

**UNCCD COP 15:
Friday, 13 May 2022**

Discussions on policy frameworks and thematic issues related to major topics introduced during previous years brought the first week to a close for the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 15). The Committee of the Whole (COW) convened in the morning to consider in rapid succession migration, gender, sand and dust storms (SDS) and land tenure. The Committee on Science and Technology (CST) contact group met throughout the afternoon and into the evening to finalize the draft decision text. The CST then reconvened in the evening and concluded its work, adopting six decisions and electing four CST Vice-Chairs. The COP then adopted the report of CST.

Committee of the Whole

Chairperson Francisco Jose Avila (Guatemala) opened the second meeting of the COW.

UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework: Follow-up on the midterm evaluation of the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/2 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Delegates welcomed the report and acknowledged the importance of a scientifically robust mid-term evaluation to implement the 2018–2030 Strategic Framework, “the backbone of the Convention,” and assessed progress towards its objectives. CHINA and INDIA expressed interest in participating in the intergovernmental working group overseeing the evaluation, and EU asked for a regionally balanced composition, mindful of size and budgetary implications. MEXICO acknowledged consideration of the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and post-COVID-19 recovery. ARGENTINA pointed to strengthening funds and, with SOUTH AFRICA and INDIA, highlighted the importance of ambitious national implementation.

Policy frameworks and thematic issues: Migration: The Secretariat introduced the report (ICCD/COP(15)/18 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

EU called for: collecting and using data on desertification-migration links; and assessing effectiveness of funding mechanisms to tap into resources of diasporas, highlighting potential for investments and entrepreneurship. ARGENTINA encouraged mapping rural-urban migration trends, drivers and impacts to enable data-driven policies to address unplanned, undesired large-scale migration. BANGLADESH drew attention to forced migration creating enormous threats to life and ecosystems, and called for a special fund for internally displaced persons.

CSOs called for direct funding for accredited organizations, noting a need for two annual conferences to support their work. MEXICO called for support to update Mexico’s studies on desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD)-induced migration and to expand these to other Latin American countries, particularly to consider populations that remain. INDIA deemed youth engagement vital, and described their watershed program, highlighting employment opportunities to encourage retention of rural populations.

OMAN sought technical and financial support through the Global Mechanism (GM) to reduce rural out-migration. ECUADOR emphasized migration cannot be deemed a climate

adaptation measure. She sought methodologies and indicators on DLDD-migration links to identify human-induced and environmental factors.

CHINA encouraged fully respecting parties’ different national circumstances and sought clarification of the term “compel” in the draft decision (ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Gender: The Secretariat introduced its report (ICCD/COP(15)/17 and ICCD/COP(15)/21). Several parties underscored that empowering women and girls must be at the heart of the UNCCD, sharing national efforts to mainstream gender equality.

EU and others noted the cross-cutting nature of gender, proposing all capacity building include gender. CSOs suggested establishing a gender-sensitive financing and resource mobilization mechanism with gender-specific budgeting within the UNCCD.

ARGENTINA and others underscored the importance of land tenure and access and right to natural resources of women. Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) referenced the technical guide addressing the integration of gender within the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT).

EU raised the need to communicate on implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) through national reporting. ARGENTINA, supported by MEXICO, called for boosting public awareness around gender issues. She further proposed a statistical approach to indicators to quantify gender equality, and with Benin, for the AFRICAN GROUP, CSOs and others, commended efforts to produce gender-related knowledge and sex-disaggregated data.

CANADA and others lauded the Secretariat on progress increasing accountability for gender equality, per results of the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

CSOs, supported by SWITZERLAND, proposed adding gender experts to the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and other subsidiary bodies with CANADA and Benin, for the AFRICAN GROUP, suggesting the Gender Caucus take an advisory role. CSOs suggested that both the Gender Caucuses and Youth Forums reflect on available documents to improve where necessary.

ARGENTINA, CSOs and others, reiterated the need for the Convention to engage with women and women-led organizations.

Sand and Dust Storms: The Secretariat introduced the documents ((ICCD/COP(15)/16 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

IRAQ elaborated on the negative impacts of armed conflict, which worsens the environmental challenges of depletion of the Sawa River, depleted forest lands, and the diminishing water table. In combination with these factors, he said SDS have catastrophic impacts on his country,

ALGERIA highlighted that SDS in her country originates from shifting sand dunes due to human-induced degradation and, with IRAQ, SYRIA and PALESTINE, called for initiatives to strengthen capacity, and provision of guiding principles, including resource management integrating SDS in national guidelines.

KOREA highlighted collaborative efforts in the Southeast Asian region to establish an annual steering committee meeting on DLDD where exchanging SDS mitigation efforts is a priority. With several parties, he suggested the Secretariat can play an important role in identifying the drivers of SDS, and developing tools, methodologies and platforms to address the challenge.

Pointing to major gaps in monitoring and assessments highlighted by the document, INDIA offered remote-sensing technical support to develop geographic information system (GIS) mapping to integrate indicators for addressing challenges pragmatically.

EU welcomed the development of the SDS Toolbox and Compendium of technical information and guidance on risk assessment, and offered support in building capacity towards using these tools.

CHINA urged international cooperation to address SDS drivers, especially through early-warning systems. Stating his country managed to reduce SDS prevalence through its ecosystem rehabilitation initiatives by 29%, he offered sharing their experiences.

MEXICO called for a typology of initiatives and developing an international programme on reducing SDS. Highlighting his country's establishment of a specialized center on SDS, SAUDI ARABIA welcomed parties to a seminar to be hosted in Jeddah in June 2022.

