



United Nations

ICCD/COP(15)/12



Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.: General
18 February 2022

Original: English

Conference of the Parties

Fifteenth session

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 9–20 May 2022

Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda

Procedural matters

Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 5/COP.14, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat to address a number of issues relevant to the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), including a specific request to the Executive Secretary to facilitate the renewal of membership to the Civil Society Organization Panel (the Panel).

By the same decision, the COP requested the Executive Secretary to report at its fifteenth session (COP 15) on the implementation of the decision, including the report of the Panel on the implementation of its tasks.

This document contains the reports of the Executive Secretary and the Panel on the measures undertaken by both to implement the above-mentioned decision. It also provides recommendations for consideration by the Parties at COP 15 on ways to strengthen the participation of CSOs in the UNCCD process.



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I. Background

1. Since 2009, the Conference of the Parties (COP) has guided and promoted the organization and engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (decisions 5/COP.9, 5/COP.10, 5/COP.11, 5/COP.12, 5/COP.13, 5/COP.14) set the basis for the CSO panel. The CSO Panel of the UNCCD has been ensuring the coordination of all the CSOs accredited to the COP and providing regular guidance and feedback on the work of the secretariat and the Global Mechanism.
2. In 2020–2021, the secretariat continued supporting the work of the CSO Panel. Decision 5/COP.14 requested the secretariat to continue working with key stakeholders, including youth, faith-based organizations, local governments, farmers, pastoralists, women’s organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities. Responding to that request, the secretariat has further broadened the participation of non-governmental actors in the Convention.
3. COVID-19 has shifted the work of CSOs to active engagement through virtual means. This new form of work helped broaden civil society engagement in the process, although it is intended to complement rather than substitute more direct, in-person engagement when possible.
4. This document provides information on the activities of the CSO Panel and the secretariat in follow-up to decision 5/COP.14 and earlier COP provisions concerning civil society engagement in the UNCCD.

II. Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

A. Renewal of the membership of the Civil Society Organization Selection Panel

5. By decision 5/COP.14, paragraph 4, the COP requested the secretariat to facilitate the renewal of membership to the CSO Panel by January 2020. Following this provision, and as a result of the consultations reached with the accredited CSOs, the following members were appointed:
 - (a) Mr. Tcharbuaahbokengo Nfinn from the Federation of Environmental and Ecological Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and Human Rights (Cameroon), representing Africa;
 - (b) Ms. Nahid Naghizadeh from the Centre for Sustainable Development (CENESTA – Iran), representing Asia;
 - (c) Mr. Pablo Andres Motta Delgado from Mision Verde Amazonia (Colombia), representing Latin America and the Caribbean;
 - (d) Ms. Sabina Gasimova from International Dialogue for Environmental Action (Azerbaijan), representing Eastern Europe;
 - (e) Ms. Manon Albagnac from the Centre d’actions et de réalisations internationales (CARI – France), representing Western Europe, and Chair of the panel.
6. Since February 2020, the CSO Panel has met 30 times to deliver its mandate. Taking into consideration the postponement of COP 15, and based on the standard practices in similar processes, the secretariat supported the extension of the CSO Panel mandate until COP 15. In this regard, the current CSO Panel will serve until the end of COP 15, coordinating the participation of the accredited CSOs at the session. It is expected that the

Panel will have met at least five times between January and May 2022 in preparation for COP 15.

B. Support for the Civil Society Organization Panel in discharging its mandate

7. Following the mandate provided by the Convention and the decisions of the COP, the secretariat has continued engaging with CSOs, providing them with information about the meetings and processes of the Convention. Furthermore, the secretariat has serviced the Panel during the present biennium to ensure that they are actively involved in the implementation of the Convention at all levels. This included, inter alia, the organization of meetings, the drafting of agendas and the preparation of meeting reports to facilitate follow-up on the decisions taken by the CSO Panel.

8. The secretariat ensured the availability of funding for the functioning of the CSO Panel and the participation of the CSOs in meetings of the COP and its subsidiary bodies. The representatives of the CSO Panel were able to secure additional financial resources to deliver the tasks entrusted to it by the COP.

9. By the end of 2021, 60 new organizations had correctly submitted their documents for accreditation as observers to the COP. Several of these organizations were accredited as early as the Second Extraordinary session of the COP organized in December 2021.¹ It is expected that additional organizations will have fulfilled this requirement before the beginning of COP 15.

