

## UNCCD COP 14 Highlights: Thursday, 5 September 2019

The Committee of the Whole (COW) reconvened in the morning to review progress in implementing several policy advocacy frameworks adopted at COP 13, addressing drought, sand and dust storms, gender and migration.

In the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), discussions focused on the role of the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub in the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices.

In the afternoon, the COP held the first of two open dialogue sessions with civil society. Drafting of COP 14 outcomes continued in the various contact groups.

### Committee of the Whole

**Effective Implementation of the Convention at National, Subregional and Regional Levels: Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Drought:** The UNCCD Secretariat introduced the reports (ICCD/COP(14)/16 and ICCD/COP(14)/INF.3).

In the ensuing discussion, many parties expressed appreciation for progress in developing a multi-tiered indicator on drought and technical and financial support to facilitate experience sharing among countries. The EU welcomed the development of the Drought Toolbox and the enhanced cooperation between the UNCCD and specialized UN agencies.

Uganda, for the AFRICAN GROUP reiterated its call for a legally-binding instrument on drought, stating it would enhance the holistic implementation of the Convention. INDIA called for engaging indigenous people in sustainable land management (SLM).

The DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA highlighted its initiative to restore degraded mountain areas. CHINA outlined how its disaster early-warning system can benefit global efforts in drought mitigation, and called for the inclusion of gender in the policy document. The US noted that early-warning systems and risk mitigation practices could have impressive cross benefits and leverage resources. AUSTRALIA explained that their government policy to address drought is focused on self-reliance, preparedness and risk management.

THE MARSHALL ISLANDS and GRENADA offered their drought management plans as models for other Small Island Developing States. The PHILIPPINES proposed sharing success stories and nominating a regional drought champion.

The AFRICAN UNION drew attention to a continent-wide drought framework to provide better support and assistance to member states. Speaking for civil society organizations (CSOs), the Center for Environmental Justice called for more support for CSOs working with affected local communities.

**Sand and dust storms:** The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/COP(14)/17. Many countries reiterated that the impacts of sand and dust storms (SDS) are transboundary in nature.

TURKMENISTAN, TAJIKISTAN and UZBEKISTAN highlighted regional impacts linked to the drying up of the Aral sea and some ongoing restoration efforts to reverse the situation.

ARGENTINA highlighted the importance of addressing SDS in both source and destination countries; and called for the UNCCD to direct its limited resources towards reinforcing synergistic approaches to drought management.

The EU encouraged affected countries to make use of the SDS Compendium and other tools developed at the request of the COP. CHINA called for enhanced international collaboration, including through developing joint standards on SDS intensity and, subject to funding, undertaking large-scale interventions.

INDIA outlined efforts to develop SDS guidance for its states. IRAN said the rich body of traditional and modern knowledge on SDS hot spots could inform regional initiatives.

JAPAN noted that the Convention does not mention SDS, stating this underscores the need to prioritize SLM as a drought mitigation measure. GUYANA called for strengthened data collection to enhance understanding of the impact of SDS on marine environments.

Representatives of research institutions encouraged parties to make use of their expertise. Speaking for CSOs, the China Green Foundation called for collaboration with community-based organizations to develop localized early warning systems and disaster management plans.

**Gender:** The UNCCD Secretariat introduced its report (ICCD/COP(14)/18). The EU, supported by SWITZERLAND, called for concrete and systematic actions to implement the Gender Action Plan and report on progress.

South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, underscored the inclusion of women, youth and vulnerable groups in policy development on land degradation, and on transformative drought, sand and dust storms projects.

CSOs called for COP 14 to recognize the role of gender justice in fighting land degradation and desertification. The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) highlighted some gender-sensitive tools, including sex-disaggregated data, and activities aimed at the economic empowerment of rural women.

**Migration:** The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/COP(14)/19. Many countries welcomed the UNCCD's efforts to advocate the links between land degradation and migration. The EU highlighted the importance of national roadmaps and the role of regional organizations in addressing the underlying causes of migration. The AFRICAN GROUP, highlighted opportunities to create jobs, especially for women and youth, through land restoration initiatives.

CHINA noted the need to differentiate between "proactive ecological migration" for land restoration and "passive migration" caused by land degradation and shared its experiences in this area. JAPAN queried the link made between renewable energy and migration in the document.

The International Forestry Students' Association, for CSOs, highlighted the interlinkages among drought, climate change, desertification and forced migration, and called for interventions to be taken at all levels.

### **Committee on Science and Technology**

**Interfacing Science and Policy, and Sharing Knowledge: The SPI, the UNCCD Knowledge Hub, and the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices:** Chair Fiati introduced the document (ICCD/COP(14)/CST/5) and the Secretariat outlined modalities for the SPI in 2018 and 2019, expanding on the Drought Toolbox.

Several countries commended the quality of information available through the Knowledge Hub. JAPAN raised concerns about potential duplication of research by other scientific bodies. CAMBODIA and ALGERIA enquired about the functionality of the Knowledge Hub and its ability to provide early-warning information.

