact group** began discussions on the draft decision. 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.

Discussions continued on Thursday, 20 August, when Parties discussed whether to include specific references to collaborating with, *inter alia*, the G20 GLI 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 refer to “relevant initiatives.” Parties also discussed the responsible use of AI.

On Friday, 21 August, delegates exchanged views on 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 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 could entail the GM working to expand partnerships to support capacity-building.

On Thursday, 27 August, delegates worked to streamline the draft by attempting to remove paragraphs or integrate proposals from across the decision text into other paragraphs. Extensive discussions ensued on an operative paragraph requesting the Secretariat and GM to assess lessons learned from the regional support architecture established for the 2026 reporting process and to explore options for defining the possible future, role, scope, and modalities of regional hubs and centers of excellence. Some Parties expressed concerns regarding the budgetary implications of, *inter alia*, the consultation process needed to assess expanding these hubs and centers.

On another paragraph encouraging Parties to make full use of, *inter alia*, digital tools developed under the Convention, some Parties requested noting that use of such tools “is not mandatory,”

and ensuring “that a contracting Party or observer does not present information relating to another contracting Party.”

Parties continued to exchange views on cross-cutting issues. In an operative paragraph inviting the Earth observation communities to continue strengthening capacity-building efforts among Parties for the implementation of the Convention, one Party called for the deletion of references to gender responsiveness, youth inclusivity, and specific initiatives, including the Earth Observations LDN Flagship Initiative. They also requested the deletion of references to synergies across the Rio Conventions.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group met and concluded discussions on the agenda item. In the evening, the CRIC approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision, the COP requests the Secretariat and the GM to, *inter alia*:

- continue to provide demand-driven capacity-building;
- consult Parties on an outline for the capacity-building strategy, and prepare a draft for discussion at CRIC 25 and consideration at COP 18;
- continue strengthening partnership-based capacity-building and technical cooperation; and
- assess lessons learned from the regional support architecture established for the 2026 reporting process and prepare consolidated options for consideration at CRIC 25.

It also encourages Parties to identify remaining capacity gaps and priority areas for further support, according to national circumstances, and invites them, in line with Articles 5 (Obligations of affected country Parties), 6 (Obligations of developed country Parties), and 20 (Financial Resources), to mobilize resources for capacity-building activities that assist them in the implementation of the Convention at national, subregional, and regional levels.

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP: This item was discussed in a joint meeting of the CRIC and CST (see below).

Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Report by the GEF on the financing of programmes and projects concerning DLDD: On [Tuesday, 18 August](#), 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 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 and SOUTH AFRICA stressed that developed countries must mobilize new and additional resources. SYRIA requested the lifting of international sanctions so it could access financial resources to address DLDD. AUSTRALIA underscored the importance of unlocking private investment.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA stressed the need for robust SLM, adding that SIDS need approaches that reflect their limited resources and strengthen their resilience. TÜRKIYE noted development of high-resolution tools for assessment is important for building sustainable capacity and explained how GEF-supported projects helped translate LDN targets to the field level. INDONESIA thanked the GEF for its 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.

In the **contact group** on Monday, 24 August, delegates exchanged views on, *inter alia*, whether to include references to the SDGs in a preambular paragraph, and, in an operative paragraph, whether to note the reduction in funding allocated to the Land Degradation Focal Area under GEF-9. Delegates also debated whether to request the GEF to improve the granularity of its tracking and reporting of resources, including by separately identifying allocation and utilization of resources addressing DLDD.

On Tuesday, 25 August, the contact group finished its first reading. One Party proposed to recognize that private finance should complement public financial resources, and to urge the GEF to simplify access to its resources and ensure resources programmed through integrated approaches preserve country ownership and avoid fragmentation of resources. Another delegation proposed, and several disagreed, to delete a paragraph encouraging the GEF to leverage synergies among the Rio Conventions and with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group met and concluded discussions on the agenda item. In the evening, the CRIC approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In its decision, the COP notes the 27% decrease in pledges for the ninth replenishment cycle of the GEF and invites additional contributions. It also invites the GEF to, *inter alia*:

- consider strengthening its support for countries in programming and accessing land degradation focal area resources;
- continue to support Parties in meeting their reporting requirements in a timely manner;
- continue enhancing knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and the dissemination of SLM best practices; and
- support the scale-up of LDN Target Setting Programme 2.0 by linking the setting and refining of LDN targets to implementation and financing with monitoring and reporting.

It also requests the GEF to continue supporting the implementation of the national drought plans and other drought-related projects, and encourages the GEF to continue with the integrated approach of funding drought-related projects and programs.

Report by the Global Mechanism on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention: On [Tuesday, 18 August](#), 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. A panel discussed, among other things, the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership and the Greening Drylands Partnership and underscored the need to create enabling environments for investments, support early-stage innovation, build institutional capacity, and move beyond pilot projects to large-scale investment.

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.

On Wednesday, 19 August, discussions 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 DLDD.

The 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.

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

MOZAMBIQUE and the PHILIPPINES underscored that finance must go to local communities and small-scale farmers, women, and youth. Emphasizing that Africa is in the greatest need of financing, ALGERIA hoped this session would lead to practical recommendations that bridge the financial gap.

In the **contact group** on Tuesday, 25 August, several countries supported requesting the GM to strengthen its support to developing country Parties, including through country-level financial needs assessment, investment plans, and strategies for accessing international public and private finance. Delegates also debated the scope of collaboration between the GM and regional organizations, multilateral development banks, and international financial institutions.

On Friday, 28 August, the CRIC approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision, the COP invites Parties, *inter alia*:

- to mobilize resources for the implementation of the Convention, in line with Articles 5 (Obligations of affected country Parties), 6 (Obligations of developed country Parties), and 20 (Financial Resources);
- that are members of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership to further develop the Partnership and engage with it in the development of investable projects for drought resilience; and
- to consider adopting the GI-SDS.