10. The secretariat facilitated the participation of the accredited CSOs in the 19th session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 19), held virtually from 15 to 19 of March 2021. CSOs were able to present their position for each one of the agenda items, and their recommendations were included in the final report of the session.

11. Representatives of the CSO Panel have also been included as members of the Steering Committee of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund (LDN Fund), the UNCCD Science–Policy Interface (SPI) and the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought.

C. Additional support provided by the secretariat in engaging with key stakeholders

12. Decision 5/COP.14 requested the secretariat to continue working with key stakeholders and identifies several on which to focus during the 2020–2021 biennium. Using the available resources and with the support of the accredited CSOs, the secretariat has been engaging actively with the following stakeholder groups.

1. Youth

13. Youth is playing a fundamental role in raising awareness and advocating around the world on the importance of protecting the environment and ensuring a sustainable future for all. Through energy, talent and creativity, youth can play a significant and valuable role in shaping the sustainable development agenda and support other stakeholders, including Parties, in their efforts to address desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD).

14. Young delegates were extremely active at COP 14, giving high visibility to the concerns and demands of youth in the implementation of the UNCCD. In addition to the celebration of the second Youth Forum co-organized with the government of India and the UNCCD Youth Caucus, the CSOs agreed to devote the second Open Dialogue Session to

¹ See document ICCD/COP(ES-2)/3 Accreditation of intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and representatives from the private sector, and admission of observers <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2021-12/ICCD_COP%28ES-2%29_3-2118021E.pdf>.

an intergenerational dialogue. Parties and observers to the Convention were able to exchange with youth delegates on the best way to engage them in achieving LDN. The outcomes of both events were included in the report of the COP.²

15. Following the request by the Parties, the secretariat has been working actively in engaging youth in the work of the Convention.

16. In the area of advocacy, the secretariat promoted the engagement of young ambassadors through the designation of the UNCCD Land Heroes. The campaign, launched on the 2020 Desertification and Drought Day, encouraged young people to share initiatives implemented to reduce the footprint we leave on the land by food, feed and fibre production and consumption. The campaign reached millions of people worldwide and shed light on scalable projects led by young men and women who fight climate change through land conservation and restoration, and mobilize communities, schools and families to join the action on the ground. The campaign included the organization of six webinars addressing issues related to organic farming and tree planting, sustainable alternatives to plastic, science and sustainability, the power of education and youth mobilization, youth-driven projects to achieve food security and art as a tool to reconnect humans with nature.

17. Together with Deutsche Welle, the secretariat also organized four webinars on land-based jobs for youth, aimed at young people aged 15 to 35. The webinars were designed to inspire young people to create jobs and entrepreneurship in the land sector. More than 2000 participants attended the webinars which were organized for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific. The last event, a global webinar, brought together young entrepreneurs in the land sector, along with policy-makers and youth from around the world. The webinar series helped the secretariat to raise the profile of initiatives undertaken by young people who are making a living from the land, either by rehabilitating or protecting it, or by utilizing sustainable land management (SLM) techniques in crop production to avoid land degradation. It was also an opportunity to encourage youth green entrepreneurship. The outcomes of the webinars will be presented at COP 15.

18. The secretariat continued its engagement with the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), getting involved in several initiatives, particularly Decent jobs for Youth, managed by the International Labour Organization, and establishing the Clearing House on Meaningful Youth Engagement, spearheaded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, together with other United Nations organizations. Furthermore, the secretariat supported the work of IANYD and the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth in the organization of the 2021 Economic and Social Council Youth Forum. The UNCCD was appointed as lead United Nations agency for the event, in charge of addressing the Sustainable Development Goals 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption) and 13 (Climate Action), entitled 'Accelerating Action for the Planet'.

19. In 2021, together with the secretariats of the two other Rio conventions, the United Nations Development Programme/Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme and the EarthBeat initiative, the secretariat launched "Restoring Balance with Nature". This initiative aims to give young people around the world the tools, inspiration and knowledge, through an online platform, to help them be part of the widespread change needed to meet the challenges of lost biodiversity, land degradation and climate change. The platform features videos, stories and articles prepared by young people to report on environmental challenges.

