

## UNCCD COP 15 Highlights: Tuesday, 17 May 2022

Focusing on the potential of agroecology to contribute to climate change and drought mitigation, civil society organization (CSO) representatives participated in a second open dialogue at the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Among the solutions highlighted were securing land tenure, especially for women, and integrating agroecology in the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) work programme.

In the afternoon, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) reconvened to consider agenda items on securing additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms. Delegates heard reports from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on the financing of programmes and projects concerning desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). Contact groups on budget and other matters met throughout the day.

### Conference of the Parties

**Inclusion of activities of civil society organizations within the official programme of work of the Conference of the Parties: Open dialogue sessions: Agroecological approaches and regenerative agricultural practices as solution to positive transformative change, achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN) and addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues:** COP 15 President Alain-Richard Donwahi moderated. The Secretariat presented key findings and recommendations on food production systems in the second Global Land Outlook (GLO2), noting transformed food systems could provide one third of climate mitigation needed to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement. Highlighting 1% of “farmers” control 80% of agricultural land through corporate consolidation, insecure tenure, and women’s lack of inheritance and property rights, the Secretariat encouraged supporting family farms and agroecological practices.

Alpha Kane, Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ENDA), observed that industrializing agriculture increases system vulnerability, while agroecology mitigates land degradation and biodiversity loss. He called for: integrating agroecology in the SPI work programme; increasing entrepreneurial farming opportunities; and promoting holistic agroecological approaches to strengthen climate resilience, using local species and sharing research results to improve soil fertility.

Pablo Motta, Misión Verde Amazonia, shared regional agroecological practices from Antigua and Barbuda, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, including: rehabilitating old water reservoirs; protecting Amazonian flora and fauna; integrating

silviculture and silvopasture; and supporting regenerative ranching. He noted while these present important steps, there is still a long way to go to ensure food sovereignty, equity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Tom Derr, EcoAgriculturePartners, presented the “1000 Landscapes for 1 Billion people” (1000L) initiative, led by dozens of CSOs globally to facilitate integrated landscape approaches. He highlighted its activities to: collect and access data more transparently; raise capacity of CSOs, governments and local actors to implement integrated landscape management (ILM) and highly inclusive approaches; redirect financial flows from siloed projects towards integrated portfolios; and build a global community of funders for landscape partnerships.

Synthesizing the interventions, Yousra Abourabi, Agrisud, highlighted the diversity of agroecological practices and their role in building resilience and addressing DLDD. She said that many ideas and prejudices related to agroecology can be brought down by looking at such initiatives across regions, and stressed the need for support at the national and international levels.

During ensuing discussions, many participants expressed appreciation for the crucial work done by CSOs, especially in vulnerable communities and those engaged with ILM. EU called for a more systemic inclusion of CSOs in all bodies of the Convention, including access to closed meetings. He highlighted agroecological approaches as important components of a sustainable food system transformation, thanking CSOs for putting it on the agenda, and asked how land tenure issues are integrated in their projects.

Stressing that “we cannot continue doing the same hoping for different results,” ARGENTINA underscored the need to move to new forms of production and consumption, and that agroecology provides a tool to help with that. Pointing to challenges for implementation, he queried which policies could be generated to promote such practices.

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and the African Biodiversity Network highlighted the proven track record and superiority of agroecology in achieving resilience and food security, and requested clear policy support to enable agroecological approaches, highlighting its contribution to biological and cultural diversity.

During discussions, WeCaN, an FAO initiative, valorized the role of women in agroecology, emphasizing the need for land tenure rights and capacity building for women.

Other questions included: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC on the health impacts of adopting agroecology; eSWATINI on sustainable food systems to address increasing populations and demands for food; and Both ENDS on concrete examples of support

received and funding needs to scale up initiatives; and Colegio de Ingeniería Agronómica de Santiago del Estero (CIASE) on challenges encountered when scaling initiatives, in both number of engaged communities and hectares of land.

BURUNDI shared national efforts to support land restoration and called for partnerships. BURKINA FASO shared efforts to integrate agroecology education and work with action partners to reach voluntary targets, calling for USD 2.7 billion “to put flesh on the bones on our plans.”

Action for the Development of the Sahel (ADESA), with SENEGAL, agreed on the importance of engaging young children through education. FAO lauded holistic, systemic thinking to address interdependent challenges, pointing to the FAO paper on the 10 elements of agroecology.