It also requests the GM to, *inter alia*:

- support the roll-out of the LDN Target Setting Programme 2.0 to additional countries, giving priority to those currently on the waiting list;
- finalize the development of a time-bound strategy to increase fund mobilization based on the UNCCD financial needs assessment;
- finalize the development and deployment of the financing toolbox for resource mobilization;
- revise and update the UNCCD financial needs assessment taking into consideration the outcomes of the 2026 national reporting process;
- incorporate the results of the 2026 reporting cycle into the financing toolbox;
- advance innovative financing mechanisms for land restoration and drought resilience;
- contribute to building country capacities to strengthen intersectoral coordination;
- demonstrate integrated decision-support tools that link voluntary LDN target-setting and drought resilience with investment decision-making;
- accelerate efforts to support private sector engagement and promote innovation; and
- continue the development and operationalization of the GI-SDS.

Finally, it invites the GM to collaborate with the UNCCD Evaluation Office to commission a comprehensive independent evaluation of the LDN Fund to inform and guide the operationalization of the Drought Resilience Investment Facility.

Procedural matters: Programme of work for the twenty-fifth session of the CRIC: On Tuesday, 25 August, the CRIC held a brief session in which the Secretariat introduced the draft decision for the programme of work ([ICCD/CRIC\(24\)/5](#)).

In the **contact group** on Wednesday, 26 August, one Party requested the deletion of an agenda item including 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, citing uncertainty about what such an agenda item would practically entail.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group met and concluded discussions on this agenda item. In the evening, the CRIC approved the draft decisions and forwarded them to the COP for adoption.

Final Decisions: In the decision on the date and venue of CRIC 25 (ICCD/CRIC(24)/L.1), the COP decides that CRIC 25 shall be held in Belgrade, Serbia in 2027, at a date to be determined.

In the decision on the programme of work, the COP adopts a list of agenda items for CRIC 25 including convening of the caucuses.

Election of officers other than the Chair: The Committee appointed three Vice-Chairs: Muhammad Muttaqin, Indonesia (Asia-Pacific); Joseph Noel, Grenada (GRULAC); and Flora Mak, Canada (Western European and Others Group). The election of the Vice-Chair from Central and Eastern Europe will take place at a later date.

CRIC Closing Plenary: On Friday, 28 August, the CRIC approved and forwarded all of its draft decisions to the COP.

Committee on Science and Technology

CST Chair Nicholas Webb opened the session on [Tuesday, 18 August](#). UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad emphasized the importance of strengthening the SPI and developing an institutional foundation for it 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.

After opening statements, CST Chair Webb presented the provisional agenda ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/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 IWG-FSF.

The EU and AUSTRALIA indicated 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 the subject of regional consultations.

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

Items resulting from the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2025–2026: The Russian Federation objected to discussion of this agenda item during the opening CST plenary. On Friday, 28 August, they withdrew their objection, citing progress in the work on the IWG-FSF. The item was forwarded to the CST contact group for consideration.

Since the agenda item was blocked until the final day of the meeting, delegates in the **contact group** agreed there was not enough time to discuss the entire draft decision, opting only for a new paragraph inviting Parties that wish to do so to consider the information and conclusions in the synthesis report of the activities of the SPI.

Final Decision: In the final decision, the COP invites Parties that wish to do so to consider, as appropriate, and in line with national circumstances, priorities and needs, the information and conclusions in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/6](#).

Interfacing science, policy and sharing knowledge: Synthesis report on supplementary technical guidance to support aridity and drought planning and adaptation across the Rio Conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: On [Tuesday, 18 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the report ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/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.

ARGENTINA stated that 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 combating 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.

The CST **contact group** met, *inter alia*, on Tuesday evening and Wednesday, 18–19 August, to discuss the draft text. Among the issues discussed, one Party called to remove explicit references to the Rio Conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and replace them with “multilateral organizations.” On Thursday, 20 August, Parties continued discussing the possibility of changing the title of the decision, and references in the preambular paragraphs to other Rio Conventions, to which one delegation is not a Party. The second reading was eventually paused due to cross-cutting issues and matters related to the blocked agenda items,

which were being discussed elsewhere in ongoing consultations led by the COP Presidency.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group agreed to defer further discussion to the next COP, asking the Secretariat to draft a decision to that effect.

Final Outcome: No decision was adopted on the agenda item. Instead, Parties agreed to defer consideration until COP 18.

Knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and innovation: On [Tuesday, 18 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/3](#)).

GRENADA noted the potential of digitalization and 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 relevant draft decisions and emphasized the role locally-adapted solutions play in 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.

In the **contact group** on Thursday, 20 August, 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 AI concerned the role of AI in addressing DLDD and advancing SLM, especially as it relates to AI-related risks.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group agreed to defer further discussion until the next COP, asking the Secretariat to draft a decision to that effect.

Final Outcome: No decision was adopted on the agenda item. Instead, Parties agreed to defer consideration until COP 18.

Future functioning of the SPI: On [Tuesday, 18 August](#), 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 (GLO4) 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 the importance of accounting for 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.

In the CST **contact group** on Thursday, 20 August, one delegation proposed reviewing the SPI procedures developed by the CST Bureau contained in the Secretariat's document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/5](#)), arguing this was mandated under [decision 20/COP.16](#).

On Friday, 21 August, when Parties resumed consideration of the three tables containing the SPI procedures developed by the CST Bureau, they reached a tentative agreement to indicate 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, as one participant noted, the Bureau operates during the intersessional process.

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 those required to fund work carried out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-

Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). 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.

Delegates deliberated at length on the differences between fast-track assessments and flagship reports, including their nature and intended audiences. Parties also discussed the procedures to request fast-track assessments, as well as the budget implications. Some delegates maintained that the SPI is not an intergovernmental body, and not all SPI products need to be negotiated by Parties.