20. Additional support was given by the secretariat to the establishment of the UNCCD and desertification Youth Caucus, particularly in facilitating the elections of their representatives, their engagement with the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration Youth Task Force, the organization of several webinars within the framework of the Food Systems Summit and the celebrations for Stockholm +50.

² See page 23 of document ICCD/COP(14)/23.

2. Faith-based organizations

21. Building upon the successful ministerial interactive dialogue, entitled 'A values-based approach to land stewardship', held at COP 14, the secretariat continued working to integrate the work of the faith-based organizations to address the importance of protecting and rehabilitating the land.

22. Several meetings and events were organized during the biennium, together with faith- and spirituality-based organizations, including the World Evangelical Alliance, Isha Foundation, Friends World Committee for Consultation/Quaker, Brahma Kumaris, Christian Aid, etc. The secretariat also participated in the regular consultations organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) interfaith group, as well as the United Nations Environment Programme's Faith for Earth initiative.

3. Local governments

23. At COP 14, local governments met at the UNCCD mayor's summit jointly organized by the host country, the secretariat and Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). Additionally, the ministerial dialogue on 'Rural and urban communities – failing or flourishing together' provided relevant information to highlight the importance of interactions between cities and rural areas to ensure sustainable production while protecting vulnerable land, including in peri-urban areas.

24. The secretariat continued working with ICLEI, Climate Chance and United Cities and Local Governments in advocating for a sustainable equilibrium between urban and rural areas and communities. In this regard, the secretariat participated in Daring Cities 2020's 'Know more, act better and lead together' event, held virtually in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Farmers and pastoralists

25. The secretariat has continued supporting and promoting the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism, managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and other partners, to promote advocacy and capacity building within the framework of sustainable pastoralism to reduce poverty and improve the environmental management of the land.

26. Within the framework of urban/rural dynamics, the work of the secretariat also engaged farmers operating in peri-urban areas to ensure that the areas have integrated sustainability into land use planning. This work was done together with the CSO Panel working actively in Asia and the Sahel regions. Special engagement was carried out by the members of Drynet³ through the implementation of the GEF AVACLIM (Agro-ecology, Ensuring Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods while Mitigating Climate Change and Restoring Land in Dryland Regions) project.⁴ The project is currently being implemented in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Senegal, Morocco and South Africa and focuses mainly on the promotion of agro-ecology at the political and decision-making level.

27. Through youth engagement, the secretariat also involved young farmers and 'agripreneurs' who shared their experiences through the above-mentioned webinars and at other international events, such as the high-level dialogue organized by the President of the General Assembly on DLDD.

5. Women's organizations

28. Within the framework of the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) of the UNCCD, the secretariat has been engaging with women's organizations to ensure their

³ <<https://dry-net.org/>>.

⁴ All the information regarding AVACLIM is available on <<https://avaclim.org/>>.

input and contributions⁵ in the areas of awareness-raising, decision-making processes and capacity building.

29. Document ICCD/COP(15)/17, 'Follow-up on policy frameworks and thematic issues: Gender', contains additional information on the engagement with women's organizations.

6. Indigenous peoples and local communities

30. The secretariat promoted the involvement of indigenous peoples while local community organizations are involved in the meetings and processes of the UNCCD. From their contribution to the work carried out under the decision on land tenure to the active engagement at the session of the CRIC or the work of the LDN Fund, indigenous peoples have been represented either in person or through the work of the CSO Panel.

31. The secretariat has also been involved in work carried out by the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform established within the UNFCCC, providing information on the technologies related to SLM and other traditional knowledge that could contribute to building a climate-resilient world. This was done at the 52nd session of the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies held in October 2020.

32. As part of the implementation of decision 26/COP.14 on land tenure, the secretariat is preparing options for the consideration of the Parties on a strategy to promote awareness-raising around responsible land governance to combat DLDD among all stakeholders, particularly among vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples and local communities. Collaboration has been sought with the International Land Coalition, Landesa and the Land Portal Foundation to support these vulnerable groups.

III. Report by the Civil Society Organization Panel

Activities undertaken by the Panel

1. Background

33. The CSO Panel of the UNCCD was established in 2009 by the COP through decision 5/COP.9.

34. The CSO Panel has five members which represent the five United Nations regional groups. The current panel was elected in January 2020 by the CSOs accredited to the UNCCD. The composition of the Panel has since been as indicated in paragraph six above.

