

UNCCD CRIC 5 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 20 MARCH 2007

The fifth session of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 5) continued on Tuesday, 20 March 2007. During the morning, delegates completed Monday's discussion on drought and desertification monitoring and assessment, and reviewed subregional and regional reports. In the afternoon, a global interactive dialogue was held on investments in rural areas in the context of combating land degradation and desertification. A Friends of the Chair group met in the evening to discuss the report of CRIC 5 to the Eighth Session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP 8).

REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Acting Chair Bongani Masuku, Swaziland, invited participants to continue the discussion on thematic topic 6 on drought and desertification monitoring and assessment.

CONTINUATION OF PANEL ON DROUGHT MONITORING: Andreja Susnik, Slovenia, said that permanent structures and plans to address drought must feature more strongly on the political agenda, and described plans to develop a Drought Management Centre for South-Eastern Europe.

Discussion: Pakistan, for the G-77/CHINA, urged the GEF to consider the development of a monitoring and assessment system covering all affected countries. CUBA suggested that assessing the impacts of management on land degradation requires monitoring in a large number of countries and not only in pilot regions, calling for the expansion of the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) project.

GUINEA, supported by panelist Robert Stefanski, World Meteorological Organization, stressed that reliable statistics on changes in land degradation over time are needed in order to assist planning and attract resources, and identified the challenge of bridging the gap between countries' different capacities to monitor drought and land degradation. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA noted that the socioeconomic impacts of projects to address land degradation can only be assessed several years after project completion.

INDIA stressed that land degradation mapping must both incorporate areas affected by land degradation and identify the processes leading to that degradation. The US highlighted the importance of incorporating local-level data into national databases to verify satellite data and improve the accuracy of regional assessments.

VIET NAM lamented that affected country parties lack the resources to benefit from the Thematic Programme Network (TPN) on Desertification, Monitoring and Assessment,

suggesting that the Global Mechanism explore opportunities to mobilize resources for more effective functioning of TPNs. SCOPE, a Pakistani NGO, urged the incorporation of traditional farmers' knowledge into LADA's work, and recommended NGO involvement in TPNs.

The UNDP reported on an ongoing inter-agency process to develop indicators and tracking tools. Stating that two further expert consultations were planned for 2007, she encouraged country parties to recommend experts, including from the Committee on Science and Technology Group of Experts, to take part.

REVIEW OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL REPORTS

The Secretariat introduced the agenda item on the review of reports on implementation by subregional and regional groups (ICCD/CRIC(5)/2/Add.2, ICCD/CRIC(5)/3/Add.2 and ICCD/CRIC(5)/4/Add.2).

Mihajlo Markovich, Bosnia and Herzegovina, reported on activities in the Northern Mediterranean region including meetings held in Bonn in 2004 and Nairobi in 2005. He provided an overview of coordination efforts, including regional thematic networks, capacity-building activities, publications and technical workshops.

Ilie Boian, Moldova, reported on activities in Central and Eastern Europe, noting their approval of guidelines for regional cooperation, and future work on addressing deforestation and integrated watershed management. He highlighted: the establishment of a regional center in Belarus to disseminate information on land degradation; training programmes in Armenia on implementation of the Convention; and a regional network in Romania for restoration of forests in areas affected by drought.

Sergio Zelaya, Secretariat, reported on activities in Latin America and the Caribbean, noting progress on the identification of indicators, but pointing to the need for financial resources to achieve objectives set out in national action programmes (NAPs). He commented that participation by women and NGOs seems to diminish following NAP approvals because coordination mechanisms set up in NAPs are often composed mainly of male government officials.

Rui Zheng, Secretariat, presented the report on Asia, outlining similar findings to other regions regarding the need for additional resources. He described technology needs in the region and examples of activities undertaken to disseminate technologies, urging the international community to find more efficient and adequate means of technology transfer. He highlighted the harmonization of benchmark indicators for the region, the first regional status map and a large-scale national desertification map for India.

Boubacar Cissé, Secretariat, reported on Africa's UNCCD implementation efforts, noting that a complete report was presented to CRIC 3 and that work is ongoing on subregional programmes and thematic networks.

Discussion: ITALY noted the need to improve the knowledge base of the Convention and highlighted an Italian initiative to improve the diffusion of information within and outside of Annex 4 (northern Mediterranean) countries. LEBANON said that in spite of limited resources, they have developed a subregional programme for West Asia, urging parties to make the best use of TPNs in accordance with available resources. ALGERIA questioned the future role of TPNs and said that the benefits of Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) have been shown but that additional support is required.

CHINA suggested that RCUs should be supported within the core budget of the Convention. Zheng emphasized the strong relationship between the Asian RCU and Asian country parties and hoped that support would be forthcoming. VIET NAM stressed that RCUs are vital for facilitating information exchange and capacity building, sharing lessons learned, and assisting national focal points, and urged strengthening of RCUs in order to improve UNCCD implementation.