On Monday, 24 August, Parties reached agreement on the three tables summarizing the proposed procedures to be annexed to the decision, which now included clarification on the purpose and process for preparing flagship reports and fast-track assessments, and specified the approval process of the Summaries for Policymakers. Discussions continued into the evening with further amendments to the draft decision.

On Tuesday, 25 August, delegates agreed to request the Secretariat to continue mobilizing voluntary contributions to support the work of the SPI "with full transparency and no earmarking that influences scientific priorities." Disagreements remained, however, on whether this request should be moved to the decision on budget. Parties also debated the modalities for the selection and operationalization of the technical support unit that will assist with the development of GLO4.

On Friday, 28 August, the CST approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision, the COP requests the CST Bureau to renew the membership of the SPI for effective delivery of its 2027–2030 quadrennium work programme. It also, *inter alia*:

- adopts the initial procedures of the SPI annexed to this decision and requests the CST Bureau to update the full version of these procedures;
- requests the SPI, for the quadrennium 2027–2030 to prepare GLO4 on the global assessment of DLDD;
- tasks the Secretariat to conduct a feasibility study to assess the budget implications and time required to negotiate text for the SPM of the GLO4 of varying lengths; and
- decides that any technical support unit shall only be hosted or operationalized with an explicit decision by the COP defining its terms of reference.

Avoiding, reducing and reversing land and soil degradation of agricultural lands: On [Wednesday, 19 August](#), 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 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, IUCN, and the 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 to the WOCAT database.

INDONESIA stated that current reporting mechanisms under SDG 15.3 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.

AUSTRALIA called for international approaches to sustainable agriculture to recognize the diversity of landscapes and production systems.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES underlined the fundamental importance of strengthening tenure rights for women, Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, and pastoralists.

In the **contact group** on Wednesday evening, 26 August, Parties began the first reading of the draft decision.

On Thursday, 27 August, Parties engaged in lengthy discussions of, among other things, streamlining terminology throughout the draft text. In a preambular paragraph on the role of agricultural lands and soils in achieving LDN, delegates debated the exact formulation in reference to agricultural and food systems. One party stated that "food systems" alone is not sufficient as it does not cover other agricultural sectors, such as animal feed and fiber production, and proposed "agricultural production systems" as a more neutral term. Many agreed with this suggestion. The discussion was picked up again in an operative paragraph regarding forward-looking analysis to inform country responses to degradation. The same Party added that "food systems" at large also include distribution and storage, which have no direct connection with land, and as such, go beyond the core mandate of the Convention.

In a paragraph on land management practices, Parties deliberated on whether or not to identify individual sustainable practices to combat land degradation. Diverging Party positions included: replacing NbS with SLM as an umbrella term; deleting the list of individual practices because it would not be comprehensive vis-à-vis the UNCCD repository of SLM practices; and removing reference to SLM and leaving only "evidence-based approaches."

Parties also debated extensively over the term "health" in the context of agricultural lands and soils. One Party maintained "health" is too vague and abstract. Another countered that "healthy rangelands" has been agreed upon in another contact group. They also noted "soil health" is established language, noting the upcoming UN Decade on Soil Health.

On Friday, 28 August, the contact group concluded discussions on the agenda item. In the evening, the CST approved the draft decisions and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision (ICCD/COP(17)/CST/L.1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- encourages Parties to apply the LDN response hierarchy on agricultural lands and soils;
- invites Parties to design and implement national legal and policy frameworks that promote soil health and generate enabling conditions for the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders;
- invites Parties to pursue evidence-based approaches to SLM practices; and
- invites the Secretariat, the GM, and other relevant partners to assist interested Parties in identifying key enabling conditions for scaling private sector contributions and public-private partnerships for the sustainable management of agricultural lands and soils.

Procedural matters: Work programme for the SPI (2027-2030) and Programme of work for CST 18: On [Wednesday, 19 August](#), the Secretariat introduced the document ([ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/8](#)), accompanied by the draft work programmes.

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 to 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.

On Tuesday, 25 August, the **contact group** completed its first reading of the draft decision. Delegates agreed, *inter alia*, to adapt the draft decision, with the help of the Secretariat, based on the outcome of the discussions on the future functioning of the SPI.

On Wednesday, 26 August, Parties exchanged views on "relevant thematic reports" "where available and appropriate" to be presented alongside GLO4. The Secretariat also provided an overview of a revised table on the objectives and deliverables of the SPI under the work programme.

Parties discussed 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 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, *inter alia*, 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.

On Friday, 28 August, the CST approved the draft decisions and forwarded them to the COP for adoption.

Final Decisions: In the decision pertaining to the work programme for the SPI for the 2027–2030 quadrennium (ICCD/COP(17)/CST/L.2), the COP provisionally adopts the SPI work programme for the 2027–2030 quadrennium, pending its update by the CST Bureau, and following these priorities:

- the SPI scientifically leads the GLO4, including the scoping;
- the SPI supports the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice; and
- the SPI cooperates with other scientific bodies.

The COP also, *inter alia*, invites Parties and technical and scientific institutions to provide, on a voluntary basis, data, expertise, knowledge and technical assistance to support the activities of the SPI for this quadrennium. It requests the Secretariat to present a synthesis report on the GLO4 at the CST 19, and a list and links to fast-track assessments and information products.

In the decision pertaining to the programme of work for CST 18, the COP decides, *inter alia*, that CST 18 should focus on operationalizing the four-year work programme of the SPI adopted by COP 17, including progress related to the GLO4, fast-track assessments, and information products. It also decides that the CST 18 should facilitate a focused thematic dialogue between Parties in emerging scientific and technical issues relevant to the implementation of the Convention.

Election of the officers other than the Chair: The Committee appointed the following new Vice-Chairs: Xiaoxia Jia, China (Asia-Pacific); Melkis Maradiga, Honduras (GRULAC); and Michael Brüntrup, Germany (Western European and Others Group). The election of the Vice-Chair from the Central and Eastern European Group will take place at a later date.