35. At the first CSO Panel meeting held virtually on 12 March 2020, Ms Manon Albagnac from the French organization CARI was elected as its chair.

2. Work of the Civil Society Organization Panel and participation in the process of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

36. To pursue the UNCCD processes, the CSO Panel members agreed to organize monthly online meetings with the support of the secretariat. Whenever necessary, they also organized extraordinary meetings to collaborate on specific topics (e.g. CRIC 19 preparation, dialogue between CSOs and the LDN Fund and peer review of the technical guide on the integration of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN). Preparation, leadership and reporting of the meetings was entrusted to the panel members on a rotational basis. Since March 2020, the CSO Panel has held 30 virtual meetings with no physical meeting possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSO Panel expects to meet in person for the first time during COP 15. Holding these virtual monthly meetings was crucial to keep the CSO Panel

⁵ All the information on the dialogue is available on the website: <<https://www.unccd.int/high-level-dialogue-desertification-land-degradation-and-drought>>.

actively involved in the actions and events happening under the Convention through ongoing communication with the secretariat and regular communication with the accredited CSOs of the five United Nations regional groups to keep them informed about topics related to the UNCCD processes. Accordingly, the reports of the CSO Panel meetings, including important topics for discussion, decisions and actions were regularly updated on the CSO Panel website.⁶

37. At the beginning of its mandate, the CSO Panel agreed on its modus operandi and prepared its work plan for the 2020–2021 biennium to enable it to fulfil its mandate. The work plan included five work packages with detailed activities. The five work packages were as follows:

- (a) The CSO Panel and UNCCD processes;
- (b) Communication and information-sharing with accredited CSOs;
- (c) The promotion of CSO preparation and involvement in CRIC 19, the Committee on Science and Technology and COP 15;
- (d) CSO involvement in implementing COP 14 decisions;
- (e) Synergies between the UNCCD and other United Nations conventions.

38. Based on these work packages, and considering the extraordinary conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the secretariat was able to mobilize a budget to support the CSO Panel's activities. The following is the collective summary of activities and the results achieved by the CSO Panel members at various levels.

3. Activities undertaken by the Civil Society Organizations Panel for communication and information-sharing with accredited civil society organizations

39. The CSO Panel maintained the CSO website by providing various important news items and relevant information on events and causes, including commission statements, publications, presentations and reports related to the Panel's work, increasing the availability of high-quality and timely information for CSOs.

40. Calls for newsletter submissions were regularly sent out to collect news and updates from all the accredited CSOs and networks, highlighting their work and promoting data exchange at regional and national levels. Nine newsletters have been produced and disseminated via mailing lists and websites to all accredited CSOs. They are also available on the CSO website.

41. Awareness-raising materials (social media posts) were translated from English to Persian and Azerbaijani⁷ and published on World Desertification & Drought Day.

42. The CSO Panel members have contributed to celebrating Desertification and Drought Day on 17 June of each year. They encourage the accredited CSOs to contribute to and report on the celebration at national, regional and international level. The CSO Panel members themselves organized celebrations:

(a) An online international meeting was organized by CARI on 17 June 2020 to disseminate information on desertification and the UNCCD, attended by scientists, political actors and CSOs;

(b) To build alliances and more synergies among various stakeholders (CSOs, academics, experts and national focal points, representatives from the Capacity Development Office of the UNCCD and National SLM Network), the CSO Panel member for Asia from CENESTA participated in various occasions and webinars, such as on 17 June 2020, and in other events aimed at raising awareness about the role of CSOs in UNCCD processes, the implementation of the UNCCD for the purposes of SLM and LDN, capacities and challenges on the implementation of the UNCCD in Iran and the

⁶ <<https://csopanel.org/resources#meetings>>.

⁷ <<https://www.facebook.com/ideacampaign.org/posts/3101986839847702>>.

conservation of land resources through the building of alliances among stakeholders to achieve LDN (Avoid, Reduce and Reverse).

4. Civil society organization participation during the nineteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

43. The CSO Panel members engaged in coordinating the CSOs' preparation for CRIC 19 of the UNCCD which was held online from 15 to 19 March 2021.

