LESSONS LEARNED FROM COP 14
Overview of the results of the participant feedback

Introduction

The 14th session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP 14) was successfully held from 2 to 13 September in New Delhi, India. 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. Close to 6,000 participants attended the COP 14, including approximately one hundred ministers and other high-level representatives.

The COP 14 resulted in 33 decisions and one resolution, elaborating further on the UNCCD priorities for the next biennium and beyond. It also welcomed the "New Delhi Declaration" and ministerial roundtable summaries that were prepared during its high-level segment.

Together with the host country India, 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 20 scale response questions (five scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree) and one open question, as well as four questions concerning the respondents' background. It was conducted during the last plenary of the COP as hardcopies in English, French and Spanish distributed in the plenary hall.

96 responses were received, with the following background:

Region		Entity		Earlier attendance		Gender	
Africa	30	Government	78	CRIC 17	24	Male	57
Asia	24	Science Instit.	4	COP 13	40	Female	33
LAC	10	CSO	7	CRIC 15	19		
CEE	9	UN/IGO	6	COP 12	27		
WEOG	20	Private sector	0	Earlier meetings	26		
Global	2	Other	1	None	36		

As may be noted from the information in the following pages, the outcomes of the survey were generally positive, with 70-80% of respondents expressing satisfaction of almost all preparations and arrangements.

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 from the COP participants, only comments that were provided by two or more respondents are included. All written comments are presented under those topics that they most belong 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…) and almost all of the sponsored participants were satisfied with their travel booking. Some participants found the visa application process too complex and time-taking. Several participants complained about the lateness of the information provided on hotels and the distance from the hotels to the conference venue. Some participants requested the secretariat to provide a tool for participants for offsetting their CO_2 emissions.

Official documents

The COP participants rated the official documentation generally well, with 74% considering them to be of high quality and almost as many expressing satisfaction with their timeliness. The female responses were, perhaps unexpectedly, more negative, with 17% of female respondents not considering that the documents were of high quality (compared to 2% of male respondents). 20% of the participants said that the documents were not available on the website by the time they started preparing for the COP.

Some participants complained about the length and style/ quality of the documents and proposed the use of the UNFCCC approach in which main points and controversies are highlighted in each document. Many countries asked to receive the draft decisions in advance.

Registration

74% of the responding COP participants considered that the pre-registration procedure was easy to understand and use. They expressed a high rate (83%) of satisfaction also with the smoothness of the first entry into premises and receiving the badge, with more than 60% giving it the highest possible rating.

Conference facilities: directions, meeting rooms and other facilities

Close to 80% of the responding COP participants considered that the directions inside the conference premises were clear and rooms easy to find, and that the meeting rooms were generally well organized and functional. Some participants considered that the meeting rooms were too cold, and some others called for more seating areas outside the meeting rooms. Several participants complained about the lack of foreign exchange and/or ATM, and many would have liked to have opportunities for shopping local products within the conference premises.

Services at the premises: transportation, local staff and food

Local transportation was the most criticized service at COP 14, with only 19% of the COP participants expressing satisfaction. In the written feedback, several problems were identified:
- Too few rides, particularly at late hours
- No clear schedule and delays in scheduled departures
- Reckless drivers

Female COP participants considered local transportation particularly problematic, with 37% of the respondents giving it the lowest possible rating, compared to 26% of male respondents.

Many COP participants complained about lack of guidance and/or transportation from the airport upon their arrival. Some complained about not having transportation arrangements for the high-level participants.

More than 70% of the COP participants considered that the staff at the conference premises was helpful and friendly.

With regard to the selection of food offers at the conference venue, only 37% of COP participants expressed satisfaction. Several COP participants called for more and healthier choices.

Several participants expressed disappointment for no field visits being offered by the host government during the weekend in the middle of the COP.

Services to sessions and negotiations

The secretariat and the GM services to the sessions and negotiations were highly valued by the COP participants: 75% of them considered that the plenary sessions of the COP, CRIC and CST were well-planned and efficient, while some called for better streamlining of the agendas of the three bodies to further improve efficiency. Some participants proposed that other UN agencies are given a more visible role in the COP agenda. Some other suggested to use more the screens to illustrate the presentations and introductions.

80% of the COP participants rated the secretariat/GM support to the contact groups as professional and valuable. Some would have preferred faster availability of papers electronically and less use of paper copies. Although majority of the COP participants were satisfied with the communication of meeting room or schedule changes through the screens and the app, a rather significant number, almost 20%, gave a negative rating on this matter.