CST Closing Plenary: On Friday, 28 August, the CST approved and forwarded all its draft decisions to the COP, except those on knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation, and science-policy recommendations on synergistically supporting aridity and drought planning and adaptation, which will be included in the programme of work for consideration at COP 18.

Joint CRIC and CST Session

A joint session of the CRIC and CST met [Wednesday, 19 August](#).

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.

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 the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC emphasized the need to enhance South-South cooperation 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 the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC underlined the role of reporting in supporting national decision-making for LDN implementation.

ZIMBABWE, MEXICO, and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC called for the prioritization of existing national data and related systems. URUGUAY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, and TÜRKİYE 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.

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.

In the joint CST-CRIC **contact group** meeting on Wednesday, 19 August, 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 continued on Friday, 21 August. Parties exchanged views on how to acknowledge challenges in, *inter alia*: 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 other things, 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 (PRAIS), one Party requested deletion of specific references to national and regional circumstances, as well as the involvement of civil society, 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.

On Monday, 24 August, Parties had differing views on explicitly referring to whether this is dependent on “adequate financial, technical, institutional, and technological capabilities,” or merely “a variety of factors.” Discussions also revolved around whether to explicitly request the Secretariat to facilitate collaboration among the Earth observation community in cooperation with the Group on Earth Observations LDN Flagship Initiative.

On Thursday, 27 August, Parties largely agreed to the decision, barring some cross-cutting issues. Delegates debated whether a preambular paragraph should recognize that effective national reporting is dependent upon “adequate financial, technical, institutional, and technological capacities” or “a variety of factors.” Some Parties indicated that “variety of factors” is too vague, to which another Party suggested including a reference noting Article 26 of the Convention (communication of information), rather than having an incomplete list of factors. Discussions also revolved around whether the paragraph should explicitly acknowledge these capacity challenges in the context of developing and least developed countries. After extensive discussions, Parties agreed to a compromise text “recognizing that effective national reporting is dependent on a variety of factors, noting Article 26 of the Convention, and that reporting requirements remain responsive to national circumstances.”

The group also largely agreed on a paragraph to support Parties in strengthening national capacity to generate, manage, analyze, interpret, and use national and Earth observation data for monitoring and reporting through technical cooperation. Disagreements remained on whether this should include technology transfer and on what modalities.

On Friday, 28 August, the CRIC approved the draft decision and forwarded it to the COP for adoption.

Final Decision: In the decision, the COP:

- invites Parties to actively engage with available support mechanisms and encourages Support Hubs and technical advisory institutions to take into account that support remains responsive to regional and national circumstances and aligned with reporting needs;
- invites Parties to involve a broad range of relevant stakeholders in the national reporting process;
- invites Parties to submit national reports in a timely manner to enable comprehensive and credible global assessments of progress toward implementing the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework;
- encourages Parties to make nationally reported data available under appropriate open licensing arrangements; and
- invites Parties to mobilize resources to support national reporting.

The COP also requests the Secretariat to strengthen coordination across the reporting support architecture. The COP also requests the Secretariat and the GM, subject to the availability of financial resources, and in collaboration with financial and technical partners, to:

- further formalize and operationalize the roles and functions of Support Hubs and technical advisory institutions;

- explore options for the further evolution of Support Hubs and technical advisory institutions beyond national reporting and into longer-term centers of excellence;
- further strengthen and expand peer-driven learning modalities within regional capacity-building efforts by fostering the exchange of practical experiences, challenges and tailored solutions among Parties, to enhance the quality of national reporting;
- promote the continuity and sustainability of capacity-building efforts and enabling support beyond the 2026 reporting process;
- support Parties, upon request, through technical cooperation to strengthen national capacity to generate, manage, analyze, interpret and use national data, Earth observation and geospatial information for monitoring and reporting; and
- promote further efficiency of reporting systems and tools.

The COP invites the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Earth Observation community, to continue structured dialogue and collaboration to identify and address gaps in the accessibility, quality, high spatial resolutions and temporal coverage of data sets used for national reporting.

Open Dialogues with Civil Society Organizations

Rangelands and Pastoralists: The first open-dialogue session with civil society organizations took place on [Thursday, 20 August](#), and focused on rangelands and pastoralists. Panelists discussed the need to connect international organizations and the scientific community with pastoralists’ knowledge and practices; integrating LDN targets with pastoralist-designed and community-led initiatives; the need for direct financial access, secure land tenure and mobility rights; and bringing pastoralists to the decision-making table. The [Global Pastoralist and Indigenous Pastoralists’ Call for Action](#), the outcome of the Global Pastoralist Gathering held in Ulaanbaatar before the COP, was formally presented.

The panel concluded with several recommendations:

- strengthening the recognition of pastoralism and mobility as a tool to address 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.

Community perspectives on addressing DLDD: The second open-dialogue session took place on [Tuesday, 25 August](#). Byaruuzanyin Pürevdagva, Governor and Mayor of Ulaanbaatar, opened the Dialogue, emphasizing the importance of multilevel governance in implementing the Convention. He then presented the [Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Local and Regional Governments](#).

In the discussion, Panelists considered, among other things, forest restoration initiatives, mobilizing youth to support land restoration, the drought-land degradation nexus, the need for a human rights-based approach to water management, and the role of rural women in combating DLDD.

Many Parties reaffirmed their support for the full, effective participation of civil society in the implementation of the Convention and called for the establishment of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities caucuses. Various CSOs highlighted

the numerous ways in which Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and pastoralists are integral to land restoration efforts.

On Friday, 28 August, the COP adopted the draft decision. In closing statements, CIVIL SOCIETY summarized the two open dialogue sessions on rangelands and pastoralists, and drought-resilient territories and water. They called for, *inter alia*, direct financing, a people-centered post-2030 Strategy Framework, bottom-up governance approaches, and shifting from reactive management to proactive locally informed action.