44. The CSO Panel members attended the meetings of regional implementation annexes in preparation for CRIC 19 as an observer.

45. To allow CSOs to prepare for the CRIC 19, the CSO Panel members produced and disseminated synthesis documents based on the official preparatory documents. They moreover organized an international online meeting for accredited CSOs on 10 March 2021. The online meeting was opened by the Executive Secretary and allowed the CSO Panel members to clarify the subjects to be discussed during CRIC 19, and to collect CSO recommendations to be presented to the Parties.

46. CSOs delivered a statement on each of the CRIC 19 agenda items. The CSO Panel members organized the collective preparation of these statements.

47. The CSO Panel members finally contributed to the CRIC 19 report by providing written comments from the CSOs for each of the discussed items.

5. Preparations for civil society organization participation during the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

48. The CSO Panel members developed a comprehensive plan of action for CSO involvement during COP 15 of the UNCCD, including preparatory meetings of the CSOs, a review of the official documents and the drafting of various statements and interventions during the event.

a. International Désertif'actions Summit in October 2022

49. The CSO Panel engaged with CARI to contribute to the Désertif'actions 2022 activities, including preparing for CSO participation in COP 15 at national and international level; and preparing for an international Désertif'actions Summit in October 2022 that will allow COP 15 decisions to be presented and reviewed and a roadmap to be established for their implementation by the countries and all stakeholders involved.

b. Appointing alternate Civil Society Organization observers to the Science– Policy Interface of the Convention

50. Upon request from the secretariat, and in accordance with its mandate, the CSO Panel facilitated the election process of an alternate CSO observer to the SPI of the Convention. There were eight applications received, including two invalid applications due to a failure to provide the required documents and information. When analysing the valid applicants' experience, expertise and the terms of reference of the SPI, the CSO Panel found that three of the applicants fulfilled the necessary requirements. During the discussion, the secretariat re-stated, in line with the adopted GAP, that given that the current representative of the CSO observers to the SPI is male, the alternate should be female to ensure parity and balance. Taking all this into consideration, Ms Jiajia Luo from the China Green Foundation, a non-governmental organization based in China, was the most suitable candidate, ensuring the necessary expertise and meeting the additional requirements for an equitable representation of the CSOs at the SPI. She was then chosen for the 2020–2021 biennium as an alternate to Mr Noel Oettle (Environmental Monitoring Group – South Africa). CSO Panel members communicated regularly with the CSO observer to the SPI which was necessary for greater synergy and dissemination of related information to the accredited CSOs through the CSO Panel website and newsletters.

c. *Participation of Civil Society Organization Panel members in the strategic board meetings of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund*

51. Two members of the CSO Panel (the representative for Asia and the representative for Central and Eastern Europe) were appointed to participate in the strategic board meetings of the LDN Fund to promote the role of the CSOs in the whole process of the LDN Fund and follow the discussion with MIROVA (LDN Fund manager) and the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH – Technical Assistance Facility manager). They participated in three strategic board meetings of the LDN Fund. Following this involvement, the CSO Panel members started a constructive consultation process with the accredited CSOs to receive their insights, concerns, and expectations on LDN Fund operationalization from various regions, and shared their findings with MIROVA. As a result, they produced a question-and-answer document with MIROVA to disseminate clarified information on the Fund to CSOs.

d. *Dialogue between CSOs and LDN Fund – The way toward stronger collaboration to achieve LDN*

52. The CSO Panel facilitated and organized the online event, ‘Dialogue between CSOs and LDN Fund – The way toward stronger collaboration to achieve LDN’, on 17 May 2021. The webinar allowed MIROVA and the IDH to present the LDN Fund to CSOs. It also allowed CSOs to present CSO-led projects that could be of interest to the Fund. This meeting served:

(a) To increase the CSOs’ awareness and understanding of the LDN Fund in various aspects;

(b) To establish an interactive dialogue among the LDN Fund and CSOs;

(c) As an opportunity for the CSOs to showcase their actions and lessons learned through an interactive session with the LDN Fund managers.

e. *Contribution to the Global Land Outlook 2nd edition of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*

53. The CSO Panel was invited to contribute to the Global Land Outlook 2nd edition (GLO2). The CSO Panel was able to participate in one consultation meeting regarding the GLO2 process. The CSO Panel furthermore collected case studies from CSOs and submitted them as a contribution to the GLO 2.

