



LESSONS LEARNED FROM COP 15

Overview of the findings and recommendations of the participant survey

Introduction

The 15th session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP 15) was successfully held from 9 to 20 May 2022 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. It served as the framework for the meetings of the UNCCD Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), as well as for numerous events and meetings taking place in the sidelines. Approximately 7,000 participants were registered to the COP and the preceding high-level events, including nine Presidents, approximately fifty ministers and numerous other high-level representatives. The COP welcomed three declarations and adopted 37 decisions and one resolution, elaborating further on the UNCCD priorities for the next biennium and beyond.

Together with the host country Côte d'Ivoire, the UNCCD secretariat had a central role in the substantive and logistical preparations of the COP. With the aim to find out what went well and what could be improved, the secretariat prepared a survey in the form of a questionnaire on various aspects of the COP to seek the feedback of the participants. This report presents the findings of the survey and on that basis, outlines some general recommendations for the organization of future UNCCD governing body meetings.

About the survey

The survey to the COP participants had 19 scale response questions (five scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree) and four open questions, as well as four statistical questions concerning the respondents. Almost all questions were identical to those of the survey conducted at COP 14, making it easy to compare the results and changes from one COP to another. The survey was conducted as an online questionnaire in English, French and Spanish; links were sent to the registered participants by email during the second week of the COP.

295 participants responded to the survey, with the following statistics:

Region		Entity		Gender	
Africa	157	Government	120	Male	196
Asia	41	Scientific institute	28	Female	95
LAC	12	CSO	80	Prefer not to say	4
CEE	16	UN/IGO	56		
WEOG	31	Private sector	10		
Global	37	Other	1		

Of the African respondents, 41 are from the host country Côte d'Ivoire. They represent close to 14% of the total respondents.



Attendance	% of respondents
COP 15: The Summit and/or Gender Caucus	36%
COP 15: The high-level segment	35%
COP 15: Side/parallel events	74%
COP 15: The negotiations	32%
CRIC 19 (online)	18%
COP 14 (India)	18%
CRIC 17 (Guyana)	7%
COP 13 (China)	14%
Earlier meetings	14%

As may be noted from the information in the following pages, the findings of the survey were generally positive, with more than 70% of respondents expressing satisfaction to 15 out of the 19 scale response questions concerning the COP 15 preparations, arrangements and services. Compared to the results of the survey made at COP 14, higher rating was given at COP 15 to 12 out of the 19 same scale response questions.

Survey findings by topic

This section presents the findings of the survey as an overview of the responses by topic, including both the scale response questions and the open questions. For calculating percentages of the scale responses, ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ are combined as positive reactions, while ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ are combined as negative reactions. With regard to the written feedback received to the open questions, only comments that were provided by two or more respondents are included. All written comments are presented under those topics that they most refer to, regardless of where they were placed by the respondents.

Practical information, visa access and travel & hotel bookings

Over 80% of the responding COP participants were satisfied with the secretariat’s document on practical information (about venue, visas, accommodation...). Many respondents considered that accommodation in Abidjan was very expensive and some also note that the hotel reservation system was difficult to use.

Around 70% of the sponsored participants were satisfied with their travel booking, but several would have preferred having the DSA payments in other than local currency.

Official documents

The COP participants rated the official documentation very highly, with 84% considering them to be of high quality and almost as many expressing satisfaction with their timeliness. Some requested to have the negotiation texts during the COP available in all UN languages.

Registration

84% of the responding COP participants considered that the pre-registration procedure was easy to understand and use. A high satisfaction rate (77%) was received also for the smoothness of the first entry into premises and receiving the badge. However, some noted the long queues at the registration area, and some others asked for bigger fonts for the names in badges.



Conference facilities: directions, meeting rooms and other facilities

Less than 60% of the respondents expressed satisfaction to the clarity of directions at the venue; some suggested assigning more local staff to guide participants in next UNCCD meetings.

Slightly over 70% of the respondents considered that the meeting rooms were generally well organized and functional. Many noted technical problems (Wi-Fi, air conditioning, electricity) during the meetings.