Final Decision: In its decision (ICCD/COP(17)/L.5), the COP:

- takes note of the Declaration made by representatives of civil society organizations attending COP 17;
- takes note of the summary of discussions from the two open dialogue sessions with civil society; and
- decides to include the Declaration and the summary of discussions as an annex to the proceedings of the COP 17 report.

Special High-level Segment

The High-level Segment convened on [Monday, 24 August](#). Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khürelsühk reminded participants that land degradation is already rampant around the world, adversely affecting the livelihoods, water, and food of over three billion people. He highlighted Mongolia's Steppe Action Agenda linked to three flagship initiatives on rangelands, the land-water nexus, and NbS for infrastructure.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed highlighted that droughts have increased in frequency and severity and drew attention to the droughts and dzuds that brought devastating losses to Mongolian pastoralists in 2023–24. She underscored the importance of the right to land, especially for women.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad called to address DLDD as a risk multiplier for migration. She further emphasized the need for countries to support private sector initiatives and unlock private finance, as well as financing to support implementation on the ground.

Carlos Andrés Alvarado Quesada, Former President, Costa Rica, emphasized that markets and international financial institutions are not responding at the scale and speed required to address DLDD, and called for the redirection of harmful subsidies. He lauded communities leading the way in responding to challenges and commended their work to restore ecosystems, protect livelihoods, and adapt to changing landscapes.

Tarja Halonen, Former President, Finland, reflected on when world leaders came together to establish the Millennium Development Goals to ensure that no one be left behind, and stated that this promise must begin with the land beneath our feet. She further highlighted the role of women and girls in supporting SLM.

Noting the cross-border nature of land degradation and desertification, Moon Jae-in, Former President, Republic of Korea, stressed the importance of advancing international cooperation. He highlighted the Peace Forest Initiative that elevates peace and security through land restoration and drew attention to the Korea-Mongolia Greenbelt Project that envisages building “trust and hope for a greener future.”

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, President, Association of Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, said the IYRP must be a turning point for recognizing pastoralists as right holders and solution providers. Noting the global contributions of pastoralists to biodiversity

conservation, climate resilience, and the economy, she stressed the importance of securing their collective land rights and protecting pastoralist mobility.

Gandelger Togooch, Mongolian pastoralist, said our future “lays strongly with our compassion and love to mother nature.” He stressed nature conservation “as our very root of existence,” and called for reducing excessive consumerism.

Sandag-Ochir Tsend, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Mongolia, highlighted the importance of nomadic pastoralism for Mongolia and that rangelands are amongst the few remaining temperate grassland ecosystems that have retained their biodiversity. He drew attention to the COP 17 Rangeland Flagship Initiative and urged using the momentum to recognize pastoralists as equal partners, knowledge holders, and leaders in sustainable rangeland management.

Ministerial Dialogue on Innovative Financial Mechanisms for Healthy Land and Drought Resilience:

In this dialogue on [Monday, 24 August](#), ministers and other high-level officials discussed the annual finance gap of USD 278 billion for addressing DLDD, redirecting agricultural subsidies while developing financing incentives, creating funding pipelines, as well as new financing initiatives by countries and the Asian and African Development Banks.

A panel session on climate finance underscored the need to strengthen public investment and to unlock private capital. Discussants noted that despite an eight-to-one return on investment for land restoration projects, investments remain low, and stressed prioritizing treating land as a critical capital asset. They called for making restoration bankable, increasing revenue visibility, and providing policy certainty. They further agreed that investing in combating desertification increases production and strengthens climate resilience, and stressed that the cost of inaction is three times more than the cost for land restoration.

Ministerial dialogue on drought resilience: On [Tuesday, 25 August](#),

two panel discussions on drought took place. The first brought together representatives from ministries to share national experiences and lessons from drought response. In addition to increased water use restrictions, efficiency, and other engineering solutions, the panelists noted the need for policy integration and fostering coordination on climate adaptation across ministries and public policies. Recalling the crucial role data, monitoring, and early warning systems play in supporting drought preparedness, they underlined the transboundary nature of water resources and the importance of cross-border cooperation, political will, and leadership.

The second panel brought together representatives from international organizations to share their experiences on addressing drought, how the term is conceptualized, and the need to establish drought as an economic and security priority. Panelists discussed, *inter alia*, how narrowly defining drought obscures its interconnectedness with food and energy security, as well as labor and economic productivity. They collectively stressed the importance of: moving from crisis management to proactive planning; developing strategic infrastructure; enhancing water governance; and strengthening local institutions and financing to support collaboration between Parties. One panelist called for recognizing water as a “connector” that can bridge the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Strategic Framework of the UNCCD.

Ministerial dialogue on restoration of rangelands and well-being of pastoralist communities: On [Wednesday, 26 August](#), the dialogue brought together ministers and other high-level officials to discuss the sustainable management of rangelands. 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. Many highlighted that rangelands are productive landscapes, not marginal lands. Others noted pastoral communities are custodians of land, as well as rights and knowledge holders to be placed at the center of decision-making. 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 VGGT.

Final Decision: On Friday, 28 August, the COP adopted ICCD/COP(17)/L.11, which decides to include the Chair's summaries of the ministerial dialogues as an annex to the COP 17 report.

Gender Caucus

COP 17 President Battsetseg opened the Gender Caucus session on [Wednesday, 26 August](#), and explained its focus on strengthening the role of women pastoralists as key stewards of rangelands, biodiversity, and resilient rural livelihoods. She underscored that gender considerations must remain integrated in land restoration, drought resilience, and sustainable development.

After a number of opening statements, 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 programmes 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.

