

## **- MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COP BUREAU (12 JANUARY 2017)-**

The meeting of the COP Bureau took place in Istanbul, Turkey, on 12 January 2017. An overview of the matters discussed and the decisions taken by the Bureau are presented below.

### **I. Adoption of the Agenda**

The agenda was adopted by the COP Bureau with the further inclusion of one additional item to be addressed as new agenda item III, as follows:

- Report of the activities of the CST and SPI

### **II. Outcomes of the CRIC 15 session and status of activities of the CRIC**

The CRIC Chair introduced the agenda item. Members of the Bureau highlighted the importance of the CRIC, which assists Parties in the assessment of the implementation. According to some members, the frequency of official sessions, which are currently held every two years (sessional/intersessional) should be maintained. The frequency of reporting however was discussed at length with various options highlighted by Bureau members.

Some members would like to see the reporting frequency to be every two years in order to provide new feedback to Parties on how the Convention is being implemented and not lose the momentum. Some others highlighted the importance of necessary funding being available for reporting which ensures that capacity and technical means are available at national level to comply with reporting requirements such as, i.e. data availability, data validation and subsequent analysis. Since the GEF is the main source for enabling activities for reporting, it was pointed out that a two year reporting frequency on all elements contained in the new draft Strategy may be too ambitious and eventually weaken the knowledge base from which an assessment on UNCCD implementation could be made.

Consequently, it was suggested by some Bureau members that the current reporting modalities of reporting on progress indicators every four years should be maintained. In the interim period, and to address the concern momentum loss, it was suggested that official communications containing more general implementation issues may be submitted for the CRIC review, at those sessions that do not review findings from the reporting on progress indicators. Mention was also made to how official communications are submitted to other Rio Convention processes, which could be used as reference.

It was also stressed that the Global Mechanism should become more active in the field of securing financing for the Convention.

The Executive Secretary underlined the fact that funding of enabling activity under the GEF is part of the currently replenishment process. A decision to increase funding for enabling activities is therefore not under the purview of the GEF secretariat but is part of the

replenishment process. Hence, in case of interest to increase the enabling activity funding, Parties need to table their concern as part of the replenishment process.

### **III. Report of the activities the CST and SPI**

The CST Chair introduced the item. One member of the Bureau expressed concerns about the fact that the UNCCD would be using data that may turn out to be inaccurate since there are issues with the data available for carbon soil. The same member expressed fears over the fact that data to be used may simply not pass a scientifically rigorous examination and hence weaken the assessment of implementation. He also highlighted that data to be used within the context of the UNCCD should be primarily from national sources and not from global datasets. In addition, it was stated that highlighting the importance of soil in the soil carbon discussion is inappropriate within the context of the UNCCD since it would draw attention for necessary action and single out responsibilities and obligations on the part of affected UNCCD countries, diverting the discussion on developed country Parties doing their share to mitigate and fund mitigation of climate change within the context of UNFCCC.

In response to those concerns raised, some other members of the Bureau highlighted the importance of getting the UNCCD engaged in discussions relating to carbon sinks and carbon data, which is not exclusively linked to the climate change debate but also very much linked to hunger, famine and migration. The topic as such may be new and hence data availability and credibility still constitute to a work in progress. However, this cannot be a reason not to engage in this important discussion.

Other members welcomed the report of the CST Chair, and highlighted the need for more cooperation/coordination between the scientific platforms created under the Rio Conventions. The CST Chair responded and outlined the cooperation mechanism in place to communicate with the IPCC, and the IPBES for example.

### **IV. Report of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG-FSF)**

The co-Chair to the IWG-FSF introduced the item. One member underlined the importance attached by his regional group to the proposed strategic objective on drought, as contained in the draft.

Another member informed that his regional constituency had held discussions on the unnumbered drought strategic objective and that there is general support to its inclusion. However, considering that drought has a very large scope, he underlined the necessity to rightly phrase the objective in order to ensure that it is included in the Strategy without going beyond the mandate of the Convention, a preoccupation that is currently being addressed by experts.

In his concluding comments, the co-chair underlined that the need to reflect drought in the new Strategy was unanimously agreed upon in the last IWG meeting. He reported that the IWG has agreed to look at the phrasing of the objective during COP 13 and not debate on the necessity of it being integrated in the first place. He underlined that the only reason for keeping it unnumbered was to provide one constituency with the possibility to address in more depth the substance of this objective with the assistance of relevant experts not available at the last IWG meeting.

## V. Overview of issues on the provisional agenda for COP13

The Secretariat introduced the agenda item, presenting and outline of the COP13 schedule of work and initial agenda items. A very preliminary draft COP13 agenda was also introduced. In doing so, the secretariat underlined that the agenda will still require important adjustment in view of the expected inputs of the CRIC and CST Bureaus and further consultations, as required.

