

UNCCD COP 15 Highlights: Monday, 16 May 2022

Following Science Day at the Rio Conventions Pavilion and a field trip to Yamoussoukrou on the weekend, the second week of the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 15) started in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Participants turned their attention to consider implementation of the Convention at ground level. In the morning, in the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), delegates provided comments to improve the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and formats of reports. Participants further considered integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15) and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality (LDN), as well as the development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building to further the implementation of the Convention.

In the afternoon, the Committee of the Whole (COW) reconvened with CRIC in parallel where a panel of regional representatives presented their efforts in building capacity towards achieving LDN. Two COW contact groups on budget and other matters met, as well as the CRIC contact group.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

CRIC Chair Andrew Bishop opened CRIC's second meeting.

Improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/9, ICCD/CRIC(20)/INF.1 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10), highlighting e-learning tools to support national reporting during the pandemic, and noting reporting deadlines would depend on dates agreed for COP 16.

The Secretariat presented on the Performance Review and Implementation System 4 (PRAIS 4), highlighting new geospatial and other features. Alex Zvoleff, Conservation International (CI), presented on innovations to the online land-change monitoring platform Trends.Earth, allowing better control over national reporting, including customize datasets, and upcoming features like flagging false positives and negatives, and modifying land cover legends.

Parties acknowledged progress made and support from the Secretariat and partners on reporting tools, capacity building and access to regional experts. Many parties lamented the lack of response from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on provision of financial support for national reporting (Umbrella projects), and stressed the need to align timing of resources with reporting deadlines, highlighting the urgent need for capacity building and national-level technical expertise to ensure high quality reports.

LAOS and INDIA pointed to specific challenges measuring and reporting soil erosion, carbon stocks, and land productivity. ANGOLA lamented persistent issues with access to online tools. FIJI, speaking for Pacific island countries, highlighted the

impacts of climate change and desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and specific challenges in terms of insufficient resolution of global datasets. INDIA requested scientifically robust technical classification of land use types, and of types and severity of land degradation. ECUADOR highlighted the costs and challenges of maintaining national data collection processes. BANGLADESH pointed to the relevance of seasonality for land cover indicators. FAO elaborated on assistance provided to countries in monitoring progress towards LDN targets, and available tools for relevant indicators at national and subnational level.

Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels: Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/7 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10).

Several parties described efforts to achieve LDN targets. Sierra Leone, for AFRICA, reflected the value of partnerships and need for political and economic momentum to raise ambition, urging sufficient funding to deliver actions to achieve LDN targets. CÔTE D'IVOIRE made a call for the LDN Fund to make available the "phantom funds" and DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO echoed the need for resources to incorporate LDN targets into national plans. NIGER called for capacity building support to, *inter alia*, ensure synergy in carbon indicators, communicate with stakeholders, and account for progress achieved.

US reiterated that the UNCCD is the official reporting entity for SDG target 15.3, but not for the related implementation activities and called for the Convention to maintain focus on drylands in LDN targets.

EU called on parties to employ systemic, multi-sectoral approaches and long-term planning to achieve the LDN targets, encouraging cooperation and synergies with all stakeholders for effective implementation.

BANGLADESH emphasized the value of sustainable land management (SLM) and land restoration in solving land degradation, supporting synergies with the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) and Rio Conventions.

CHINA highlighted the Knowledge Management Center on Combating Desertification as a platform to share experiences preventing and controlling land degradation, and called for deleting reference from a paragraph related to finance, saying "others in a position to do so" is unclear.

BANGLADESH called for an assessment tool to calculate the resources required to achieve national LDN targets, and with LAOS, TANZANIA and MAURITANIA, called for resources and technical assistance to implement their LDN plans and develop reports. The GAMBIA emphasized the need to have a whole-society-approach and for governments to support local communities to have stable, secure land management systems.

Development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building to further the implementation of the Convention: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/6 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10).

Seven panelists from each regional implementation annex, Western Europe and Other States (WEOS), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) presented on their capacity-building initiatives.

Dominican Republic, representing LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, shared activities undertaken, including: establishing coordination mechanisms to facilitate convention implementation; conducting train-the-trainers programmes; and creating synergies through linkages with the Aichi and Sendai targets.

On behalf of NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, Turkey reported on organizing 1,100 experts from 108 countries from Africa, the Caucasus, Asia and Eastern Europe to host international trainings and workshops on capacity building towards enabling LDN. On the Ankara Initiative, he outlined it leverages the full range of these skills, expertise and experience to provide practical support.

On behalf of ASIA, Republic of Korea described providing aid to countries from the region through sharing plantation techniques, land management technologies and providing compost aid packages. On the Changwon Initiative established in 2011, he emphasized the virtual aspect of capacity building through an e-learning course for least developed countries (LDCs), and the Greening Drylands Partnership.