Numerous detailed comments were made on the conference facilities, including the following:

- There were very few quiet places for work and for organizing bilateral meetings among delegates;
- Security at the premises was not at the level of the usual “UN Blue Zone”, particularly at the hotel lobby and in the exhibition area.
- The COVID regime was not well explained and it changed several times.
- There was no place for lost and found items.
- There was no systematic approach in the distribution of participant kits/memorabilia.
- Further measures could have been taken to reduce waste at the COP (plastic cups and hardcopies were occasionally used).

Services at the premises: transportation, local staff and food

In their open responses, numerous participants commended the planning and organization of the COP, the facilities at the venue, and the hospitality and kindness of the host country and its people. The high-level involvement and commitment of Côte d’Ivoire was praised and attributed to the pleasant atmosphere and constructive spirit of negotiations at the COP.

80% of the respondents considered that the staff at the conference premises was helpful and friendly.

Slightly over half of the respondents were satisfied with the local transportation between the airport and the hotels and between the hotels and the venue. Some participants called for more organized reception at the airport, clearer scheduling of the transportation, more detailed advance information, and better availability of taxis.

With regard to the selection of food offers at the conference venue, only 37% of COP participants expressed satisfaction. Several respondents criticized the quality of food, lack of vegan options, and the high cost of meals at the conference venue.

Services to sessions and negotiations

The secretariat and the GM services to the sessions and negotiations were highly valued by the respondents. 74% of them rated the plenary sessions of the COP, CRIC and CST as well-planned and efficient, although online streaming of the plenaries was considered to have been of low quality. Diverse feedback was received on the plenary sessions, with some asking for longer plenaries with more interactions and others calling for shortening the plenaries.

Although majority of the respondents (61%) were satisfied with the communication of meeting room or schedule changes through the screens and the app, many complained about the difficulty of keeping up with the changes. The late meeting hours of some contact groups were also criticized.



Some called for organizing the high-level segment in the middle of the COP, as earlier, and some also requested for more time for the CST. The parallel scheduling of side events and regional consultations was brought up too.

84% of the respondents considered the secretariat/GM support to the contact groups as professional and valuable, mentioning particularly the high technical quality and clarity of the secretariat's briefings. Several respondents hoped for interpretation in the contact groups in the coming meetings.

Many remarked also generally on the reliability and helpfulness of the secretariat/GM, with more than 70% of the respondents stating that their questions and problems were dealt with efficiently and timely.

Support to the regional and interest group coordination

85% of the responding COP participants considered that the secretariat/GM support was important for the coordination and preparations of the regional and interest groups.

Side events and exhibitions

Side events were generally well appreciated by the COP participants and 74% of the respondents had attended some of them. Many respondents actually mentioned the side events as their most liked feature of the COP. Several appreciated the attention given to civil society organizations, women and youth during and in the sidelines of the COP.

Relevance of the COP

The COP participants gave very high ratings to the relevance of the COP, with 91% stating that the agenda items were directly relevant to their work and 93% intending to use the COP decisions in their work.

Many respondents appreciated the range of matters considered and agreed at the COP, not only the focus on land restoration and drought but also the attention given to "new" topics such as land tenure and nature-based solutions. The high quality of speakers and the relevance of the COP 15 themes were mentioned in several responses.

Of specific COP decisions, reaching an agreement on the hosting arrangements for the upcoming CRIC, COP 16 and COP 17 was often mentioned.

Numerous respondents highlighted the COP as a platform for sharing knowledge and ideas, and for engaging into rich, cross-cultural debates over joint aims. The COP was also widely appreciated as an opportunity to meet old and new colleagues and partners.

Some respondents emphasized the importance of considering the status of implementation at the field level and using more of COP time for sharing related experiences. Opportunities for site visits during the COP were called for. Other substantive remarks were about better integration of UNCCD agenda with those of CBD and UNFCCC, reducing the number of agenda items that are not directly on land, and increasing the role of innovative science.

Many respondents suggested broadening of the scope of participation at the COPs, calling for more involvement of and easier access to youth, farmers, civil society and donor organizations, among others. Some also asked for better engagement of implementation/ donor partners, and some others proposed bigger publicity for the high-level segment.