6. Civil society organization involvement in implementing decisions from the fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties

a. *Contribution to the technical guide of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for the integration of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security into the implementation of the UNCCD and land degradation neutrality*

54. Following the advocacy conducted by accredited CSOs, under the previous CSO Panel, the UNCCD recognized land tenure as a major component to combat desertification. Following decision 26/COP.14, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the secretariat to the UNCCD, prepared a technical guide for the integration of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN. The CSO Panel members attended two consultation meetings for the preparation of the technical guide. The CSO Panel also contributed to gathering comments and case studies from CSOs to be considered in the guide. In December 2021, the CSO Panel members contributed to the peer review of the technical guide.

- b. *Increased number of accredited civil society organizations/ Indigenous Peoples and /Local Communities/ Women's groups in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification*

55. During the extraordinary session of the COP which took place in December 2021, 45 CSOs were accredited to the Convention, bringing the total number of accredited CSOs to 637. By region, the new accredited CSOs are distributed as follows: 71 per cent Africa, 16 per cent Asia, 9 per cent Western Europe and Other, 2 per cent Eastern Europe and 2 per cent Latin America and the Caribbean.

7. Civil society organization involvement in building synergies between the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, other United Nations conventions and other international events

- a. *World Conservation Congress 2021 of the International Union for Conservation of Nature*

56. The Western Europe and Other Group (WEOG) representative attended the IUCN World Congress in September 2021 in Marseille. There, she organized an event on CSO commitments for the sustainable management of landscapes in drylands. The event highlighted civil society engagement in landscape and land management in drylands, drawing on the outcomes of the 2019 International Désertifications Summit, organized in June 2019 by CARI with support from the UNCCD. During the Congress, the WEOG representative contributed to organizing a high-level dialogue on the Great Green Wall accelerator which took place in the French Pavilion of the Congress. The Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Mauritanian Minister of Environment attended this event.

- b. *Joint International Grassland & International Rangeland Virtual Congress, 2021*

57. The Asia representative of the CSO Panel, as a member of the regional support group of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) for the Middle-East and North Africa, attended as keynote speaker of the **Joint International Grassland and International Rangeland Virtual Congress** in October 2021. The focus of the keynote speech was 'Pastoralism; Social, Gender and Policy Issues', delivering a number of key messages, including:

(a) Recognising pastoralists' tenure and property rights over their territories with particular attention to women's right to land within the framework of gender equality of the VGGT;

(b) Recognising ancestral lands of mobile pastoralists in the form of 'Territories of Life' / Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas and Territories;

(c) Fostering multi-stakeholder alliances to approve the IYRP to raise awareness and fill knowledge gaps globally in terms of the value of healthy rangelands and sustainable pastoralism; and

(d) Renewing our promise to leave no one behind through strengthening, recognition and the involvement of the pastoralists' governance institutions, allowing their actual participation in decision-making and policy-making process linked to their destiny at all levels.⁸

- c. *Experts Review Workshop on the Gender Responsive Sustainable Land Management Assessment Tool*

58. Participation of the CSO Panel member (Asia) in the Experts Review Workshop and meetings on the Gender Responsive SLM Assessment Tool in September 2021. This event was in line with the objectives of the GAP, in 2020, to promote gender responsive SLM technologies and approaches through sharing and reviewing the questionnaire developed by the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies, the FAO and the

⁸ <<https://b2n.ir/t01770>>.

UNCCD to further enhance and fine-tune the methodology to assess gender responsive SLM practices.

d. Strengthening the role of civil society in achieving land degradation neutrality

59. The CSO Panel engaged in the review of the Project Identification Form of the ‘Strengthening Civil Society Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality’ project, a joint initiative between the IUCN, the CSO Panel and Drynet for submission to the GEF.

e. Civil Society Organization Panel interaction with the Global Youth Caucus on Land and Desertification

60. The CSO Panel had one meeting with representatives of the Global Youth Caucus on Land and Desertification, and the CSO Panel helped review the terms of reference for the election of the global focal points of the UNCCD Youth Caucus.

61. Among the newly accredited CSOs, at least eight are youth-led.

8. Lessons learned

62. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSO Panel members were only able to collaborate online. They did not benefit from the positive effects they may have experienced from a face-to-face meeting at the beginning of their mandate and a handover from the previous panel members. The CSO Panel recommends that arrangements be made for a handover meeting with the next panel.