Cissé outlined the work of the African RCU, which is hosted by the African Development Bank, highlighting an agreement to use the Bank's trust fund to provide US\$20-30 million for each of two large-scale projects in Niger and Burkina Faso.

The SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, from India, stressed the need for multiple partnerships in facilitating civil society participation.

GLOBAL INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON RURAL INVESTMENTS

Chair Moore introduced the global interactive dialogue on investments in rural areas in the context of combating land degradation and desertification. Sem Shikongo, Namibia, spoke on sustainable ecotourism as a source of income in drylands, focusing on the competitive advantages of land that is marginal for agriculture but rich in indigenous biodiversity. Describing farming in marginal areas as a "poverty trap", he explained that biodiversity-based industries such as tourism provide more income, education and job opportunities in Namibia's dry areas, including for women. He stressed the need to maintain environmental quality, stating that policies ensuring a high "tradable value" for indigenous biodiversity create the strongest incentives for wise and sustainable use.

Christoph Kohlmeyer, Germany, outlined the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, emphasizing that investments in agriculture and rural development in developing countries will be needed to meet many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Describing the Platform's mission to harmonize aid interventions and align them with the strategies of recipients, he advocated, *inter alia*: untied, predictable aid; incentives for cooperative behaviour; simplified procedures; and mutual accountability and transparency.

Yannick Glemarec, UNDP, outlined the UNDP's work on improving access to carbon finance in drylands, noting in particular the potential for carbon cap-and-trade markets and the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to leverage funds for sustainable land management. He listed current barriers to the use of the CDM for afforestation, reforestation and biofuel projects, including, *inter alia*: the geographic imbalance of projects; low internal rates of return; and high up-front investment costs.

Rattan Lal, Ohio University, highlighted the importance of soil organic matter, and noted the linkages between increasing terrestrial carbon sequestration, mitigating desertification, alleviating poverty, increasing biodiversity and improving water and element cycling.

Larwanou Mahamane, National Agronomy Research Institute, Niger, described his country's land rehabilitation efforts over the last 30 years, including through water harvesting and farmer-managed natural resource regeneration projects. He said that land rehabilitation is time-consuming but necessary and that Niger is now reaping the benefits of its long-term investments.

Antonio Rocha Magalhaes, Brazil, noted that conditions for investment include entrepreneurship, access to capital markets and prospects of profitability, as well as public policies to create a positive investment environment and reduce the costs of doing business. He highlighted the results of a World Bank community development programme in Brazil that reaches 50% of the population living in semi-arid areas.

Discussion: SWITZERLAND questioned how money can reach local populations following the adoption of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, with FINLAND adding that as a result of the Declaration, the major part of development cooperation will now be allocated to budget support for governments, which in practice means that there will be no more stand-alone projects to combat desertification unless they are part of national policies. Kohlmeyer replied that small-scale farmers are the main investors in charge of sustainable resource management, and if proper policies were put in place, including dismantling agricultural subsidies in developed nations, such farmers would be able to engage in sustainable land use.

The EUROPEAN COMMUNITY said the European Development Fund will increase its grants for rural development, giving rise to opportunities for UNCCD implementation projects.

FINLAND asked Shikongo whether a different platform may be needed for civil society engagement in combating desertification. Shikongo replied that the best approach is a coherent, concerted and integrative approach including countries, civil society and donor agencies.

SAUDI ARABIA said that the promotion of ecotourism in his country helps to increase environmental awareness. FRANCE highlighted results from an international workshop on the costs of inaction, held in Rome in December 2006, noting that addressing land degradation can be economically, socially and environmentally sound. Responding to a question from Pakistan, Shikongo explained that ecotourism can lead to "cultural erosion" and that socio-cultural impacts must be examined prior to an intervention.

CRIC 5 REPORT TO COP 8

A Friends of the Chair group met in the evening until midnight, and considered and agreed on all sections of the report of CRIC 5 to COP 8, including resource mobilization, synergies, and technology transfer. Proposals for recommendations differed between developed and developing countries on financial resources and whether the GM should have a capacity-building mandate. Delegates also discussed and agreed to make references to "sustainable" biofuels.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The COP Bureau meeting held in the morning raised a few delegates' eyebrows and spurred gossip along the Rural corridors. It reportedly approved the date for the COP 8 meeting to be held in Madrid, Spain from 3-14 September 2007, and discussed the procedures for the appointment of a new Executive Secretary for the UNCCD, due by the end of 2007. Some countries appear to have doubts over the traditional designation procedure – whereby the UN Secretary-General appoints an Executive Secretary following discreet consultation among the main regional groups – and would prefer a more open process, while others seem to relish the suspense of the New York-style appointment system.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of CRIC 5 will be available on Saturday, 24 March 2007, online at: <http://www.iisd.ca/desert/cric5/>