In general, almost 70% of the COP participants felt that their questions and problems were dealt with efficiently and timely.

Support to the regional and interest group coordination

76% of the responding COP participants considered that the secretariat/GM support was important for the coordination and preparations of the regional and interest groups. Many of them, particularly newcomers, expressed appreciation of the briefings and updates received at the regional consultations, while some complained about the lack of interpretation. Some participants called for stand-alone regional meetings well in advance to the COP. Proposals to increase the preparedness and thus negotiation ability of delegates included the following:
- Providing additional in-depth briefings to key negotiators

- Organization of stand-alone regional briefing meetings in advance to the COP, so as to provide delegates more time to prepare their positions
- Providing one additional regional meeting day prior to the COP to review and refine the positions

Side events and exhibitions

Side events were generally well appreciated by the COP participants, but it seems that one quarter of the respondents did not attend any of them.
On the exhibitions, it was noted that the area was detached from other conference areas which must have influenced the visitor rates.

Relevance of the COP

The COP participants gave very high ratings to the relevance of the COP, with 87% stating that the agenda items were directly relevant to their work and 85% intending to use the COP decisions in their work.

The COP App

78% of the responding COP participants used the COP App and many of them expressed appreciation of this new tool. Comments to further improve the App included the following:
- More diligence in ensuring that the information is correct and the updates timely
- Notifications to include room/schedule changes
- Document notifications to specify the name of the uploaded document
- Document notifications to include the Daily Journal
- More detailed information about the side events
- Development of features for collecting feedback from users
- Use of user analytics tool to guide which features to further develop
- Inclusion of modules for Announcement and Lost & Found
- Inclusion of a help desk service
- Better promotion of the App, including more visibility on the website

V   Conclusions and recommendations

The organization of COP 14 was successful in many ways: on substantive side, it made important decisions that will bring the UNCCD forward in the coming years, which was greatly facilitated by the host country India that took a leadership role in putting land restoration agenda at the core of the sustainable development goals and climate action. With regard to the logistics, the participants were largely satisfied with the professionalism and level of services that the secretariat in collaboration with the host country and partners provided to them. In this context, the secretariat is deeply grateful for the special efforts made by India to ensure smooth administrative and logistical arrangements.

Nevertheless, the findings of the survey show that there is still room for improvement. Below is a series of recommendations, loosely grouped into three categories concerning substantive work, practical arrangements and the UNCCD App, deriving from the findings of the survey. These recommendations are meant as indicative; they should be further considered and developed by the secretariat when planning for and working on the respective topics.

1. **Substantive work**

- The COP, CRIC and CST agendas and organization of work should be streamlined to ensure that the negotiations and resulting decisions under each body complement (and do not duplicate) each other. This streamlining would also support time management and increase the efficiency of the COP as a whole.

- As feasible, relevant UN system organizations should be involved in suitable COP agenda items at the plenary level. This could bring new perspectives to the meeting exchanges and demonstrate the linkages between the UNCCD and other UN system actors.

- The secretariat should ensure that the official documents are available on the UNCCD website by the deadlines established in the related UN rules and regulations.

- In preparing the official documents and the draft decisions, the secretariat should introduce measures for making it easier for the COP participants to perceive the key points and main controversies of each document, as well as linkages with other agenda items. This could be done by, for example, a summary of these matters under the conclusions section of each document.

- National delegates, particularly those from the least developed countries, need capacity building to effectively negotiate on various agenda items. In addition to the additional guidance in the documents, as proposed in the above point, the secretariat's support to this end may include, for example, further development of the regional coordination meetings or targeted briefings to key negotiators.

2. **Logistic arrangements**

- Minimum standards should be established for the services to be provided by the host country during the COP, including the availability of local transportation, selection of food offers, possibility to withdraw cash and/or exchange currency, and possibility to purchase locally produced souvenirs within the COP venue or in its immediate vicinity. These standards may be considered in the context of, or integrated into, the host country agreement.

- Standard requirements should be established for selected consular and protocol matters, including a simplified procedure for the conference participants to apply for visa, and the responsibilities of the host country for the arrangements of high-level participants. These standards may be considered in the context of, or integrated into, the host country agreement.

- In collaboration with suitable partners, the secretariat should arrange for an easily accessible service for the COP participants to calculate and offset the CO_2 emissions of their travels to and from the COP.

3. The COP App

- For the duration of the COP, a clear workflow should be established for ensuring that the information on the App is correct and the updates timely.

- The modules of the App should be further developed, taking into account the feedback received from the COP participants.