

## UNCCD COP 13 HIGHLIGHTS: 6 SEPTEMBER 2017

The thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 13) opened in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, China, on Wednesday, 6 September. The Committee of the Whole (COW) and the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) began a review of the draft documents in the afternoon.

### OPENING PLENARY

Cemal Nogay, on behalf of COP 12 President Veysel Eroğlu, Minister of Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey, opened COP 13. He noted that national land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets are being set in 110 countries, and highlighted the food security, biodiversity and climate change co-benefits of combating land degradation, especially for the rural poor.

Delegates then elected Zhang Jianlong, Minister of State Forestry Administration, China, as COP 13 President.

In his opening remarks, Zhang noted that over 1.5 billion people in more than 100 countries are exposed to desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD), which endangers global peace. He announced China's intention to declare its LDN voluntary target during COP 13.

Bu Xiaolin, Chair, Inner Mongolia People's Government, highlighted the achievements of Inner Mongolia in combating desertification in recent years, with a reduction of 2.9 million hectares of affected land since 2000.

Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary, expressed fears that the window of opportunity created from aligning the Convention with the 2030 Agenda is limited and expectations are "huge," therefore efforts at this COP and thereafter need to focus on implementation, and translating the LDN targets into action.

### STATEMENTS BY REGIONAL AND INTEREST

**GROUPS AND UN AGENCIES:** Ecuador, for the Group of 77 and CHINA (G77/CHINA), noted that the 2018 session of the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development will offer an opportunity to showcase countries' progress towards LDN, and stressed the need to align the LDN Fund with other financial mechanisms.

Estonia, on behalf of the EU, emphasized their support for the LDN Fund. He stated that gender mainstreaming, scientific research including effective translation, and considerations of local conditions and communities, were critical to achieving desired outcomes.

Kenya, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for COP 13 to consider specific measures to deal with the impacts of drought in the region, and to strengthen the CRIC as an interactive body for sharing of country experiences.

Bhutan for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, welcomed the inclusion of drought as a specific objective in the new Strategic Framework and underscored the importance of LDN for the implementation of the Convention, as well as the need for transparent and fair resource allocation.

Argentina, on behalf the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), emphasized the importance of the new Strategic Framework in addressing DLDD, noting this requires means of implementation, especially finance.

Armenia on behalf of the CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE GROUP (CEE) stressed the need to align LDN target setting with SDG reporting. He supported the four-year CRIC reporting cycle and called for the CST's involvement in identifying topics for the intersessional CRIC meetings.

Italy, on behalf of the NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN GROUP, welcomed the technical and financial efforts made towards LDN target setting, and stated her support for the four-year reporting cycle and improved role of the CST through the Science, Technology and Implementation unit.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP), for UN ORGANIZATIONS AND ITS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES, emphasized UNDP's role in assisting countries through, *inter alia*: capacity building and policy advocacy; supporting local approaches; and resource mobilization.

The China Green Foundation, on behalf of CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs), highlighted the impacts of DLDD worldwide, including food insecurity, and displacement and migration; and stressed that land tenure security is a prerequisite for land rehabilitation.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work without amendments (ICCD/COP(13)/1).

Delegates postponed the election of Vice-Presidents to await selection of candidates from all regions.

Delegates then established a Committee of the Whole (COW) to consider the following agenda items: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implications for the UNCCD; effective implementation of the Convention; programme and budget; procedural matters; and any other matters.

Delegates also adopted the document on accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, CSOs and representatives from the private sector (ICCD/COP(13)/17), noting, *inter alia*, that seven business and industry entities, and 492 CSOs were accredited for COP 13.

### COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (COW)

Interim Chair Skumsa Mancotywa (South Africa), standing in for COW Chair Nosipho Ngecaba (South Africa), introduced the items to be covered in the two contact groups on budgetary matters, chaired by Marcelo Borges (Brazil), and non-budgetary matters, chaired by Luis Domingos Constantino (Angola).

The EU announced that it would table text on the links among DLDD, migration and stability. GUYANA, supported by GRENADA and SAINT LUCIA, said they would propose text for a decision on capacity building, while TURKEY expressed concern about the proliferation of new decisions.

**PROGRAMME AND BUDGET: Programme and budget for the biennium 2018-2019:** The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(13)/7 and ICCD/COP(13)/8-

ICCD/CRIC(16)/2). The EU, JAPAN and SAUDI ARABIA called for sufficient time for consultations among parties. SOUTH AFRICA and SWITZERLAND favored an increase in the biennium budget.

#### **Financial performance for the Convention trust funds:**

The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/COP(13)/9, as well as the audited financial statements for the Convention trust funds (ICCD/COP(13)/10, ICCD/COP(13)/11 and ICCD/COP(13)/12).

**Report of the Evaluation Office:** The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/COP(13)/14, outlining seven completed evaluations, including on: effective participation of CSOs; the LDN Fund; and economic valuation activities of the GM.

**2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNCCD: Integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3:** The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/COP(13)/2. JORDAN, EGYPT, IRAQ, SYRIA, HAITI and OMAN outlined their target-setting efforts, while BELARUS highlighted problems faced by national statistical offices in incorporating LDN indicators. THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA called for further refinement of LDN indicators and monitoring guidelines. SWITZERLAND questioned why the LDN Fund launch was postponed. Uganda, for the AFRICAN GROUP, outlined the need to clarify access to the LDN Fund. URUGUAY and BRAZIL said the UNCCD should not restrict itself to a single SDG. UN ENVIRONMENT outlined its work on dust storms, land degradation and drought.