Closing Plenary

The final COP plenary first convened at 11:17 am on Friday, 28 August. Delegates adopted the report on credentials (ICCD/COP(17)/L.1) and the declarations of the

- Mayors' Forum (ICCD/COP(17)/L.4);
- Youth Forum (ICCD/COP(17)/L.8);
- Indigenous Peoples (ICCD/COP(17)/L.9); and
- Local Communities (ICCD/COP(17)/L.10).

The COP also adopted the draft decisions on the High-level segment (ICCD/COP(17)/L.11) and the High-level Parliamentary Forum (ICCD/COP(17)/L.12); and the report from the Gender Caucus (ICCD/COP(17)/L.13). The COP was then suspended pending the outcome of ongoing consultations in the contact groups.

The COP plenary reconvened at 12:25 am on Saturday morning to adopt the remaining decisions forwarded from the COW, CRIC and CST.

In closing statements, Azerbaijan, speaking on behalf of the CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN GROUP, noted the COP 17 theme "Restoring land, restoring hope" is a guiding principle of their common work. They noted their support for building women negotiators' skills and capacities, and contributing to more inclusive and effective decision-making under the Women Delegates Fund.

Egypt, on behalf of the ARAB GROUP, said that land-related challenges know no borders, and therefore require multilateral action based on partnerships and equality. They lamented that the drought decision did not achieve consensus, but noted the door remains open for resuming debates and negotiations. As the upcoming COP 18 host, they called for flexibility and political will.

The EU reminded Parties that shared responsibilities require a strong UNCCD and effective multilateral cooperation. They regretted that COP 17 was not able to deliver on a number of issues at the level of ambition and clarity required. They particularly lamented not strengthening deeply interconnected synergies between the Rio Conventions and urged advancing the unfinished business of COP 17.

Highlighting that, for developing countries, drought and land degradation are not future risks but current realities, EGYPT called for accelerating implementation, strengthening resilience, supporting affected communities, and ensuring commitments are matched by the necessary means of implementation.

PARAGUAY, on behalf of GRULAC, reiterated their support for a results-oriented post-2030 Strategic Framework, which they noted is grounded in science and supported by robust indicators and strengthened national capacities. They regretted that some items could not be included in the agenda and underscored that preserving the multilateral character of the Convention requires building on previously reached consensus by Parties.

Noting that the text for the Ulaanbaatar Declaration was circulated shortly before plenary, with little time for consultations, TÜRKİYE disassociated from it.

The ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP highlighted the transboundary nature of drought and SDS, as well as the need for enhanced cooperation at all levels. They noted that cross-cutting and procedural matters can have significant implications for progress across the Convention and called on the Secretariat to consider more effective ways of addressing this recurring matter.

The AFRICAN GROUP expressed disappointment at the lack of progress on drought and noted with concern that the necessary ambition to enable the Convention to deliver on its mandate continues to be insufficiently financed. They also stressed that concessions made in negotiations are limited to the current session and do not constitute a precedent for future COPs.

The PACIFIC SIDS highlighted that COP 17 has reinforced that different national circumstances matter, and that responses to DLDD must recognize those differences. They called for: data and reporting systems that reflect their realities; sustained technical support and capacity-building; and financing that is fit for purpose.

ARMENIA looked forward to welcoming delegates to CBD COP17. Referring to the meeting's slogan, "Taking action for nature," they urged Parties to find collective solutions to shared environmental challenges.

SPAIN, for the Northern Mediterranean, regretted the omission of gender in the discussions, stressing that women are key agents in land and water management and drought resilience. They also

underscored the role of the SPI in the global context where science-based policymaking is challenged.

SOUTH AFRICA noted with concern the procedural difficulties on addressing the interconnected challenges of DLDD and stressed that existing approaches remain fragmented. They supported a sustainable and adequate budget that will enable the Secretariat to support Parties in the implementation of the Convention.

CAMEROON lamented others' efforts to alter or reinterpret the Convention and stressed that any departure from established practices and procedures, accepted on an *ad hoc* basis, should not establish a precedent. They cautioned against reopening or modifying the Convention outside the legally established processes.

UN WOMEN emphasized the importance of securing women's land tenure rights, access to finance and technology, protecting women human rights defenders, and gender parity in decision-making. They affirmed the Gender Action Plan and Roadmap are the foundation upon which this work must continue.

CIVIL SOCIETY expressed frustration at the blocking of key issues by a small number of Parties, noting that such actions risk undermining existing commitments and stalling urgently needed negotiations. They also noted their disappointment at the low attendance of Parties at the open dialogue and gender caucus sessions, stressing that meaningful dialogue requires Parties to be present.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES reflected on the role of Indigenous Peoples in protecting and restoring their lands and territories through knowledge, customary governance, and generations of stewardship. They called on Parties to operationalize the terms of reference for the Indigenous Peoples caucus and called for their full, effective participation in decision-making processes.

YOUTH called for institutionalizing youth participation and inclusion from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. They further urged building genuine partnerships with youth and enabling inter-generational learning and capacity-building to translate global commitment into action. Lamenting that inaction is a decision their generation is bearing the consequences of, they stressed the importance of putting young people at the heart of restoration.

Acknowledging difficult times during COP 17, UNCCD Executive Secretary Fouad recounted the successes achieved, including the substantive decisions on SDS and land tenure, among other things, and elevating rangelands from recognition to increased investments and implementation, and the convening of the first Indigenous Peoples caucus. She underlined the importance of implementation on the ground, calling for Parties to fulfill their contributions in time to enable the Secretariat to deliver.

COP 17 President Battsetseg lauded the adoption of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, which reaffirms, *inter alia*, the commitment to LDN, strengthening implementation, improved policy coherence, and greater access to finance. She welcomed decisions on rangelands, the private sector, SDS, the SPI, FSF, and drought, and stressed they strengthen the Convention's institutional foundation for implementation, while placing people at the center of land restoration.

She gavelled the meeting to a close at 2:36 am on Saturday 29 August 2026.