Responding to questions, Derr reiterated that ILM is a promising solution to the intersecting, cross-cutting challenges, underscoring that equitable land rights are paramount to establishing landscape partnerships that are required to implement ILM.

Motta highlighted Colombia’s five university programmes in agro-engineering as a way to increase human capital. Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment (CENESTA) emphasized secure land tenure rights to prevent land degradation, and called for policy support to increase reliable investments in local and innovative initiatives.

Emphasizing regenerative crops’ value in improving sustainable land management (SLM) and crop productivity, ARGENTINA commended the Convention for allowing CSOs “a seat at the table” and said local organizations are the guardians of land.

Responding to questions from the floor, Kane urged introduction of agroecology into environmental education at elementary school level and including land tenure for women, without whom scaling successful initiatives would be impossible.

INDIA called for quantifying all previous work by CSOs on land restoration and DLDD, and disseminating the information to determine which organizations are successful, how they are funded and how they can be supported. He said CSOs have provided the fundamental link to advance SLM and land restoration at all levels.

### ***Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention***

The CRIC reconvened in the afternoon, with Chair Andrew Bishop opening the fourth meeting.

**Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: Report by the Global Environment Facility on the financing of programmes and projects concerning desertification, land degradation and drought:** The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/4 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10).

Ulrich Apel, GEF, noting the report covered the period from July 2019 to December 2021, highlighted substantial progress made in the GEF Land Degradation Focal Area (LDFA); programming trends; and expected portfolio results. He noted that USD 715.58 million, which leveraged USD 5,270.69 million in co-financing, was approved from the LDFA and looked ahead to a 26% increase in funding for LDFA in the GEF’s eighth replenishment (GEF-8).

CHINA suggested direct coordination with UNCCD national focal points and INDIA opined that GEF funding is not balanced across the Rio Conventions, echoing the suggestion from CHINA to direct funding through national focal points.

SYRIA lamented the lack of GEF financial assistance since 2012, stating that there are many projects in need of support.

EU called for continued synergies with other financial mechanisms, like the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Fund, and exploration of private sector partnerships and innovative funding.

ARGENTINA queried if drought could be addressed through arrangements similar to those of the Umbrella projects during GEF-8. Senegal, for AFRICAN GROUP, pondered if there could be a financial instrument dedicated solely to the Convention, in cooperation with GEF.

Apel indicated the Country Support Programme could address improving coordination between operational and national focal points. On the need to focus on drought mitigation and plans, he noted that GEF-8 has raised drought mitigation to a LDFA goal with a dedicated objective.

**Report by the Global Mechanism on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention:** Louise Baker, UNCCD Global Mechanism (GM), introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/CRIC(20)/5 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/10).

Parties welcomed GM activities like the project preparation partnership (PPP) and private sector engagement. REPUBLIC OF KOREA hoped the PPP will enhance LDN at national, regional and global levels. BANGLADESH sought effective global cooperation and support.

EU encouraged reviewing available funds for capacity building and supported strengthening partnerships to resolve backlogs in projects, including on land management and drought resistance. VENEZUELA suggested increasing investments in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building networks for drought preparedness, and more webinars on drought. CUBA called for “greater operability” in financing to meet LDN targets and tackle drought, remarking, “We should see the disappearance of hunger, not of mankind.”

CBD Secretariat encouraged connecting with biodiversity national focal points in setting LDN targets.

**Procedural matters: Programme of work for the twenty-first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention:** The Secretariat introduced the draft decision on page 10 of ICCD/CRIC(20)/10. Observing no requests for the floor, the Chair concluded consideration of this agenda item.

### ***In the Corridors***

Some weary delegates, having sat through contact groups non-stop Saturday and late into Monday evening, took the ferry-shuttle Tuesday morning to enjoy some views of the city on the way to Sofitel. They could not help noticing the patchwork of plastic littering Ébrié Lagoon as they boarded the boat. As delegates chatted about the relentless heat, reflecting on the even hotter conditions in Saudi Arabia, the designated host country for COP 16, a spray of lagoon water hit some legs, leading one to exclaim, “I wish the river were clean!”

Entering the venue from tropical 40°C heat to Arctic-level air conditioning, hundreds of plastic bottles on each desk stood out as yet another contradiction between the ambitions in declarations and speeches, and the practices on the ground.

Unanimous praise for the work of CSOs and community organizations during the open dialogue session hinted at some level of awareness of the importance of the grassroots level to achieve true sustainability. Meanwhile, ironically, all substantial and political negotiations continued to happen in closed contact groups, excluding the very recipients of that praise.