The COP13 host country explained that the dates referred to in the secretariat website for COP 13, i.e. 04 – 20 September were still to be considered indicative as further internal consultations were required to finalize the schedule. The representative further noted, referring to national practice, that the proposed date of the High Level Segment (HLS) may be rescheduled from Monday-Tuesday to Tuesday- Wednesday. The secretariat took note of the information provided and stressed the need to reach a final decision on these matters as soon as possible in order to secure in a timely and planned manner the availability of external partners who jointly service the COP. It was agreed that a final decision on the matter will be taken in a week time.

One member further noted that the agenda item on the “Effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional level” was of prime importance to its region.

Another member took note of background document Inf.12 and the draft agenda item of COP13 and made several comments and proposals. In this respect, a proposal was made to reword agenda item 2 sub-item (a) in order to integrate language from SDG 15-3, as follows:

Integration of the sustainable development goals and targets into the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and ~~the Land Degradation Neutrality~~ **combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world**

The same member further requested to timely forward the MoU between UNCCD and the GEF to the Bureau and to include a report by the GM on agenda item 3, sub-item (d) on “securing of additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms”. Under procedural matters, the same member sought clarifications on the type of meetings referred to under sub-items (b) on the “Participation and involvement of civil society organizations in meetings and processes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification”, welcoming the participation of CSO to specific meetings but expressing concerns over the fact that, on one hand, some meetings were reserved to Parties only and, on the other hand, participation of CSO could not supersede efforts to ensure the proper and priority funding of eligible country Parties.

Another member further noted that there are 17 SDGs but only one directly relates to the work of the Convention and, hence, requested to reword agenda item 2, sub-item (a) accordingly. On the issue related to the participation of CSO, the same representative underlined that decision 5/COP12 was very clear in addressing the matter.

An additional member underlined that the rules of procedure of the COP foresaw in a clear manner the participation of observers.

A further member requested the secretariat to inform the Bureau on plans foreseen for the organization of regional consultations prior to COP13, as the same constituted an important matter for his region. Another member supported this request underlining that the past COP12 contact group on budget had extensively addressed the matter.

The secretariat took note of the comment made and recalled that regional meetings are to be organized, either in a specific country should the same make a specific invitation in that respect and cover part of the agreed costs, or, back to back and prior to a given COP session. On the issue of the CSO participation the secretariat further underlined that participation of CSOs is provided for in the rule of procedures and in several COP decisions, including decision 5/COP12. Such participation is primarily meant to the official sessions of the governing bodies of the Convention and, eventually to further meetings or conferences, provided that Parties agree to it and funding is made available. In her intervention, the Executive Secretary further underlined that there were no earmarked resources under the core budget for the funding of participants to regional meetings. The Executive Secretary further noted that, as per past sessions, the secretariat will spare no efforts to fundraise resources for that purpose under extra budgetary funding. One member emphasized in that respect that concerns will be raised if funding for eligible Parties is limited while the funding of a robust participation of CSOs, media and other observers is secured.

## **VI. Status of consultation with the Government of China for the organization of COP13**

The secretariat introduced the agenda item by commending the commitment and support of the host country. In doing so, it referred to the progress achieved so far in the consultations related to the logistical and legal aspects of the process, including the adaptation of the conference center and the Host Country Agreement. The secretariat further reported that the second planning mission was due to take place from 20 to 24 March 2017 and invited the representative of the host country to bring any further element of information deemed relevant. The representative of the host country praised the secretariat for a fruitful cooperation, renewed the assurances of her country's full support to the organization of a successful session of the COP, which organizing committee is to be chaired by the Vice-Premier and reiterated the need to uphold on the final dates of the Conference, pending internal consultations to be concluded in a week time.

## **VII. Convention budget: Analysis of actual biennial budget and first outline of next biennium**

The secretariat introduced the agenda item emphasizing its continuous monitoring of the core budget in order to maintain expenditure within the framework of the COP decision on budget for the biennium. For the biennium 2018–2019, the secretariat further indicated that the Executive Secretary would respond to a request by COP submitting a programme budget that contained the work plan, work programme and details of the estimated financial resources, highlighting an unprecedented commitment to maintain the same level of resources (zero nominal) for eight consecutive years, a first for the Convention. Furthermore, the secretariat would report on contributions paid by Parties prior to 2016 in the current biennium and make proposals on how to use these funds without affecting Parties' indicative contributions for the biennium 2018–2019.

One member commended the secretariat's efficient management of the budget by committing to a zero nominal growth in the next biennium. He nevertheless noted that more details could be provided to the Bureau on how funds were being spent for the current biennium.

