



UNCCD COP 12 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2015

On Tuesday, 20 October, delegates at UNCCD COP 12 gathered for the High-Level Segment, which was opened by the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Roundtables took place in the afternoon, with a Business Forum and a Roundtable of Parliamentarians also taking place. Contact groups continued in the afternoon and into the evening, to draft the COP 12 decisions.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

OPENING: In his welcome address, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, stated that a new approach to nature is needed for humanity to find lasting solutions to climate change and desertification. He emphasized Turkey's promotion of climate smart technologies, and investments in land rehabilitation, and called for increased international cooperation and a new system to be agreed at the Paris Climate Change Conference.

Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, on behalf of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, urged Parties to support LDN, as it promotes climate change resilience and supports the poor and most vulnerable.

COP 12 President Veysel Eroğlu underscored that in the last 12 years, four million hectares were rehabilitated. He said seven billion seedlings would be planted, including one for every delegate in the "UNCCD COP 12 Memorial Forest."

Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary, noted the speed and dedication it took to build the Giza pyramids, emphasizing that parties have to be ambitious and build "metaphorical pyramids" of SLM. She cautioned that climate change will exacerbate land degradation, and can lead to increased conflict and extremist activity.

STATEMENTS ON BEHALF OF REGIONAL AND INTEREST GROUPS: Speaking for the G-77/CHINA, Barbara Thomson, Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs, South Africa, underscored the need to implement the LDN target as a means to achieve other SDGs, including on food security and climate change.

Théophile Chabi Worou, Minister of Environment, Benin, for the AFRICAN STATES, emphasized the adoption of the LDN target as an opportunity for renewed commitment and partnerships under the UNCCD. He appealed to COP 12 to align the 10-year Strategy with the LDN target.

Tenzin Dhendup, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Bhutan, for the ASIA-PACIFIC STATES, commended Turkey's efforts to address LDN, and suggested that these serve "as a milestone" to support parties' efforts to achieve SDG 15.3.

Igor Kachanovsky, Vice-Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Belarus, for CEE, called LDN a challenge and an opportunity, and said the UNCCD should be tasked to monitor progress. He called for increased funding on land degradation under GEF-7 and for synergies across all Rio Conventions.

Lina Dolores Pohl Alfaro, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, El Salvador, for GRULAC, complimented the efforts of the Executive Secretary and the Secretariat. She said that, although it is included in the SDGs, any LDN target should be voluntary, without conditionality on access to financial resources and technology.

Camille Gira, Secretary of State for Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Luxembourg, for the EU, stated the EU's expectation that COP 12 will adopt a science-based definition of LDN and integrate the LDN target into the Convention.

Noel Oettlé, Environmental Monitoring Group, for CSOs, identified success factors for triple bottom line enterprises as: collective vision, environmental knowledge and transparent and equitable governance; and sound regulatory environment, honest trading partners, and consumers willing to reward producers for the social and environmental benefits that they generate.

ROUNDTABLES: From Global to Local: Translating Land Degradation Neutrality into Action: Mahama Ayariga, Minister, Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, GHANA, chaired the roundtable, moderated by Paddy Woodworth, *The Irish Times*. Ayariga highlighted the significance of the SDGs for efforts to address DLDD.

Gunnar Sveinsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, ICELAND, gave a keynote, reviewing Iceland's experience in addressing land degradation domestically, and through the Group of Friends on DLDD in New York, established by Iceland, Namibia and the UNCCD's New York office.

SOUTH AFRICA and others highlighted that LDN has become a global objective with the adoption of the SDGs. Many countries referred to national-level actions, including through the Bonn Challenge. KYRGYZSTAN noted that water discharges influence downstream countries. TIMOR-LESTE linked soil erosion in mountainous areas with increased degradation and reduced soil fertility.

Many countries called for, *inter alia*: effective tools and policy measures; scientific and technical projects; and financial resources to mobilize efforts to address land degradation. Some suggested building "collaboration frameworks" to exchange information, as well as integrated approaches, involving relevant ministries and stakeholders, while incorporating scientific and traditional knowledge to fight land degradation.



Speakers referenced challenges, including sand storms, food security, soil depletion, extended drought, extreme weather incidents, and the impacts of refugees on the forests and water resources. Countries noted that land degradation drivers include population pressures, poverty, climate change, conflicts.

In a video message, GEF CEO Naoko Ishii announced US\$3 million for country-based LDN target setting. UNEP called DLDD destructive of environments, societies, and “our shared humanity and security.”

The EU highlighted the availability of EU funds for DLDD. GERMANY stressed that LDN implemented at the country level provides a common goal to monitor progress. SWITZERLAND called attention to WOCAT.

CSOs emphasized preventing land degradation rather than land rehabilitation. Woodworth summarized key messages, noting: an urgent need to address land degradation; links between degradation, migration and conflict; and political will to support LDN.