A Brief Analysis of COP 17

Heading into the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), many delegations hoped to shore up support for sustainable agriculture and food systems, securing land tenure for people in vulnerable situations, and strengthening drought resilience, all in the name of healthy lands, water, and soil to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD). However, blocked agenda items, diverging views, and funding constraints proved to be barriers from the start.

While progress was uneven on many issues—including the highly anticipated decision on drought, which was carried over from the previous COP following intense negotiations—Parties were grateful that even where agreement could not be reached, the issues were still included in the draft agenda for COP 18 and work can continue. While frustrations ran high and tensions were palpable throughout much of the two weeks in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the resolve of Parties was equally clear as participants shared experiences about the devastating impacts of DLDD on livelihoods, communities, landscapes, and economies. Most Parties agreed on the need to strengthen sustainable land management for the wellbeing of future generations.

This brief analysis examines how a changing geopolitical landscape and an evolving Convention present both challenges and opportunities for the UNCCD as Parties work to address DLDD. It also reflects on how perseverance by Parties and the COP Presidency secured meaningful outcomes, despite the challenges along the way.

Disruptive Forces

Geopolitical tensions arising from interregional conflicts and trade disputes have left indelible marks on the UN system and have affected multilateral cooperation in many forums over the past few years. Widening geopolitical cleavages have hindered, for example, progress on climate change in the work of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), efforts to reach an agreement on a global treaty to address plastics pollution, and the operationalization of the newly established Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution.

Similarly, the move by the US during the opening plenary of COP 17 to block agenda items on gender, synergies across the Rio Conventions, and participation of civil society set the stage for two weeks of acrimonious negotiations. Many Parties came into the COP hoping to advance civil society participation by establishing terms of references for the Indigenous Peoples and local communities' caucuses, advancing the Gender Action Plan and Roadmap, and supporting action for climate, biodiversity, and DLDD in the triple-COP year. Several other agenda items, including drought, migration, aridity, and knowledge sharing, ultimately went nowhere, a situation many delegates attributed to the lack of flexibility in one Party's negotiating position. Together, the sheer number of items blocked and postponed to the next COP was unprecedented in the UNCCD.

Throughout negotiations in contact groups, delegates sought to bridge proposals in an attempt to reach agreement on decisions and save entire paragraphs from being lost. In some instances, Parties had to compromise by agreeing to postpone issues, like migration, for further consideration at COP 18. On drought, Parties relentlessly sought to reach an agreement on a way forward after a substantive decision on the matter failed to materialize at COP 16.

Frustration over the inability to reach agreement on these and other issues peaked when a regional group announced it would suspend negotiations on all decisions. While the standoff only lasted a few hours, it was emblematic of the mounting frustrations in the face of disruptive forces that some believed were seeking to hold the Convention “hostage” at the expense of human and environmental well-being.

Despite such hurdles in the negotiation rooms, Parties worked to ensure discussions on the blocked items continued in open dialogue sessions, caucus meetings, and high-level ministerials, where many Parties reaffirmed their commitment to the blocked and postponed agenda items. In these moments, the importance of these issues to many delegates and their communities was clear, and their commitment to moving the needle was evident as many emphasized that “work will continue regardless of decisions because this has to be the COP of implementation.”

It also became apparent that, despite attempts to prevent discussion on some agenda items, issues like the importance of gender responsiveness, the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in land stewardship, and the role civil society plays in implementation are crucial to the Convention and its work programmes. Delegates sought creative solutions to retain the essence of such principles in other decisions, albeit with diluted language. Perhaps more importantly, these items were retained in the provisional agenda for the next COP, and a provision was added to the COP 18 Programme of Work requesting the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism to continue implementing all previous COP decisions related to these agenda items. Many Parties also made it clear during the closing plenary that concessions made by postponing items for future discussions “in no way constitutes a precedent for future COPs.”

While some sought to undermine aspects of the Convention that aim to support those most vulnerable to DLDD, it was apparent at COP 17 that these groups are at the heart of the Convention and that many Parties are still willing to champion their meaningful participation and engagement. Moreover, it appeared that the seemingly insurmountable conflicts between certain Parties gave way to affinities among some delegations. Blocs of support developed during negotiations on text referencing cross-cutting issues like gender and synergies that were being called for deletion, often by only one Party. As the “crisis of multilateralism” gives way to newfound ideas like “coalitions of the willing” and “minilateralism,” it is clear that many refuse to let unwilling Parties undermine cooperation when seeking to address global environmental challenges.

An Evolving Science-Policy Interface

As Conventions develop, they establish more sophisticated institutional arrangements to meet the mounting needs of Parties. Permanent bodies help support this growth, often expanding in scope, responsibilities, and modalities of work. The Science-Policy interface (SPI) is one such example. It was first set up to help translate relevant scientific findings into policy-relevant recommendations to be considered by the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). At COP 16, Parties established the SPI as a permanent body, but it was up to COP 17 to determine how the SPI would function going forward.

Parties discussed at length the nature, purpose, and target audiences of the different SPI outputs. Some Parties maintained that the summaries for policy-makers (SPM) as well as all other

SPI outputs should be subject to intergovernmental approval. Such a move would transform the SPI from a small, nimble scientific subsidiary body into something more akin to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), both of which employ lengthy processes in preparing and reviewing the summaries of their flagship products. In theory, some argued, this proposed move towards more active and established intergovernmental rigor would lead to greater visibility, strengthen the political weight of the outputs, and enhance regional balance.

Others disagreed. Given the fast pace of environmental change caused by deeply interconnected and complex drivers, they argued, the SPI should maintain its agility and ability to provide scientific information to Parties quickly through fast-track assessments and advice. They emphasized that the SPI is not an intergovernmental body and that adopting such procedures would greatly slow down the production of outputs, especially fast-track scientific advice targeted to decision makers at all levels, which was never intended to go through political review processes. This shift would have significant budgetary implications and prevent the SPI from providing scientific information in real time, which many Parties emphasized is a valued function of the SPI.