The COP App

63% of the responding COP participants used the COP App and many of them expressed appreciation of this tool. Comments to further improve the App included the following:

- More diligence in ensuring that the information is correct and the updates timely
- Inclusion of a venue map
- Inclusion of photos and media about the COP, changing daily
- Inclusion of a separate icon for final version of the decisions
- Inclusion of high-level speeches
- Notifications to include events and room/schedule changes
- More detailed information about the side events, including also the Rio Pavilion

V Conclusions and recommendations

The preparations for COP 15 started in a context of major uncertainties – the COVID-19 pandemic was still widespread, and many other meetings continued to be postponed or even cancelled. The offer of Côte d'Ivoire to host the COP came to the rescue of the UNCCD, preventing any further delays in the formal decision-making and setting the scene to Africa, after almost a decade of the last UNCCD COP in the region. In spite of the challenges in the organization of the COP, the COP participants responding to the survey were generally satisfied with the services that were provided.

Perhaps the most important survey questions were those on the relevance and usefulness of the COP agenda items and decisions, both of which received an approval rate of over 90% of the respondents. Similarly important indications of appreciation to the work of the secretariat and the GM were the high ratings for the quality of the official documents (84%), organization of the plenary sessions (74%), services to the contact groups (84%) and support to regional consultations (85%). Around 80% satisfaction rate was given by participants also to the pre-COP functions of providing practical information and registration.

While the overall level of satisfaction of the participants was higher than for COP 14, there were nevertheless many areas of work that could use further improvements. Below is a series of recommendations, loosely grouped into two categories concerning collaboration with the host country and practical arrangements, deriving from the findings of the survey. These recommendations are meant as indicative; they should be further considered and developed among the units that work on the respective topics for the upcoming UNCCD official meetings.

Collaboration with the host country: In order to ensure that the meeting facilities and services are of adequate quality, a checklist or a similar tool could be developed, outlining the minimum UN standards for conference venue security, meeting room equipment, local transportation and diversity of food. If needed, the host country agreement and its annexes could be reviewed for ensuring that their provisions are still responsive to the evolving needs of the UNCCD meetings.

Practical arrangements: In collaboration with the host country, many needs concerning the conference premises that were raised in this survey process could be addressed. For example, providing small seating areas for the delegate use for work and bilateral meetings, organizing better the memorabilia distribution, and set-up of a lost and found desk should be easy to arrange. Further development of the COP App could be carried out.



Detailed results for the scale response questions

The table below presents the key questions of the survey concerning various arrangements before and during COP 15. Information in the columns after the questions is as follows:

- “Positive”: The number of respondents that chose “agree” or “strongly agree” as the reply
- “Total”: The number of respondents to the question in concern
- “%”: Percentage of positive answers of the total respondents
- “COP 14 %”: Corresponding percentage in the COP 14 survey

Question	Positive	Total	%	COP14 %
The pre-registration procedure was easy to understand and use	246	294	84%	74%
The secretariat’s document on practical information (about the venue, visas, accommodation...) was useful and to-the-point	226	276	82%	79%
The official documents were available on the website at the time I started preparing for the meetings	212	283	75%	69%
<u>Only for sponsored participants:</u> Travel booking was efficient and related information was clear	114	160	71%	88%
First entry to the conference premises and receiving the badge went smoothly	219	285	77%	83%
Directions inside the conference premises were clear and rooms easy to find	174	293	59%	78%
Local transportation between the airport and hotels and between the hotels and conference venue was well organized	127	242	52%	19%
Staff at the conference premises was helpful and friendly	232	291	80%	71%
My questions and problems were dealt with efficiently and timely.	200	276	72%	67%
The selection of food offers at the conference venue was suitable for my diet	92	247	37%	37%
Meeting rooms were generally well organized and functional	212	292	73%	77%
Changes in the schedule or rooms were efficiently communicated through the screens and the app	157	259	61%	66%
The plenary sessions of the COP, CRIC and CST were well-planned and efficient	189	257	74%	75%
The secretariat/GM support to the contact groups was professional and valuable	191	228	84%	80%
The secretariat/GM support was important for the coordination and preparations of the regional and interest groups	194	227	85%	76%
The documents prepared by the secretariat were generally of high quality	220	263	84%	74%
The side events were interesting and well prepared	231	275	84%	65%
The matters considered at the meeting were directly relevant to my work	256	280	91%	87%
I will use in my work the decisions made at this COP	254	273	93%	85%