63. In 2021, the number of accredited CSOs totalled 637. These 637 organizations have contributed in varying degrees to implementing the UNCCD. It is crucial that the Parties regularly dialogue with their national CSOs and consider CSO actions in national implementation reports.

64. For the CSO Panel and the secretariat, it is a challenge to engage with all those organizations. The CSO Panel recognizes that the mailing list developed for each region, as well as the CSO Panel website, were crucial communication tools and should be maintained and improved. Considering the language barrier for many CSOs, the CSO Panel requests the secretariat to provide more resources and tools to facilitate information dissemination, consultations and capacity building activities directed at CSOs in multiple languages.

65. Engaging with the LDN Fund has allowed the CSO Panel to understand that, as the Fund is looking at very specific projects including a return upon investment, and high social and environmental standards, there are many lessons learned by the Fund that should be disseminated to CSOs and other stakeholders. The LDN Fund managers should maintain a close dialogue with the CSO Panel and CSOs in general to share experience and contribute to CSO capacity building.

66. The CSO Panel expresses satisfaction regarding the CSO consultation in the review of the technical guide on the integration of the VGGT into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN. The CSO Panel requests the UNCCD to develop additional products from this guide, as well as a capacity building plan considering the needs of CSOs (operational needs to integrate practices into their development projects, needs to fuel their advocacy) and citizens (needs for awareness and understanding to fuel activism). This would support the contribution of CSOs to push for the integration of land tenure into SLM.

67. Moreover, regarding land tenure policies, CSOs request that the UNCCD helps to provide evidence in order to convince political leaders and drive political will for change, including quantified and science-based evidence, evidence on how such an integration of VGGT can improve the resilience of land users in the context of post-COVID recovery and showing the potential risks of inaction.

68. Furthermore, the CSO Panel encourages the Parties at COP 15 to consider the technical guide in order to integrate the VGGTs into the UNCCD and LDN implementation and to be proactive in ensuring the adoption and implementation of legal frameworks that guarantee access and adequate management of land to minority groups, such as pastoralists, and indigenous people, as well as equal land use and ownership rights for women.

69. Finally, the CSO Panel recalls that the COVID-19 pandemic has been an accelerating factor in the spread of hunger and inequality around the world, in addition to factors such as climate change, land degradation and conflicts. In this context, the CSO Panel invites the Parties to consider the interlinkages between food systems and land management. The CSO Panel also requests the UNCCD to consider nature-based solutions, such as agroecological practices, to avoid land degradation and allow the resilience of agricultural production systems and the preservation of biodiversity.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

70. The role played by CSOs, including youth groups, in the meetings and processes of the UNCCD has been greatly appreciated by the various stakeholders within the Convention as well as outside of it. The adoption of decision 26/COP.14 on land tenure, promoted and supported by the CSOs, is a positive example of this engagement and has been presented in other international fora as a success story portraying how civil society could shape the decision-making process in multilateral environmental agreements.

71. During the last two years and particularly since the beginning of the pandemic, the CSO Panel of the UNCCD has supported the active engagement of CSOs, ensuring that the whole community is informed and aware of the priorities of the Parties and the work of the secretariat. Through their regular meetings and continued communication with their respective constituencies, the CSO Panel has maintained the level of commitment during these difficult times. The secretariat has supported the work of the CSO Panel to keep the momentum built at COP 14 and attempt to overcome the difficulties of the pandemic.

72. Going forward, Parties, observers and the secretariat could put more focus on work to ensure the meaningful engagement of youth and future generations in the meetings and processes of the UNCCD. The Convention would benefit from their energy, vitality, and forward-looking ideas to address the challenges of DLDD and their interlinkages with the climate and biodiversity crisis. A meaningful youth engagement strategy would lay the foundations for ensuring their involvement at all levels.

73. In addition to youth, the Convention institutions will need to strengthen their forthcoming work with other relevant stakeholders, including the indigenous peoples and local community organizations, women's organizations, people with disabilities, local governments and parliamentarians.

74. Elements from these conclusions are presented in the form of a draft decision for the consideration of the Parties, contained in ICCD/COP(15)/21.