Canada, representing WEOS, focusing on gender, shared experiences in implementing a feminist international assistance policy and observed that viewing women as rights holders and agents of transformation is crucial. For the future, he suggested, *inter alia*: giving the Gender Caucus a formal structure and terms of reference; facilitating gender balance among COP delegates; and providing adequate resources for women's organizations.

Ghana, representing AFRICA, highlighted gaps in monitoring and reporting, human resources and leadership, financing, information and technology, institutional, and policy and legal capacity. He called for, among others: expanding the Capacity Building Marketplace (CBM); facilitating women's access to land tenure; and training in proposal development to facilitate development of bankable projects.

For CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), Bosnia and Herzegovina said capacity building is a key element of achieving LDN for all stakeholders and technical institutions and, as specific efforts in the region, he described: a regional workshop on creating LDN national target setting in 2017, workshops prior to CRIC 17 in 2019, and a regional workshop on LDN financing.

Zero Waste Antigua and Barbuda, speaking for CSOs, urged capacity building workshops to be inclusive in order to avoid ill-advised management practices. She warned that leaving local stakeholders out of the design and planning processes would lead to gaps in vital information sharing and knowledge exchanges among partners.

In ensuing statements, CHINA expressed: appreciation for capacity-building activities already undertaken; and continued support to promote UNCCD implementation "to a new level."

EU highlighted capacity building as a priority, and encouraged: deepening synergies and conceptual links with other UN agencies; development of a CBM involving CSOs and the private sector; and continuation of a transformative and inclusive gender-based approach.

Other CSOs shared implementation activities in Asia and the Arab region, including the Landscape Partnership Asia platform, aimed at implementing performance-based investments in restoring Asian drylands and drought-prone areas, and successes in facilitating implementation of the LDN-target framework in the Arab region.

Committee of the Whole

Chair Francisco Jose Avila opened the third meeting of the COW.

UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework: Review of progress in the implementation of the UNCCD communication plan and the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010–2020): The Secretariat introduced documents ICCD/COP(15)/3 and ICCD/COP(15)/21.

EU welcomed the communication plan, underscoring the value of engaging youth and non-English speaking communities. CHINA highlighted public awareness-raising activities carried out nationally.

Promotion and strengthening relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/4 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Countries lauded the Secretariat's efforts, stressing the importance of strong cooperation with other Conventions, organizations and institutions with complementary or overlapping mandates to address the climate, biodiversity and land challenges and achieve the SDGs.

UK, with EU, called for continued commitment to strengthen interlinkages with the UN Framework Convention to Combat Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD), and encouraged projects that use integrated approaches. CHINA highlighted its contribution to the Global Land Outlook. JAPAN called for attention to relevant organizations beyond other UN agencies, such as the International Tropical Timber Association. INDIA highlighted its reforestation targets and contributions to the Bonn challenge. KENYA reminded of the urgency to address the three Rio Conventions together. The International Renewable Energy Agency, for CSOs, reiterated its willingness to strengthen the partnership with UNCCD to work on the land-energy nexus, stressing that incentives for bioenergy production to provide necessary income streams will help achieve LDN.

Procedural matters: Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the UNCCD:

The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/12 and ICCD/COP(15)/21). EU welcomed the report and encouraged increasing youth engagement in future meetings.

Participation and involvement of the private sector in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the business engagement strategy:

The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (ICCD/COP(15)/13 and ICCD/COP(15)/21).

Parties welcomed the evaluation of the private sector engagement strategy 2021–2030. EU added support for robust environmental safeguards, requesting additional information on implementing the strategy, guidance on ways forward and details on lessons learned.

OMAN queried what mechanisms would be used to engage private participation. CSOs stressed the importance of ensuring that private sector engagement respects the values inherent to the Convention.

The COW referred these four items to the contact group on other matters.

In the Corridors

Delegates returned on Monday after a short, busy weekend. Saturday was spent in non-stop work in contact groups making up for what one delegate called "a lot of time spent waiting" during the first week. Despite the somewhat unfortunate placement of the Rio Conventions Pavilion's Science Day over the weekend, which seemed to confirm sentiments shared in the CST meetings that science does not get the level of recognition it deserves, delegates enthusiastically embraced and willingly dove into the nitty-gritty of collecting and sharing of data for DLDD and related issues. This showed that UNCCD really is a "scientific convention," as one country noted during Monday's discussion on indicators for national reporting.

Funding availability and access were recurrent themes during the morning's CRIC session, with one country asking for the "phantom funds" from the LDN Fund. Limited resources was a common experience, felt across the board. During his elaborations on how to access the finally-approved GEF funds in support of country national reporting, a UNEP officer urged delegates to "just grab our staff wherever you find them" for bilateral discussions, since they had no office space in the venue. A warning was also raised not to engage the private sector in a way that "pushes the Convention farther from what science and traditional knowledge tell us," or in the words of one: "be wary of corporate interest that puts profit first."