

## UNCCD COP 13 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2017

On Tuesday, 12 September, COP 13 delegates participated in plenary dialogues on gender and land rights, the role of local governments in addressing the challenges of land degradation, and the role of the private sector in helping achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN). These dialogues were the final substantive sessions of the two-day High-Level Segment. In the morning, the inaugural edition of the UNCCD's Global Land Outlook took place, while in the evening a ceremony to launch the LDN Fund took place, following the close of the High-Level Segment. A COW contact group also convened, with informal discussions taking place throughout the day.

### HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

**DIALOGUES WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR: Gender and Land Rights:** Barbara Thomson, Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs, South Africa, moderator, stated "no land, no development." She emphasized the causal links between land rights and environmental degradation, and the UNCCD Strategic Framework objective to improve livelihoods and increase local people's participation, including women, in decision making.

Hindou Ibrahim, Indigenous Women and Peoples, Chad, noted that women are largely excluded from formal land tenure rights despite their role as farmers and pastoralists, and urged for a monitoring system for gender inclusiveness within the UNCCD, and a COP 13 decision on land rights.

Ulrich Apel, Senior Environment Specialist, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), highlighted examples of the GEF's systematic inclusion of gender aspects, and noted that gender considerations have risen from 56% in the fifth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF-5) to 97% in GEF-6.

Ana Di Pangrazio, Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, Argentina, underscoring the unequal distribution of land ownership between men and women in Latin America, urged governments to protect environmental defenders, and called on COP 13 to make a decision on land rights to provide women with more secure access to land.

Shah Abdus Salam, Development Wheel, Bangladesh, emphasizing land's contribution to socio-economic conditions and agricultural livelihoods in developing countries, lamented that women's role in the work force is not recognized properly by his national government, and women are not sufficiently involved in decision making.

In the ensuing discussions, CHAD said efforts are underway to put in place, and implement the land code and other legal frameworks to protect women's land rights; SOUTH AFRICA emphasized land tenure and gender are central to achieving the UNCCD's targets and urged transformative interventions for the rural sector; and ECUADOR described women's marginalization

as a systemic problem, and highlighted the need for equal access to education and for men to understand the essential role played by women in the workplace.

CANADA announced the country's new feminist international assistance policy of placing women and girls at the center of development interventions, stressing that women are "agents of change."

BOLIVIA stated that combating desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) should be built on responsible and comprehensive approaches that embrace local traditions and envision women as leaders of their communities. BURKINA FASO lamented social and cultural prejudices preventing women from accessing land, despite the country's national gender policy. The EU proposed that the UNCCD gender plan of action be piloted and then further developed in a transparent and participatory fashion.

CHINA stated that women's land rights is a priority for the government. VENEZUELA highlighted his country's institutional framework, which provides land rights to women and local communities. Highlighting mining, over-herding, and cultivation as main drivers for land degradation, MONGOLIA identified "gender-sensitive investment" as an important potential solution. CSOs said responsible governance should ensure a framework that encourages multi-stakeholder dialogues and enhance the rights of women to access land.

Wrapping up the interactive dialogue, Thomson suggested two key messages: women must be meaningfully included in the design and implementation of programmes; and power is expressed through official decision-making structures, hence a decision on this matter has to be realized.

**Local Governments:** Session moderator Pawel Salek, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment, Poland, noted that synergies among the Rio Conventions and cooperation among local governments are the key to sustainable development, and combating DLDD and climate change. He discussed Poland's urban climate change adaptation plans and forest carbon fund.

Shi Yanjie, Vice Mayor of Ordos, China, recalling the city's history of desertification and the region's rehabilitation successes, emphasized the inclusion of the private sector and social capital in the sand-based ecological industry.

Ashok Sridharan, Mayor of Bonn, Germany, called for "city optimizers," which should consider all challenges and strategies, discuss them with all stakeholders to create common benefits and buy-in, and to "think of land" when planning future developments.

Ahmed Aziz Diallo, Mayor of Dori, Burkina Faso, outlined how local communities in his country are able to fight against DLDD, through decentralization and a rights-based approach.

Roland Ries, Mayor of Strasbourg, France, highlighted key messages, including: the importance of linking communities, cities and regions through the concept of territorial governance; and the urgent need to combat land degradation globally "otherwise one billion children will have no alternative but to flee."

Manuel António Lopes de Araújo, Mayor of Quelimane, Mozambique, outlined his city's experience of reversing mangrove land-clearing practices to meet housing needs, and emphasized education initiatives on the importance of mangroves and alternative building technologies.

During the ensuing discussion, many countries highlighted: the role of local governments and indigenous knowledge in sustainable land management (SLM) and planning; experiences with governmental decentralization to combat DLDD; and the critical role women play in implementing SLM to achieve LDN. Jan Szyszko, Minister of Environment, Poland, concluded the session by inviting COP 13 participants to attend the next climate change COP in Poland in 2018.

**The Private Sector and LDN:** Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director-General for Environment, European Commission, moderator, challenged participants to consider: governments' action to promote green investments and identify priority sectors for business involvement; increasing capacity development for bankable projects; and monitoring and evaluation of business engagement in the sustainable development agenda.

Matthew Reddy, Director, Forest Solutions Group & Climate Smart Agriculture, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, highlighted how the business sector is orienting its actions in response to the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, emphasizing landscape connectivity initiatives and private sector interest in blended finance.

Philippe Zaouati, Chief Executive Officer, MIROVA, emphasized the need to mobilize the private sector, particularly to access finance. He lauded the green bond market in China as a solution to involve stakeholders, and stated that LDN could be integrated into green financing.

Gloverson Moro, Head, Research and Development, Syngenta Asia-Pacific, stressed the importance of innovation and business in agriculture. He added cooperation among academia, farmers, and enterprise is key to reversing land degradation and gaining traction for sustainable development.

Wang Wenbiao, Chairman, Elion Resources Group, shared the experience of Elion in combating desertification in the Kubuqi desert, which also provided an opportunity to innovate and build wealth, stating that it was a 'good example' of private-public partnerships (PPP).

SOUTH AFRICA and ZAMBIA said the private sector can help achieve LDN. The EU called for attention to the needs and challenges of smallholder farmers. BENIN stressed the need to mitigate the risk of private sector investments, through, *inter alia*: enacting transparent governance frameworks; considering returns on investment; and protecting vulnerable sectors and populations.

CSOs emphasized: the need for adequate resource mobilization for the Convention's implementation; incorporating the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security to ensure inclusive LDN processes; and correcting the "oversight" of excluding civil society from the new Strategic Framework.

Responding to the issues raised, Reddy stressed the importance of ensuring that PPPs: include environmental safeguards; contribute to food security and rural livelihoods; and integrate scaled-up approaches to land management. Zaouati emphasized training would attract young people to green technologies and finance. Moro proposed partnering with CSOs for greater impact on livelihoods. Wenbiao emphasized the role of industries in the Kubuqi model and of training for local farmers.

**CLOSING:** COP 13 President Zhang Jianlong concluded the high-level segment, and invited session chairs and moderators to summarize the roundtables and dialogues. Sydney Alexander Samuels Milson, Minister, Environment and Natural Resources, Guatemala, summarized the roundtable on peace and development. He highlighted, *inter alia*: coordination within governments, including local government; better policies to increase the exchange of good practices; and following participatory approaches.

Abdullah Ahmed Al-Sabah, Director-General, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait, summarized the roundtable on sand and dust storms, highlighting the need for, *inter alia*: a strong scientific basis; CSO participation; the collaborative establishment of early warning systems; and the involvement of the private sector.

Johanita Ndahimananjara, Minister of Environment, Madagascar, summarized the roundtable on LDN by noting the need for strong political commitment and private investment, and the use of available public resources to leverage private finance.

Bhawani Shanker Kusum, UNCCD CSO Panel member, summarized the outcomes of the dialogue on gender and land rights. He highlighted broad consensus that: LDN cannot be achieved without addressing land tenure; putting women and girls at the center of interventions contributes to SLM and poverty reduction; and no development is possible without land rights.

Aziz Diallo summarized the dialogue on local governments, highlighting, *inter alia*: positive examples of engagement of local communities and national governments; implementation of the global agenda into local territories; optimizing land resources considering SLM, smart growth and city planning; and decentralization and appropriate funding to local governments.

Wang Wenbiao lauded the common vision among parties on SLM, and hoped the Kubuqi experience will be promoted internationally.

CANADA announced its re-established support for UNCCD. She stated that, like poverty, desertification affects women and girls disproportionately, which Canada aims to address through its new Feminist International Assistance Policy.

Monique Barbut, UNCCD Executive Secretary, presented the COP 13 President Zhang Jianlong with a Certificate of Excellence for his contribution to combating desertification. Receiving the award, Zhang said he will "cherish it forever" and that it also belongs to hundreds of thousands of people that have contributed to halt land degradation in the region. Jianlong thanked high-level representatives for their active participation and declared the High-Level Segment closed at 5:30 pm.

## **CONTACT GROUPS**

### **COW CONTACT GROUP ON OTHER MATTERS:**

Discussions continued throughout the day and in the evening, both formally and in "informal-informal meetings" on the integration of SDG goal 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the UNCCD, relating primarily to: scaling up finance for the achievement of LDN; partnerships to support implementation of the Convention; preparations for the High-Level Political Forum; and integration of gender responsive approaches. In light of the group's slow progress, facilitator Luis Constantino proposed working late into the night to begin considerations of some of the remaining 12 decision texts.

### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

While outside the corridors of COP 13, the city of Ordos began to show the seasonal colors of a transition into fall, the conference itself was similarly transformed into diverse discussions with the "real actors" who will implement the COP's high-level discussions and decisions. Some delegates however, voiced concern that these dialogues are just "window-dressing" if they do not translate into real change for women, municipalities, smallholder farmers and other local actors. Inevitably drawn to a fellow city's unique story, one visiting mayor reflected on the "very many things" he had learned from visiting Ordos, empathetically concluding that the strong political will to "put things right for the good of the planet" is inspiring.

Meanwhile, the COW contact group resumed the gargantuan task of ploughing through 12 decisions, with some delegates clearly feeling the effects of their hectic weekend activities and complaining "we can't even remember what we said last week." One delegate suggested, tongue in cheek, that perhaps the ENB might be drawn into formal notetaking in the contact groups to help them with this onerous task.