

**Meeting of the Bureau of the COP
Milan, Italy
16 June 2015**

Report on the third Intersessional COP 11 Bureau Meeting

1. The third intersessional COP 11 Bureau meeting was held in Milan, Italy on 16 June 2015.
2. Dr. Kalumbi Shangula, designated as Chairperson by the President of COP, opened the meeting and welcomed the Bureau participants.
3. In her preliminary remarks, the Executive Secretary welcomed the Bureau members to Milan and stressed the importance of organizing this meeting back-to-back with the celebration of the World Day to Combat Desertification at the Milano Expo. Particular emphasis was placed on updating Bureau members on the various activities undertaken by the Secretariat over the recent weeks and months, followed by a detailed introduction of the different agenda items.

I. Adoption of the agenda

4. One delegate requested introduction of an additional sub-item under agenda item XI "Other Business" addressing the outcomes of the last AMCEN conference entitled "Cairo Declaration". The issue of the funding of participants for COP12 was also raised and subsequently answered by the Executive Secretary.
5. The Bureau adopted the provisional agenda with the proposed amendment.

II. Consideration of the draft report on the last COP 11 Bureau meeting

6. The Executive Secretary introduced the draft report of the second intersessions COP Bureau meeting, which was adopted without further discussion.

III. Outcomes of the CST S-4 (including the Third Scientific Conference) and Status of activities of the CST

7. The Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) introduced the outcomes of the third UNCCD Scientific Conference, particularly on the scientific and non-scientific findings. He also introduced the assessment of the previous scientific conferences for which the CST and its Bureau were mandated.
8. The COP Bureau unanimously acknowledged the results of the conference, both in terms of attendance as well as the quality of the inputs provided by the scientific community. Some Bureau members, however, were of the opinion that the CST Bureau and the Conference's Scientific Advisory Committee departed from theme agreed upon by Parties at COP 11¹ and focused on climate change matters². Other members objected that the theme given by the COP was too wide and prone to interpretation. As a matter of fact, the scientists felt that addressing climate change and ecosystem services would have had more attention by decision-makers and

¹ "Combating drought, land degradation and desertification for poverty reduction and sustainable development: the contribution of science, technology, traditional knowledge and practices".

² The Impulse Report issued in preparation for the Conference was entitled on "Climate change and desertification: Anticipating, assessing and adapting to future change in drylands".

the public at large than poverty reduction, and that addressing poverty cannot be conceived outside of the general discussion on the impact of climate change on economic and social conditions.

9. From the ensuing discussion, some Bureau members argued that negotiations on mitigating climate change should only take place within the UNFCCC process. While all members concurred on the fact that decisions on how countries address mitigation pertains to the climate negotiations, it was also evident that climate change is one of the main drivers of desertification and land degradation, and that land-based mitigation is gaining relevance in the climate change regime post-2015.
10. The CST Chair stressed that the last Scientific Conference contributed to creating awareness about the fact that using land in a sustainable way will increase its productivity, and ultimately contribute to reducing greenhouse gasses emissions and increasing the content of organic carbon in soil: both having an evident and significant impact on mitigation of climate change.
11. The President of the COP, while acknowledging the concerns expressed by the representative of GRULAC on behalf of his group, recalled that this matter was not on the agenda of the meeting as adopted by the Bureau and should not be hereby discussed as a separate agenda item but within the context of the report of CST. He encouraged government officials and scientists of the region to hold such discussions at the meetings of the governing bodies and the scientific conferences, where appropriate debates can take place.
12. The Chair of the CST presented the work done by the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and recalled that the SPI convened two meetings in the current biennium. Among the three deliverables of its work programme, they stressed the ongoing cooperation with the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) with specific regard to the thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration (LDRA). In this regard, he informed the Bureau that the input provided by the SPI to the assessment was not taken into due consideration by the IPBES and its secretariat. He was of the opinion that the IPBES assessment is too much focused on the impact of land degradation on ecosystems and disregards the effects on land users; that it is overly tailored to biodiversity and overlooks the socioeconomic consequences of land degradation and desertification. In this regard, the CST Chair recommended that the LDRA should be reviewed by the SPI and that the UNCCD should establish its own science delivery mechanisms, to be based on a number of existing mechanisms and institutions.

IV. Outcomes of the CRIC 13 session and Status of activities of the CRIC

13. The Chair of the Committee for the Review of Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), introduced the deliberations made by the Bureau of the Committee at its second intersessional meeting (Bonn, Germany, 11-12 June 2015), including its recommendations to the COP Bureau.
14. With regard to the recommendations contained in the CRIC 13 report (ICCD/CRIC(14)/9), the CRIC Chair informed how - in accordance with decision 18/COP.11 - the secretariat and the CRIC Bureau will use the outcomes of the session to inform the drafting of decisions for consideration by Parties at COP 12. In order to streamline the decision-making process at CRIC level, recommendations of the CRIC 13 will be compiled according to the relevant matters (alignment of action programmes, cooperation with the GEF, improving the reporting exercise, setting national targets, etc.) and forwarded to the contact group on CRIC matters that may be established during COP 12. As customary, two omnibus decisions will be drafted on assessment of implementation of the Convention and Assessment of financial flows for the implementation of the Convention, thus covering all deliberations made by Parties at CRIC 13.

15. The CRIC Chair also highlighted the need for coordination of the consultations at COP 12 because of the many interlinkages between CRIC, CST and Committee of the Whole (COW) matters to be deliberated upon in Ankara. In this regard, he called for:
 - (a) an early consultation on the question of Land Degradation Neutrality, whose outcome will have an impact on the work and the schedule of CRIC 14;
 - (b) daily consultations to take place during COP 12, among the three chairpersons (CRIC, CST and COW) and the facilitators of the respective contact groups; and
 - (c) convening joint meetings of the CRIC and the CST contact groups in relation to the matters of common interest (indicator framework, best practices and information sharing).
16. The CRIC Chair conveyed the concerns of his Bureau that only one Regional Implementation Annex (Africa) will have the opportunity to meet before the COP in a form of stand-alone meeting. He called the COP Bureau to provide guidance on possible regional meetings for the remaining implementation annexes to be convened as soon as practicable and eventually immediately prior to COP 12.
17. The CRIC Chair also informed the Bureau that the deadline for submission of additional feedback on the Non-Paper 2 has been extended to 1 July 2015 in order to take into account that a number of inputs from Parties have been announced as delayed. This delay would also accommodate the request made to the secretariat to translate all inputs received by Parties into English, annex them to the CRIC 14 document to be issued for CRIC 14 consideration, and to post them on the UNCCD website.
18. Finally, recalling the provisions of decision 18/COP.11, the CRIC Chair informed the Bureau that all recommendations for actions that the Convention's institutions have been requested to take by Parties at CRIC 13, will be brought to the attention of the Executive Secretary with a view of including them into the work plan and programme for the next biennium. Similarly, these recommendations will be forwarded to the Chair of the COW for information of the contact group of the programme and budget.
19. The COP Bureau took due note of the information provided by the Chair of the CRIC. With regard to the specific request for guidance on convening regional meetings in preparation for COP 12, the COP Bureau was informed that the host country did not make any provisions for such meetings to be held back-to-back to the Conference. Nevertheless, the representative of the Government of Turkey informed of the intention to support the organization of stand-alone meetings for Annex IV and V, for which logistical support could be provided by the Government.

V. Consideration of the request submitted by Annex V country Parties on the scope and mandate of the UNCCD

20. The Executive Secretary introduced the matter and highlighted a possible language that - should Parties at COP 12 agree - could be added to any relevant decisions that target affected country Parties other than those in the drylands.
21. Some Bureau members recalled that many Parties, in each Regional Implementation Annex, that identify themselves as affected by desertification do not fall in the drylands as defined in the Convention text, nor do they have dryland in their national territory. In this regard, and similarly to the language adopted in the report of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG), an alternative formulation was submitted to the consideration of the Bureau. This formulation would be used in all decisions where "drylands" are referred to, and would read: "... in drylands [or arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas] and other areas at the discretion of the countries".

22. While the COP Bureau recognized the rationale behind the request and agreed on the need to find a solution convenient to all Parties, there was no consensus on whether or not a standard language could be found that would apply to all decisions referring to drylands and action to be taken by affected country Parties. While some Bureau members would prefer to decide on the language to apply on ad-hoc basis, other expressed concerns for possible misunderstanding and delays in the decision-making process if a standard language is not agreed upon.
23. A request for clarification with regard to the schedule of work of COP 12 and the matter under consideration was address by the secretariat: as customary, adjustments in the programme of work of the Conference can be made at any time during the session, according to the status of consultations among Parties.
24. The President of the COP reminded the Bureau members that there was an agreement to include this topic among the items to be discussed at COP 12 and that this is reflected in the draft provisional agenda submitted by the secretariat.
25. The Bureau decided that the secretariat will undertake a review of past COP decisions, with the view to identify the typology of decisions for which the text proposed by the secretariat would fit and could apply, and inform Parties accordingly for their further consideration of the matter.

VI. Additional procedures on institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention

26. The Executive Secretary introduced the item and the rationale behind the proposed changes to the reporting and review process. She also informed the Bureau that the draft document circulated at the COP Bureau meeting (draft document ICCD/CRIC(14)/10) will be reviewed again before submission to CRIC 14, taking into consideration that many inputs are still being transmitted to the secretariat.
27. From the ensuing discussions, no one challenged the importance of the review process in any environmental multilateral agreement and the relevance of the subsidiary body entrusted to it in the UNCCD. Some members recalled that reviewing the Convention implementation is a prerogative of Parties that cannot be delegated to any external institutions or organizations.
28. Some Bureau members agreed on the need to consider adjusting the reporting cycle with a view of adapting it to the path of the land degradation processes, since no substantial changes could be recorded in a short period; at the same time, others stressed the fact that adjusting the reporting period should not forcedly lead to any adjustments in the frequency of the meetings of the CRIC. Many Bureau members recalled that the intersessional meetings of the Committee are the only occasion for Parties and other stakeholders to meet and exchange experience on the ground: missing this opportunity would result in different ways to understand the Convention and different paces to implement it. There was a general agreement, however, of the fact that the format of the intersessional meetings could be revised without losing the efficacy and the utility of such meetings, but rather improving its efficiency, as it has proved at CRIC 13 where regional consultations and meetings of the Committee have been organized in one week.
29. A member of the Bureau recalled that it is usual practice of sister Conventions to convene the intersessional meeting of the subsidiary bodies without specific provisions on the core budget, as is the case for the UNCCD. Conversely, UNCCD Parties may consider having specific allocations for the intersessional sessions, to be used only if there is no country willing to host the session and contribute to its costs.

30. Beyond the cost of organizing intersessional sessions of the committee every two years, for which - as the Executive Secretary informed - a temporary solution could be found for the next biennium by using the savings of the 2014/2015 core budget, the challenge of gathering the information required for a solid review of implementation in a short time would still remain. Experience shows that it was never possible to convene an intersessional session of the CRIC the year after the COP because Parties did not have sufficient time to compile their reports. Even in the best case recorded so far - the 2014 reporting exercise - at the closing date only half of the reports were submitted. As decided by the CRIC Bureau at the time, supported by the COP Bureau in this regard, the information received was not sufficient for a substantive review of the implementation, the deadline was subsequently postponed and CRIC 13 had to be convened the same year of CST S-4 and COP 12. It seems very likely that a similar scenario would happen in 2016, where reporting against process indicators shall take place and the need for capacity building will be more evident than before.
31. Some members recalled that the document prepared by the secretariat contains very good proposals on how to streamline the reporting and review process and deserves attention; however, the recognition of the need for a change should come from Parties at COP 12.

VII. Overview of issues on the provisional agenda for COP 12

32. A member of the Secretariat introduced the agenda item which presented the main issues listed under the draft COP12 agenda and its provisional schedule of work.
33. One Bureau members raised a concern regarding the multiplication of contact groups, which penalized small delegations. While acknowledging the problem, the Executive Secretary explained that the establishment of contact groups were under the direct responsibility of the respective chairs and invited concerned delegations to address the matter directly with them so as to ensure a mutually agreeable schedule.

VIII. Status of consultation with the government of Turkey

34. The representative of the Host Country made a detailed presentation on the organization of COP12, the designated conference venue, the facilities offered as well as the diverse initiatives undertaken to ensure the high visibility and success of the conference, including the invitation extended to 20 Heads of State, numerous Ministers and the special contribution made to the Special Voluntary Fund on Participation.
35. One Bureau member enquired about the availability of information packages for participants to COP12. The secretariat informed that following the feedback received from the Host Country, a specific document addressing all information and logistical aspects related to COP12 will be issued shortly by the secretariat, under the title "Information Note for Participants".
36. One Bureau member enquired about the possibility of organizing a session dedicated to the youth during COP12 and funded through the Special Voluntary Fund on participation. The secretariat underlined that no such session was foreseen in the programme of work of COP12 but aspects related to youth could be addressed during the HLS dedicated to the dialogue with the civil society. However, the funding of such session could not be covered though the Special Voluntary Fund for participation as its terms of reference and mandate were limited to the support of eligible countries' participation to governing body meetings.
37. The President congratulated the Host Country for the commendable efforts undertaken in the organization of COP12.

IX. The SDGs and the post 2015 Agenda

38. The Executive Secretary reported on the SDGs process, including the unsuccessful attempt to change the concept of “Land Degradation Neutral World” to “Land Degradation Neutrality” (LDN) as well as the designated deadline of 2020. She added that the formal adoption of the SDGs containing a designated LDN target is scheduled for September 2015.
39. The Executive Secretary presented the IWG report as relatively positive, as it suggested that the Convention may soon rely on a concrete target. She highlighted the options for achieving LDN, but underlined that appropriate combinations will vary depending upon:
 - (1) the drivers, types, degrees and extent of land degradation;
 - (2) the potential and resilience of land resources in arid and semi-arid areas;
 - (3) and the willingness of the countries to report on the same in affected areas.
40. She further stressed the importance to back the theoretical basis of LDN with concrete means. If agreement was reached at COP12, immediate follow-up will have to be ensured with adequate funding, some of which has already been pledged.
41. One Bureau member noted that para 10 of COP Bureau/Inf. 11 was more in line with the overall mandate of the summit, while para 11 seemed to depart from the mandate of the Convention and requested that the secretariat focus on its mandate. The Executive Secretary did not agree and underlined that the note in question was meant for information purposes and did not constitute a negotiated text for discussion.
42. One Bureau member noted however that Bureau Members should have the right to discuss and negotiate proposals and sought therefore the guidance of the COP President on the way forward. The Executive Secretary recalled that the present note was for information purposes as a full-fledged report will be made to the COP on the SDG process, including the report of the IWG. The Executive Secretary further recalled that during the summit she would have no right to speak as it was a Heads of State summit. The Bureau member acknowledged the statement of the Executive Secretary but meant to suggest that DLDD issues should be relevant to the mandate of the Convention.
43. The President reiterated the informative nature of the note and further underlined that the Executive Secretary would attend the summit as an observer.
44. As a conclusion, the Bureau agreed to delete the last sentence in paragraph 11 starting with “The COP Bureau...”.

X. Convention Budget. Analysis of actual biennial budget and first outline of next biennium

45. A member of the secretariat introduced the document on the financial performance of the core budget for the biennium 2014-2015 and an outline of the core budget for the biennium 2016-2017. To the former, the secretariat highlighted that the core budget had achieved savings through vacant posts and engaging consultants at local rates through an initiative of the Executive Secretary. The secretariat also mentioned a slight savings under the budget for transferring the Global Mechanism to Bonn.
46. With regard to the budget for the biennium 2016-2017, the secretariat highlighted that the budget would be presented at zero nominal, or at the same level as the current biennium’s budget.

47. In regard to budget documents, the presentation would be more streamlined combining the work plan and work programme, providing fewer performance indicators and restructuring the secretariat to build synergies with units that normally work together. As an outcome to this approach, the GM would return to the face of the COP decision on budget, giving Parties more transparency on associated resources for the GM.
48. Finally, the secretariat would propose to maintain the level of the post table with the understanding that the Executive Secretary is downgrading posts whenever the possibility arises.
49. The Bureau attention was drawn to the potential savings from the current biennium which, as one option, could go towards funding CRIC sessions in the future. However, Parties may wish to opt for a second scenario in the event that a host country is not forthcoming, whereby the costs of holding the session would be divided by the member states in accordance with the indicative scale of contributions to the UNCCD.
50. A final note was brought to the attention of the Bureau with regard to the inclusion of evaluation reports as a standing item in the COP agenda under programme budget.
51. One Bureau member indicated that paragraph 6 of the document which deals the advancing of the new commitments in following-up to the 2015 agreements on global priorities on environment and development, assumed a decision to make a priority of monitoring the progress of LDN and support the inclusion of land rehabilitation to address climate change. The representative wanted more information on the budget presented under the old structure against the new structure, and information on staff costs for potential liabilities of staff. Namibia raised a concern expressed by the African Region on the downgrading of positions in the secretariat as this may lead to hiring unqualified personnel in the run up to the SDGs. He further added that capacity building element should not be collapsed in the budget.
52. In response, the Executive Secretary reported that the budget will be presented in old and new structure types and that positions have not been downgraded, only opportunities taken to adjust vacant posts. She explained that in the past promotions had been automatically granted with the length of service, thus generating several high ranking positions. While promotions should be possible to create a healthy working environment, they must not be considered automatic. The Executive Secretary underlined in that regard that combining units will provide opportunities for synergies.
53. COP President commended the efforts of the Executive Secretary in cost efficiencies and effective savings in the budget. He noted however that saving on staff should not compromise the quality of the secretariat. He believed that these actions were necessary steps to build an effective operation.
54. The Executive Secretary concluded by underlining that the UNCCD is presently engaged in the recruitment of vacant posts. Full recruitment, including that of the Deputy Executive Secretary, will be finalized as soon as the revised organizational structure could be operationalized.

XI. Other Business

55. The representative of Namibia presented a short note on the outcome of the AMCEN meeting held in Cairo, Egypt. He reported on that occasion on the decision taken to relocate the Regional Coordination Unit of the Secretariat to the African Union Headquarters.

56. The Executive Secretary updated the Bureau on the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) for Africa. She explained that the latter was serviced by only one staff member, based in Bonn, at the time. The Executive Secretary further reported on the new modality for funding an additional person at each RCU, through bilateral partnerships with countries of the region. In this approach, the UNCCD will offset staff costs to complement the difference between national and UN scale of salaries; such offsetting however would not include UN entitlements. This would therefore make it possible to support two people per region.
57. One Bureau member sought clarification on the final decision taken, regarding the debate on mitigation issues and recalled that such debate outside of UNFCCC constituted a red light for the G-77 plus China. The Bureau member noted that reference to agreed text in the UNFCCC does not seem appropriate or useful. On this matter, he underlined that the SCT-S4 went beyond the mandate entrusted to it by parties, going even beyond the current SDG process, and expressed concerns about the fact that this may happen again in the future. The Bureau member requested for the minutes to reflect the concerns flagged.
58. An additional Bureau member noted that the COP Bureau is not the relevant venue for such a discussion.
59. While fully agreeing on the fact that negotiations related to mitigation matters should remain within the UNFCCC process, the Executive Secretary underlined that other fora, such as the UNCCD, have to interpret UNFCCC decisions and cannot remain silent when it comes to identifying potential/possible actions to support mitigation. The Executive Secretary further underlined that scientists cannot be told what they can and cannot discuss when asked about the drivers of land degradation.
60. Two Bureau members supported the statement of the Executive Secretary, while one of them further underlined disagreement with the fact that the CST went beyond its mandate.
61. To a further request by a Bureau member on the final decision that had been taken on the matter, the President underlined that scientists should not be told what they can and cannot discuss and invited the concerned Bureau member to brief the scientists of his delegation on the issues of concern so as to ensure that they are brought to the relevant UNCCD body.
62. One Bureau member requested information on how the discussions from scientists will show up in COP Decisions.
63. The CST Chair responded that the SPI is in the process of reviewing the findings into policy options. These will be channeled to the CST Bureau for review and submission to the UNCCD secretariat.

XII. Next Meeting

64. The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting on Monday, 12 October from 9:30 to 12:00, at the COP12 venue, in Ankara, Turkey

Closing of the meeting

65. The President thanked the Bureau members for their support in facilitating the consideration of the various agenda items. He also expressed thanks to the secretariat for the documentation prepared and the organization of the Bureau meeting. He declared the meeting adjourned.

List of participants to the COP Bureau Meeting

Bonn, Germany

16 June 2015

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