Drought Adaptation: Mainstreaming Drought Management Policy in National Agendas and Mitigating the Effects of Drought: Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment and Tourism, NAMIBIA, chaired this roundtable, which was moderated by Saadet Oruc, a Turkish journalist. Rajendra Singh, Tarun Bharat Sangh, India, gave a keynote on managing drought in India through rainwater harvesting, and called for “common-sense science” as well as education programmes to sensitize people living in affected areas. Chair Shifeta suggested the UNCCD should take the leading role in formulating a proactive approach to drought preparedness.

Delegates then discussed, *inter alia*, the costs of drought prevention versus drought management; the need for national prevention policies and plans; the importance of regional forecasting centres supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO); and integrating traditional knowledge with modern technologies. Many parties shared their experiences on the issue.

EL SALVADOR, CUBA and the PHILIPPINES noted that El Niño is causing additional challenges. ZIMBABWE called for “drought risk reduction” policies at the international level. The EU and CSOs called for innovative drought management policies, emphasizing the need to involve local communities in their formulation and implementation.

Moderator Oruc posed questions about enhancing implementation of the Convention, the role of industrialized countries, and what could be learned from the current migrant crisis in Europe. EL SALVADOR emphasized information sharing systems between countries, while some supported building on traditional knowledge to mitigate against drought. The EU suggested focusing on clean freshwater provision, while the WMO stressed addressing climate change, disaster risk reduction, SDGs and DLDD together and taking a multi-country approach to implementing sustainable solutions. ERITREA called for addressing the economic root causes of migration.

Land-based Adaptation to Climate Change: Resilience through Sustainable Land Management: This roundtable was moderated by Guillermo Altares, *El País*, and co-chaired by Abdeladim Lhafi, High Commissioner for Water, Forests, and Desertification Control, MOROCCO, and Gabriel Quijandria Acosta, Vice Minister of Strategic Development of Natural Resources, PERU.

Many participants highlighted the effects of climate change at national and local levels, the linkages between land degradation, migration, social instability and peace and the need to enhance synergies among the Rio Conventions.

Many countries reported on efforts to address climate change and land degradation, including through: policy and legislative measures; land use planning and coastal area management; forest conservation and erosion control; agroecology; and partnerships such as the Global Dryland Alliance, the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, and early warning systems. Some

interventions stressed local finance and establishing financing mechanisms, including the LDN Fund. Some participants underscored the need to strengthen the resilience of local communities.

Braulio Dias, Executive Secretary, CBD, said loss of ecosystem and genetic resources reduces the resilience of lands and the capacity of human populations to adapt to climate change. FAO suggested the findings and recommendation of the forthcoming State of World Soil Resources could guide action on SLM.

SUDAN suggested developing a SLM Strategy modeled on the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy.

MOROCCO emphasized the need for detailed spatial information. ZAMBIA described an ongoing national land audit. The NETHERLANDS emphasized the role of consumers and the private sector, while ITALY highlighted the importance of a monitoring, reporting and verification system.

The EU stressed the importance of land tenure security. France pledged to ensure that the Paris Climate Change Conference pays specific attention to concrete actions to address DLDD and food security.

In closing, Altares noted that LDN is the “missing piece” in closing the emission gap. Lhafi advocated for solutions that address the complexity of the climate change and land degradation. Quijandria Acosta called for a paradigm shift in climate finance, as current climate funds are not sufficient.

CONTACT GROUPS

Programme and Budget Contact Group: The group met on Tuesday evening and discussed the proposed programme budget for the next biennium. They carried out a line-by-line consideration of the budget, addressing tables on executive direction and management; external relations, policy and advocacy; knowledge management, science and technology; facilitation and monitoring and implementation; administration services; and the GM. The group will continue discussions on Wednesday.

CRIC Contact Group: This group met throughout the afternoon and evening, considering decisions on financial flows and assessment of the Convention’s implementation against the operational objectives of the Strategy. Delegates finalized the decision on collaboration with the GEF. They postponed discussion of additional procedures or institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in reviewing implementation, to allow regional groups to consult. On financial flows, following extensive discussions, delegates agreed to revise preambular paragraphs noting the need for additional resources to support, among others: achievement of DLDD and SLM goals, as well as related enabling activities such as baseline development, target setting and sharing best practices; establishment and implementation of integrated investment frameworks (IIFs) and integrated financing strategies (IFS); and increased access to funding from sources beyond the GEF. The group agreed to invite developed country parties to increase their financial commitments, and to further invite voluntary support from other donors, including the private sector, to reverse land degradation. The group also finalized paragraphs calling for financial support for an assessment of priority needs for the 2018-2030 Strategy, agreeing to move them to the decision on national action programmes.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Contact group discussions continued into the evening against the tantalizing backdrop of Senegalese music and preparations for an elaborate high-level dinner in the entrance hall to the venue, leading delegates to remark on the difficulty of maintaining concentration, with one group having met continuously since lunch time. During the high-level segment, ministers were encouraged to instruct their delegates to keep the greater goals of the Convention in mind, but some wondered how the message would be translated into the language of the contact groups.