Ultimately, Parties agreed that the CST will only oversee the SPMs of flagship reports, like the Global Land Outlook, and requested the Secretariat to conduct a scoping study on the time and budgetary requirements to establish this modality. Importantly, throughout COP 17, Parties kept underlining the essential role of evidence-based information, coupled with traditional and local knowledge, to inform decision-making at a time where science is being challenged and undermined. Indeed, the essential work the SPI does to provide Parties with sound scientific advice and policy-relevant recommendations affirms the growing and vital role science and traditional and local knowledge play in supporting implementation of the Convention. As the Convention and its bodies continue to mature, it is crucial for the SPI to remain responsive to evolving country needs amidst shifts in political landscapes and the natural environment.

A Silver Lining

Despite challenging negotiations, several significant outcomes emerged from COP 17, including on sand and dust storms, land tenure, capacity-building, resource mobilization, and rangelands and pastoralists. By supporting negotiations through high-level consultations, the Mongolian Presidency managed to effectively navigate their inaugural hosting of a large multilateral meeting amidst a fraught geopolitical landscape and create an environment where 34 decisions were ultimately adopted.

Furthermore, Mongolia brought rangelands and pastoralism into focus. Different host countries often bring new worldviews into processes, highlighting often overlooked issues. Such is the case with rangelands and pastoralists. Rangelands occupy 54% of the global terrestrial surface and host around 500 million pastoralists. Pastoralism has proven to be a highly adaptive form of land use, but has come under heavy pressure in recent decades due to increasing land conversion and degradation, which have undermined customary governance and land stewardship practices. As a result, pastoralists are among the poorest and most marginalized communities in many countries.

Steeped in this economic, social, and political reality, pastoralism is woven into Mongolian identity. With the COP taking place

in Ulaanbaatar during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, these issues took center stage. In the weeks leading up to the COP, the Global Pastoralist Gathering brought together pastoralists from around the world and produced the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, which affirms, among others, the role they play in sustaining healthy lands, food systems, biodiversity, and livelihoods.

The COP also decided to encourage Parties, among others, to develop and implement policies for the sustainable management, conservation, and restoration of rangelands. It also saw the launch of the Rangelands Flagship Initiative: a multi-partner, global initiative that seeks to significantly increase investments to achieve land degradation neutrality. Together, these important initiatives reveal the ways in which the cultural identity of a host country can bring forth traditional knowledge and land stewardship practices that contribute to the implementation of the Convention.

While many left the closing plenary deflated by the lack of political will demonstrated by some Parties, others expressed hope that COP 18 will produce renewed momentum and support meaningful outcomes, including on drought and gender. Egypt, the COP 18 host, is severely impacted by drought, and UNCCD Executive Secretary Yasmine Fouad was vocal at COP 17 about the importance of asserting the leadership of women and girls in all levels of decision-making. Furthermore, Parties ensured that intersessional work would continue even for the blocked and deferred items, something the current and incoming Presidency expressed commitment to furthering as a legacy of this “COP of implementation.” Indeed, in closing statements, while many expressed regret about the lack of progress in some areas, a sense of determination was also palpable that there remains a sense of commitment to come together to restore land and restore hope in multilateralism at a crucial time when there is so much at stake for the Earth and our communities.

Upcoming Meetings

65th Session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC-65): IPCC-65 will advance work related to the seventh assessment cycle. Delegates will consider the IPCC’s budget and the timeline for the contribution of the three Working Groups to the seventh assessment report. **dates:** 12–16 October 2026 **location:** Addis Ababa, Ethiopia **www:** ipcc.ch

UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 17): The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will assess implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and continue negotiations on biodiversity conservation and finance. **dates:** 19–30 October 2026 **location:** Yerevan, Armenia **www:** cbd.int/conferences/2026

UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 31): The 31st session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will bring governments together to advance collective action to address climate change, including through implementation of the Paris Agreement. **dates:** 9–20 November 2026 **location:** Antalya, Türkiye **www:** unfccc.int/cop31

2026 UN Water Conference: Co-hosted by the United Arab Emirates and Senegal, this conference will focus on accelerating implementation of water-related challenges, including water security, sanitation, and financing. **dates:** 8–10 December 2026 **location:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2026

CGRFA 21: The 21st regular session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture will address a range of issues related to its Multi-Year Programme of Work. **dates:** 26–30 April 2027 (TBC) **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** fao.org/cgrfa

UNFF22: The 22nd session of the UN Forum on Forests will convene as a technical session with a thematic focus on three of the Global Forest Goals addressing economics, financial resources/scientific and technical cooperation/partnerships, and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels. **dates:** 24–28 May 2027 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** forests.desa.un.org

UNCCD CRIC 25: The intersessional meeting of the UNCCD CRIC will review implementation of the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework. **dates:** 2027 (TBC) **location:** Belgrade, Serbia **www:** unccd.int

UNCCD COP 18: The next session of the COP, CST and CRIC will convene to adopt decisions to further the implementation of the Convention. **dates:** 2028 (TBC) **location:** Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt **www:** unccd.int

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

AI	Artificial intelligence
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
COW	Committee of the Whole
CRIC	Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention
CSOs	Civil society organizations
CST	Committee on Science and Technology
DLDD	Desertification, land degradation, and drought
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
FSF	Future Strategic Plan
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GLO	Global Land Outlook
GM	Global Mechanism
GRULAC	Latin America and Caribbean Group
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWG	Intergovernmental Working Group
IYRP	International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NFPs	National Focal Points
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDS	Sand and dust storms
SIDS	Small island developing states
SLM	Sustainable land management
SPI	Science-Policy Interface
SPM	Summary for Policy Makers
STCs	Science and Technology Correspondents
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security
WOCAT	World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies