

## UNCCD COP 15 Highlights: Tuesday 10 May 2022

Schools specializing in innovative agricultural techniques with internships and trainings to engage young people were among the many solutions put forward during the first interactive dialogue of the High-Level segment. A second dialogue highlighted the need to restore the balance between soil health and regenerative agricultural practices, and improving pest management by introducing innovative nature-based solutions without relying on chemicals. During the afternoon, participants gathered in three roundtables to consider the rights, rewards and responsibilities regarding the future of land stewardship, land restoration as a path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery, and how to move from disaster to drought resilience in the Big Dry.

### Continuation of the High-Level Segment

During the opening remarks of the interactive dialogue sessions, moderated by Musonda Mumba, UN Development Programme (UNDP), Andrea Diaw's video showcased the variety of landscapes.

Warning the 2022 Global Land Outlook cannot be clearer, Ibrahim Thiaw, UNCCD Executive Secretary, highlighted our collective choice: to shrink or grow the global economy by half, depending on how we manage land. Despite the "frightening diagnosis," Thiaw expressed hope that the session will stimulate honest discussions on land generation and stewardship, by focusing on youth and sustainable production and consumption.

Against a backdrop of interconnected climate, biodiversity and land challenges, Bhupender Yadav, Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, urged integrating local and Indigenous knowledge in all decision-making stages, and harnessing private sector power towards transformative action.

Prime Minister Patrick Achi, Côte d'Ivoire, said his country lives the challenges the UNCCD is confronting, and urged resource mobilization to forge a future with environmentally-friendly agriculture systems. He concluded, "time is short. Let us not look for hope, but for action."

Sadghuru, Isha Foundation, advocated for a single-point, incentive-based agenda enabling farmers to rebuild living soils. Stressing other issues become irrelevant unless "soil extinction" is stopped and reversed, he called for a global target of 3% soil organic carbon content.

**Interactive dialogue 1: Land reGeneration: The role of youth in shaping the sustainable land agenda:** Alfred Prospere, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food security and Rural Development, St. Lucia opened the first interactive dialogue by sharing insights from Youth involvement in land restoration in St. Lucia, highlighting the need to place young people at the forefront at local and national levels, create green jobs, and encourage collective and meaningful participation.

Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland and UNCCD Ambassador, highlighted the pioneering role of Youth concerning sustainable behavior and consumption in her country and shared experiences with intergenerational dialogues. She called for giving Youth more space in decision making.

Esha Mitra, Youth constituency, UNCCD, recalled solutions owned and implemented by Youth, shared at yesterday's Youth Forum. She called for financial support and capacity building, stressing that all regions and countries were equally important.

Patricia Kombo, YOUTH, highlighted the important role of access to land for young people, saying "I cannot restore land if it belongs to my parents." She called for financial support, access to knowledge, land tenure rights, and more attention to land-based and green jobs as career options, and stressed that to transform food systems, young people must be at the center of efforts.

Sidi Touré Tiémoko, Ministry for the Promotion of Youth, Youth Employment and Civic Service, Côte d'Ivoire, reflected on the experience of transitioning from a youth activist to a Minister. On land opportunities to absorb youth employment for a growing demographic, he identified solutions such as schools specializing in innovative agricultural techniques, internships and trainings to engage young people, and guaranteed funds to increase access to finance for young people.

Diabaté Ibrahim, National Youth Council, Côte d'Ivoire, made a call to parties to "do everything possible" to support the Declaration from the Youth Forum. He highlighted the call to, *inter alia*: incorporate education for sustainable development and sustainable agriculture; fund innovative projects for young people; resolve access to land specifically for youth; continue to support the development of green enterprises; and increase support for increased participation of young people at the next COP. He called on the Secretariat to organize youth events in order to ensure that the Declaration is operational with tangible outcomes.

During an interactive discussion, parties welcomed youth leadership: ITALY said that young people are the "ultimate recipient of our agreements" and should be active stakeholders in the process; and KENYA encouraged support for the youth land restoration movement.

**Interactive dialogue 2: Future-proofing land use: Shifting patterns in production and consumption:** Eisenhower Nduwa Mkaka, Minister of Natural Resources and Climate Change, Malawi, moderated. On food security's biggest global challenges, Florika Fink-Hooijer, European Commission, highlighted: the triple crises of climate, biodiversity and land degradation; overconsumption; food waste; and high meat consumption diverting land use towards growing feedstock for livestock. To address these, she discussed regulatory responses like the EU's biodiversity, soil and forest strategies, all anchored on healthy soils.

On whether food production is secure, Maria Helena Semedo, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), categorically said no. Noting 95% of food consumed starts with land, soils and water, she lamented these resources are stressed at a critical point because of drivers including a growing population, urbanization, and climate impacts. She urged better resource use and reorientation of subsidies towards sustainable production and consumption.

On how consumption can contribute to more resilient value chains, Jorge Laguna-Celis, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), highlighted the need for systemic responses, adequate enabling environments to stimulate lifestyle changes, and better consumer information.

On future-proofing food systems, Jyotsna Puri, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), emphasized the role of regional and local markets through rural finance and nutrition-linked bonds.

Florent Clair, UPL Ltd., elaborated on his company's approach to bring back food security to West Africa, highlighting technologies to capture nitrogen from air, "making friends with nature" through bio-based integrated pest management, encouraging localized production, and rewarding farmers for ecosystem services.

During the interactive discussion, participants underscored the critical need to maintain healthy and productive ecosystems as a tool to achieve the SDGs and a post-COVID recovery that is in harmony with nature; stressed the importance of nature-positive, climate-smart agriculture and pledged more finance for climate change adaptation; and elaborated on steps taken towards sustainable land management, with a focus on cattle production.

On the shift away from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, it was said that technology should not be relied on as the only solution, calling for innovative approaches to produce without exceeding natural limits. There was support shared for the evolving global legally binding instrument to eliminate plastic and plastic pollution.

Beyond land use planning, the need for improved scientific knowledge was emphasized.

The increasingly evident value of engaging stakeholders, specifically women, youth and Indigenous Peoples, was underscored.

**Round table 1: Rights, rewards and responsibilities: the future of land stewardship:** Co-Chair Foday Jaward, Ministry of Environment, Sierra Leone, framed discussions as supporting implementation of the UNCCD decision on land tenure. Alexander Müller, Managing Director, TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, delivered keynote remarks, questioning how to: implement the UNCCD decision on land tenure; use the global decision to support local land stewardship; inspire responsible governance; learn from countries leading with successful examples; and continue to integrate the three Rio conventions.

Co-Chair Anne Lugon-Moulin, Ambassador of Switzerland to Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, welcomed national experiences highlighting challenges and successes. Many noted further progress could be achieved through increased international cooperation.

Participants emphasized the growing scientific evidence that secure land tenure is an enabling condition to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation, with one calling for a national-level mechanism to translate global policies to local actions.

On the ten-year anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of national food security (VGGT), one participant inquired about relevant experiences to develop safeguards to overcome implementation challenges. Participants welcomed the upcoming launch of a technical guide addressing the integration of the VGGT within the implementation of the UNCCD and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The suggestion was raised to translate the guide into local language to facilitate local engagement.

Many participants agreed on the need to support gender equity and exchanged experiences to improve civil society engagement, highlighting opportunities to raise awareness during the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

**Round table 2: Land restoration: A path to sustainable post-pandemic recovery:** Luis Vayas Valdivieso, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ecuador, and Megh Nath Kafle, Ministry of Forest and Environment, Nepal, co-chaired the roundtable.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, Global Environment Facility (GEF), delivered the keynote address, calling the idea that drought only affects arid and semi-arid countries a myth. He urged addressing two global challenges to land restoration: un-internalized externalities, and institutions working in silos.

Elizabeth Mrema, CBD Executive Secretary, appealed for bold, actionable decisions to restore land and ecosystems, asking parties to build on momentum created in Abidjan when holding the biodiversity and climate summits later this year.

On increasing coherence to improve land restoration, delegates repeatedly acknowledged that SLM lies at the heart of responses to the triple crises of climate, biodiversity and land degradation. They discussed efforts to link LDN and climate targets, saying both offered biodiversity co-benefits.

To scale LDN, they discussed: investing in technology; and harnessing youth, women, Indigenous and local communities, and the private sector. One delegate said UNCCD must be put on equal footing with its sister Rio Conventions, noting climate and biodiversity targets cannot be achieved without healthy land.

To incentivize all stakeholders to support regenerative land management, participants discussed: investing in innovative technologies; working with scientists to monitor soil productivity; providing opportunities for green jobs for youth; and engaging women, rural and Indigenous communities.

On assistance needed to create a pipeline of bankable restoration projects, delegates emphasized the importance of facilitating access to stable financing, technology transfer, and capacity building support. They highlighted a need to focus on capacitating youth, women and vulnerable groups and to incorporate traditional knowledge systems.

**Round table 3: The Big Dry: From disaster to drought resilience:** Co-Chair Philippe Lacoste, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, opened the roundtable, stating that droughts affect all countries. In her keynote, Patricia Espinosa, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, highlighted that: human activity is the root cause of the biodiversity, climate and land crises; cooperation with the other Rio Conventions is central to UNFCCC; all finance should be considered through a lens of resilience and sustainability; and the focus of UNFCCC COP 27 will be on adaptation and resilience, especially in the African context.

Tony Simons, Executive Director, CIFOR-ICRAF, called vegetation "an insurance against disaster", and highlighted social, political and natural capital, as vital preconditions for land stewardship, alongside equity. Referring to the urgency of action, he lauded that the UNCCD had introduced a 7th official UN language, "the language of common sense."

Co-Chair Makhotsa Magdeline Soty, Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa, moderated a challenging session, with many ministers scheduled to speak and more countries wanting to take the floor during a debate that featured many examples of regional challenges and solutions related to drought. While some used the opportunity to underscore their positions on negotiation topics, most notably the call for a formal drought protocol facilitating international support, others were simply passionate about the exchange, with one minister stating "I have not come here with a begging bowl, but want to share my experience".

### ***In the Corridors***

Day two continued Monday's trend of Ivorian security forces zealously guarding rooms and corridors. Delegates hoping to attend Tuesday morning's High-Level Segment were met with a security officer's plea for patience: "It is dangerously full!" while those lucky or early enough to get in filled seats, steps and passages.

Lively discussions across the venue showed participants' passion and strong appetite to move from words to deeds, echoed in formal sessions with one panelist stating "Let us not look for hope, let us look for action!"

Like the tropical clouds darkening Abidjan's horizon, the war in the Ukraine cast shadows over the afternoon sessions through a combination of stern condemnation and silent walkouts.

During a 30-minute power outage in the tents, one delegate whispered, "hopefully the future for land is brighter than the present room!" As if responding to that remark, lights flickered and then symbolically lit the room – just as delegates were poised to talk about finding the reset button to restore land after COVID. The Executive Secretaries of UNCCD's sister Rio Conventions, the UNFCCC and CBD, spoke in two roundtables, reflecting joint efforts to address land, signaling what to expect at the Rio Conventions Pavilion, which opened in the evening.