SWITZERLAND encouraged cooperation with the other Rio Conventions and the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) to support the dissemination of SLM best practices.

ARGENTINA stressed the importance of disseminating the knowledge contained in the platform. BURKINA FASO stated that elements of the platform could be useful for developing their national drought plan.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature highlighted the importance of including ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions in the platform.

Responding to the interventions, the Secretariat explained that the Toolbox seeks to reduce overlaps in the work of different organizations. Barron Orr, UNCCD Lead Scientist, gave the example of reporting on land degradation neutrality (LDN) and climate change adaptation to illustrate how overlaps sometimes occur because some stakeholders may be wary of using similar terminology to avoid "double counting."

**Work programme of the SPI for the biennium 2020–2021:** The Secretariat presented document ICCD/COP(14)/CST/6 and provided feedback on comments received from parties in a survey regarding the work of the SPI, including on potential deliverables.

Niger, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, proposed language on provisions for scientific guidelines linked to the work of the Global Mechanism. SWITZERLAND said the objectives and deliverables should remain within the scope of the Convention. SUDAN asked for more information on collaboration with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In response, Orr said capacity building cuts across all aspects, but is more overtly referenced in CRIC decisions. He invited delegates to attend Science Day activities, stating they would focus on scientific collaboration among the Rio Conventions.

**Procedural Matters: Programme of Work for the 15th session of the Committee on Science and Technology:** Chair Fiati introduced this item without comments from parties.

### **Open Dialogue Session with Civil Society**

In the afternoon, the COP hosted the first of two open dialogue sessions with CSOs, focusing on the inclusion of land tenure in the context of LDN. Opening the meeting, Chandra Kishore Mishra, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, representing the COP President, mentioned that CSOs add value and bring a fresh perspective to the intergovernmental process.

Session facilitator Octavio Perez Pardo, College of Agronomic Engineering of Santiago del Estero, noted that parties have accepted to discuss this topic for the first time, and encouraged participants to make the most out of this meeting.

An NGO panel shared experiences in promoting land tenure security.

Valentin Ciubotaru, NGO Bios, discussed lessons learned from Moldova's land reform process, noting the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in enhancing transparency and advocacy efforts.

Nahid Naghizadeh, Chesta, highlighted challenges faced by local communities in Iraq, Iran, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka due to insecure land tenure, noting it is exacerbated by competition for natural resources stemming from inadequate regulation and misallocation of lands to extractive industries.

Pablo Mota, Mision Verde Amazonia, highlighted land tenure initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, citing examples where indigenous communities have been granted autonomy to make decisions over their land.

Kouyate Guondo Sissoko, Réseau des Femmes pour les Droits Environnementaux, discussed experiences from Africa, noting that women face an array of challenges in securing access to land, driven by traditional norms that discourage women's land ownership.

Nathalie Van Haren, Both ENDS, provided an overview of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (Voluntary Guidelines).

Responding to the presentations, the EU commended CSOs for their efforts, noting they played a major role in ensuring the inclusion of land tenure on the official agenda of COP 14.

ARGENTINA agreed on ensuring land ownership as key to SLM, and pointed to urbanization and migration as drivers of both degradation, and, at times restoration.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO stated effective implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines requires involving all relevant stakeholders in capacity building, knowledge sharing and resource mobilization.

COLOMBIA recognized the links between insecure land tenure and land degradation, but stressed that action should be taken through existing governance processes so as not to create new reporting obligations for countries.

Stressing that the Voluntary Guidelines were developed in the context of food security and are already well established, BRAZIL objected to any further elaboration of the land tenure concept and preferred to focus on how the guidelines inform ongoing UNCCD programmes.

GABON called for recognition of different land tenure regimes at country level, with GUINEA-BISSAU, BURKINA FASO and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC emphasizing the need for reform processes to take into account cultural and ethnological aspects of land tenure systems.

BOLIVIA emphasized that indigenous peoples and local farmers are the best stewards of land and other resources on which economies depend, and stressed the importance of securing their right to land.

CSO representatives stressed that the Voluntary Guidelines will transform land management at the grassroots level and expressed hope that they will be adopted at all levels of governance. FAO pledged its support to countries in this regard.

### **In the Corridors**

"You've got some of the best minds in the world. I put it to you: how do we go from assessment to response?" UNCCD Lead Scientist Barron Orr challenged Science Day attendees after presenting research confirming that land restoration and rehabilitation can have significant co-benefits for the SDGs.

Delegates rushed to the Pavilion from contact groups, where they'd engaged in the usual lengthy debates on whether to "urge," "invite" or "encourage" action based on scientific evidence. Several expressed eagerness to step away from negotiations to delve into the latest scientific knowledge.

"The writing is on the wall," commented one observer, adding the challenge for the COP is how to digest all this information to accelerate actions towards transformative change.