In her response, the Executive Secretary underlined that her understanding and that of many Parties was that the Bureau did not constitute a decision making body on financial matters, which were of the sole mandate of the COP. She added that most of the budget goes to fund staff salaries; however, if Parties had concerns regarding activities funded through the core budget they should ensure that their priorities are reflected in the programme budget and that proposals are provided with associated funding.

The same member acknowledged that indeed budgetary questions were a matter for the COP, but indicated that the COP may need to consider establishing a finance committee to analyze how staff time is being utilized and looked forward to seeing more detailed information on how resources were being used.

The Executive closed by emphasizing that the COP serves as a finance committee through its contact group on budgetary matters at each session.

## **VIII. Other Matters**

### **(a) Presentation of the Global Land Outlook (GLO)**

A representative of PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency made a presentation on "Scenarios for the Global Land Outlook". One member inquired about the presentation on declining natural productivity observed globally.

Another member requested information on the date in which PBL began its work with the secretariat on the GLO. The same member made several comments on the presentation, as follows. Firstly, he underlined that the information contained in the presentation did not relate to the UNCCD mandate as land was not in the mandate of the convention. Furthermore, agriculture productivity in certain areas must be better understood and agreed upon to avoid misleading information such as the one referred to for the Amazon region, before going public with such information. He expressed concerns over the fact that Parties had not been involved in the finding and content of this potential major publication, which competes with other major publications, underlining that Parties need to discuss the objective, content, and authors of such a publication. He further underlined that his country would like to avoid a situation whereby the secretariat publishes conclusions that Parties have not been consulted on and referred to the decision calling for any output published under the name of UNCCD to be reviewed by the COP Bureau, prior to its publication.

Another member noted that information contained in this publication was of great interest to Parties. In this perspective, he sought clarification on what type of information would be published about countries.

In her response, the Executive Secretary pointed out at several aspects. In doing so, she dismissed the fact that land was outside of the mandate of the Convention and recalled that land was part and parcel of the Art. 1. of the Convention on "use of terms". The Executive Secretary also noted that to this date 165 countries have declared themselves affected. She further underlined that the decision referred to on the need to consult the Bureau prior to engage in the publication of a given material, was strictly limited to the SPI process. She indicated that the information on the GLO process have been presented to Parties on many occasions as far back as the last UNCCD Scientific Conference and several side events at the

last session of the COP. The Executive Secretary further emphasized that not all information would be part of the publication as the more detailed information would be left out and made available as a tool for Parties' use. She also recalled that the draft publication will be sent for information to Parties before launch so that factual mistakes can be corrected.

On the technical aspects of the presentation, the PBL representative indicated that his institute started working on the GLO as of the beginning of last year. He further underlined that specific in-country analyses had not yet been conducted, but the data was available for further analysis and presentation. He further clarified that they were fully aware of the Amazon limited agricultural potential and that, in no way, was his presentation hinting at a high agricultural productivity of the region.

### **(b) Update on the work of CSO Panel as per Decision 5/COP**

A representative of Civil Society Organizations panel introduced the agenda item referring to the main activities undertaken by the Civil Society Organizations since the beginning of 2016. On decision 5/COP12, which "requests the secretariat and the CSO Panel to make proposals to the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties on ways to support the work of the Panel and expand its membership", he reported on potential options being contemplated, as follows:

1. Continue with the status quo
2. Integration of the 9 UN major groups
3. Expansion to allow for sub-regional representation
4. Combine elements of the options above

In that regard, he invited the Bureau to consider option 4 as there is a need to include additional actors within the CSO panel while ensuring appropriate representation and efficiency. In that respect, there is the possibility to continue with the 5 members as agreed by decision 5/COP11 plus 3 CSOs selected from among underrepresented major groups according to the guiding principles of the CSO panel and its work plan. A final proposal will be presented to the COP Bureau after the assessment of the panel, which will be undertaken in the next months.

One member sought further clarification on the involvement of the civil society within the UNCCD process. The secretariat indicated that such participation referred to meetings of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies as well as other events and processes for which funding was available and participation deemed relevant by Parties.

Another member underlined the importance of CSOs' participation in the Advisory Committee of the LDN Fund and further requested the possibility for affected developing countries to be represented in the new committee. The secretariat informed the Bureau that this proposal will be brought to the attention of the LDN Fund manager, which is a private sector partner and invited Parties to suggest criteria that will help the fund manager to select such representatives in the Advisory Committee.

On a different item, the Executive Secretary informed the Bureau that following an extensive consultation with many stakeholders, the secretariat has recently redesigned its website. Stemming from this consultation process many stakeholders invited the secretariat to align its corporate branding with the rest of the UN agencies. In this perspective, the Executive Secretary also presented a new logo.

## **X. Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the COP Bureau will take place in Ordos, in the sidelines of the thirteen session of the COP.

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