Highlighting SDS impacts on health, crop production and livestock, FAO described the agricultural sector as a major human-induced driver of SDS. He said efforts in his organization are focused on strengthening capacity, and improving methodologies towards land, soil and water management. Speaking on behalf of the [UN Coalition to Combat Sand and Dust Storms](#), FAO highlighted its objective to provide support in the four cross-cutting work areas of information exchange facilitation, capacity building and training, resource mobilization, and advocacy and awareness raising.

Pointing to the high percentage of countries affected by SDS in a recent survey by FAO, CSOs emphasized the widespread effects of dust particles on children through premature deaths, and on ecosystems and agricultural production. He called for: holistic solutions that should take a One Health approach; methodologies to address increasing SDS frequency and intensity; and continued research and data on the topic.

Land Tenure: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/19, ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Delegates welcomed the technical guide on integrating the VGGT into the implementation of the UNCCD and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), and related efforts on awareness raising and capacity building, acknowledging the FAO and other partners for their contributions. Ghana, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed that building capacity, creating partnerships and attracting the right funding are key to implementing the technical guide and achieving LDN in the region. EU noted progress on land tenure by some parties, and encouraged others to align their national plans with the VGGT. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, KENYA, NEPAL and ARGENTINA underscored the importance of tenure governance for sustainable land management (SLM) and LDN, in particular concerning the rights of women, youth and Indigenous Peoples. MEXICO and MADAGASCAR suggested studying challenges to landowners and exchanging experiences regionally. SWITZERLAND, stressing commitment to the matter, encouraged all to progress on implementation.

FAO offered his agency's expertise and support for further integration of the VGGT into LDN initiatives and plans. CSOs welcomed the work done as an important step forward, and gave seven recommendations for consideration in the COP 15 decision on land tenure, including meaningful participation, an intersectional approach and engagement with civil society, translation into local languages, and a focus on tenure in the different UNCCD tools and initiatives. CHINA asked to delete "other countries in a position to do so" from a paragraph on financing.

Chair Avila concluded general discussions, and referred further elaborations to the COW contact group on other matters, convening on Monday.

Committee on Science and Technology

During the closing plenary in the evening, CST Chair Bongani Masuku presented, and the CST adopted without comment, five draft decisions relating to:

- Items resulting from the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) for the biennium 2020–2021: evidence on the potential contribution of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management to positive transformative change, achieving land degradation neutrality and addressing DLDD issues (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.1);

evidence on the approaches for the assessment and monitoring of the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems to drought (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.2); and coordination activities of the SPI with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.3);

- Interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge: the SPI, the dissemination and accessibility of best practices, and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.4); and
- Procedural matters: Programme of work for the sixteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.6).

Chair Masuku presented the draft decision relating to the agenda item on interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge: work programme of the SPI for the triennium 2022–2024 (ICCD/COP(15)/CST/L.5). The Secretariat assured parties that the amendments agreed in the contact group will be incorporated into the final document. The CST adopted the draft decision.

Chair Masuku noted that consultations relating to the agenda item on interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge: information on modalities for reporting on the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework were being undertaken by the joint CRIC/CST contact group, to be submitted for adoption at the CRIC plenary.

Mexico, on behalf of LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, thanked CST and SPI, stressing that improving the knowledge about matters central to this convention will allow better decision making. She reiterated her request to increase implementation and finance, and support to regional and subregional networks.

Anna Luise (Italy), CST rapporteur, read the report of the meeting, and thanked the CST Bureau and all delegates for great cooperation during her term in office.

The CST subsequently adopted the report of its 15th Session.

Organizational matters: Election of officers other than the Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology: The CST elected its Vice-Chairs: Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed (Egypt), Abdul Hamid (Bangladesh), Hamid Čustović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Jeffrey Herrick (USA).

Closing the session, Chair Masuku called science and technology the "engine of the functioning and success for this Convention." He lamented that scientists and CST members did not receive the recognition they merit. The session was adjourned at 9:21 pm.

Conference of the Parties

Delegates approved the election of Narine Hakobyan (Armenia) as rapporteur. COP 15 President Alain-Richard Donwahi introduced document ICCD/COP(15)/22 on the credentials of delegations. The COP adopted the document without comment.

Delegates approved the election of Vice-Presidents: Ahmed Abdelati Ahmed (Egypt), Abdul Hamid (Bangladesh), Hamid Čustović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Jeffrey Herrick (USA).

The COP then adopted the report of the CST without additional comments. Donwahi declared the meeting closed at 10:30 pm.

In the Corridors

On the final day of the first week, calls for linkages with other conventions and mechanisms were repeated throughout the talks on gender, migration, SDS and land tenure. This was particularly the case for gender, and the role of women, youth and Indigenous Peoples was a red thread that even ran through the Rio Conventions Pavilion's "Land for Life" Day and, of course, the Gender Caucus. There, participants listened to voices from the ground and discussed the film "Through her eyes" in talks on empowering women while working towards land degradation neutrality.

Back in the meeting rooms, negotiation dynamics took their first toll on the CST closing plenary. Fine-tuning draft decision text of a long and complex work programme had miraculously been achieved with just a few hours' delay, due to the contact group chair's outstanding facilitation. As one seasoned delegate lauded, "Without her skills, we would never have finished!" However, a last-minute political issue held up the plenary for hours in what was hopefully simply due to it being Friday the 13th, and not an omen for the week to come.