#### **The Future Strategic Framework of the Convention:**

Co-Chairs Stephen Muwaya (Uganda) and Ahmet Şenyaz (Turkey) of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Future Strategic Framework of the Convention, reported on the two-year process to develop the Strategic Framework (ICCD/COP(13)/3). They highlighted its alignment to the SDG process and other Rio Conventions; the adoption of LDN as an ambitious target; and, at just seven pages, its usability for policy makers. They described the main sections, including: a brief introduction; five Strategic Objectives with 17 expected impact and ten progress indicators; and an implementation framework.

UKRAINE, EGYPT, AUSTRALIA, JORDAN, IRAQ and VENEZUELA proposed inclusion of new elements such as sand dunes and migration. Others, including the EU, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, US and SWITZERLAND, reiterated their preference for adopting the draft framework as it stands.

#### **EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AT NATIONAL, SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL: Addressing particular regional and national conditions:**

The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (ICCD/COP(13)/2 and ICCD/COP(13)/3). Armenia, on behalf of CEE, proposed withdrawing this agenda item as the COP 12 decision on the topic still stands.

**Securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms:** The Secretariat introduced the Memorandum of Understanding between the UNCCD and the GEF (ICCD/COP(13)/18). UKRAINE AND JORDAN called for continued support for countries that have not embarked on LDN target setting.

**Report of the Global Mechanism:** Chair Mancotywa clarified that this item (ICCD/COP(13)/8-ICCD/CRIC(16)/2 and ICCD/COP(13)/9) would be taken up by the CRIC and outgoing GM Managing Director, Markus Replik, outlined achievements since COP 12. SAUDI ARABIA sought clarification on the extent of GM financial support to countries.

#### **COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**OPENING PLENARY:** Chair Hamid Čustović, (Bosnia and Herzegovina), opened the meeting, with UNCCD Executive Secretary Barbut delivering opening remarks. She reminded delegates of the first Conference on Desertification exactly 40 years ago and urged CST delegates to develop a bold and feasible work programme to address the most glaring gaps, through producing scientific guidance that is understandable to decision makers.

#### **REGIONAL STATEMENTS AND INTEREST GROUPS:**

The EU emphasized science as a prerequisite for combatting DLDD, and monitoring and reporting on land restoration. He welcomed ongoing efforts to make information accessible to all stakeholders through the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal (SKBP).

IPBES, welcoming future collaboration with the SPI, noted the land degradation and restoration assessment where SPI made regular contributions.

Nigeria, for the AFRICAN GROUP, recommended: considering African specific issues in the LDN conceptual framework; linking LDN indicators to poverty and indigenous knowledge; and capacity development, particularly on monitoring soil carbon stocks.

DESERT INTERNATIONAL, for CSOs, welcomed the inclusion of issues related to responsible governance, protection of user rights and gender issues in the conceptual framework, and supported the extension of the SPI.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK:** Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/1).

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS OTHER THAN THE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:** Delegates nominated Jean-Luc Chotte (France), as rapporteur.

**ITEMS RESULTING FROM THE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE FOR THE BIENNIUM 2016–2017: The Scientific Conceptual Framework for LDN:** The Secretariat introduced this item (ICCD/COP(13)/CST/2). Presenting the framework, Barron Orr (US) and Annette Cowie (Australia) highlighted it was developed by the SPI through a collaborative process involving also external experts and feedback from the LDN Target Setting Programme of the UNCCD.

Delegates and the presenters discussed, *inter alia*: harmonizing indicators across the environmental conventions and including additional indicators; including a focus on cultural values and traditional knowledge; and improving mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and verification. SWITZERLAND stated that scientific findings should not be reviewed by political bodies such as the COP Bureau.

The GM described how the framework has been used in practice to support countries participating in the LDN Target Setting Programme.

BENIN, COLOMBIA, and TURKEY presented on best practices of LDN implementation in their countries.

The CST established a contact group on matters related to the CST, and appointed Jean-Luc Chotte as group facilitator.

#### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

As COP 13 delegates arrived in Ordos, there was universal admiration for the gleaming buildings, magnificent sculptures, efficient transport, beautifully laid out parks and friendly local hosts. It was clear that China has left no stone unturned to ensure a successful COP. But this COP is also very much targeted at the domestic audience, with the Chinese delegation emphasizing to a roomful of local journalists that Ordos was selected to provide a “yes we can” moment, strengthening China’s self-confidence about its capacity to reverse desertification.

Many delegates echoed this renewed enthusiasm to engage in the Convention, saying the “stars are aligned,” now that the UNCCD finally has a concrete target and deadline. However, many noted that it will take hard work over the next 10 days to fully seize this opportunity and ensure the new Strategic Framework is fully operationalized. With “business as usual” resuming in the afternoon, delegates will need to work hard to maintain their initial enthusiasm amidst the expected battles over the programme and budget, strategic priorities, and how to balance private investments with land rights. Some expressed fears that the relatively manageable agenda will rapidly fill up with new draft decisions.