

Highlights of the Meeting between the UNCCD and GEF Secretariats 8 October 2020 (virtual)

The following is a summary prepared by the GEF Secretariat and the UNCCD Secretariat of comments, understandings, and clarifications made during the meeting of the GEF and the UNCCD Secretariats.

Agenda Item 1 Opening and Self-Introduction of Participants

1. The GEF CEO, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez opened the meeting and welcomed the UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw and members of the UNCCD Secretariat. Members of the UNCCD Secretariat were then invited to introduce themselves.

Agenda Item 2 Discussion with the Executive Secretary and CEO

2. The CEO shared the topics that the GEF would like to discuss with the UNCCD Executive Secretary. First, he asked about strategic priorities for UNCCD for the next decade and how to collaborate more.

3. The CEO also stated the importance of working with UNCCD towards a successful outcome of the GEF-8 replenishment. The CEO reiterated that the GEF is pleased to work closely with the UNCCD Secretariat as a key partner in the replenishment process. He noted this time around the process will be unique due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in parallel it is a good opportunity to engage with donors and stakeholders in order to upscale and amplify the GEF's actions.

4. The CEO then raised the subject of UNCCD and GEF in the COVID-19 world and contributions for green recovery/building back better. The CEO expressed interest in hearing from the UNCCD on the impact of COVID-19 on the operations of the Convention. This information would allow the GEF to gain insight on how to continue to support countries and parties, how to maintain GEF's core support in terms of its mandate in relation to the COP and how to make the best of the COVID-19 experience to build back better.

5. Finally, expectations of major initiatives such as the Great Green Wall (GGW) and outlook into 2021 and beyond was raised as a key topic of discussion. The CEO expressed his positive impression of the GGW Initiative in the Sahel and shared that it should be replicated in other geographies such as Latin America and Asia.

6. The Executive Secretary noted with pleasure the working relationship between the UNCCD Secretariat and the GEF Secretariat.
7. The Executive Secretary noted the impact of COVID-19 on countries and Parties and indicated that in terms of recovery, investments on land is an opportunity as billions of people depend on land as their livelihood. Investing in land regeneration is a beneficial opportunity for recovery as it creates green jobs, provides opportunities for increased food production and reduces poverty.
8. In terms of the GGW, the Executive Secretary reiterated it is a very concrete large-scale restoration program which delivers on the land degradation neutrality (LDN) agenda. He indicated that many countries and institutions recognize that now is the time to move towards larger scale efforts. Furthermore, he commended the GEF for being one of the first supporters of the GGW. Related to this is India's commitment, made at COP 14, to restore 26 million hectares of land. This provides another example of an initiative on which the GEF and UNCCD can work collaboratively.
9. Other initiatives highlighted included the UNCCDs work in the Caribbean, together with Caribbean Community (CARICOM), where land is recognized as their scariest resource. Additional support is being provided to the Meso American Countries and the Dominican Republic on the dry corridor. A project has been submitted to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for this initiative.
10. The Executive Secretary reiterated that LDN is a priority and it is not just the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment, but Ministries of Energy, Agriculture, Livestock should also be involved as it is a cross-cutting and integrated problem.
11. The Executive Secretary shared key points on topics coming out of the COP 14 on land tenure, gender, private sector, and drought. On land tenure, COP 14 delivered the first intergovernmental decision on land tenure. The UNCCD Secretariat has recognized that there is great potential to tap into private sector investment, given the potential to generate ecosystem services as well on the fact that land restoration constitutes a profitable business. Gender was also mentioned as a key decision point, given that in some countries in the Sahel, 80 percent of the producers are women.
12. Drought is an issue that is becoming global and very much concerns the biodiversity and climate change agendas. Up to 70 countries have been hit by drought and 25 have developed drought emergencies. A UNCCD Intergovernmental Working Group on drought is now in place and actively developing its work plan and will be reporting at the next COP.
13. Louise Baker, recently appointed Managing Director of the Global Mechanism of the Secretariat further stated that the Global Mechanism has been successful at building up demand in key themes, such as LDN, land tenure, drought, and gender. Expressing commitment to support a successful GEF-8 replenishment, she also called for a bold level of implementation on key themes.

14. On Communications, Yukie Hori of the UNCCD Secretariat said UNCCD is working with the other Rio Conventions on having a common message regarding building back better and invited the GEF to join in this initiative. She reiterated that the GEF has always been a strong advocate of the Rio Conventions working together and will continue this work with the GEF. The UNCCD Secretariat is also collaborating with the Rockefeller Foundation to change the narrative on the Sahel from what is currently negative, to one that sends a message that the region has potential of energy, opportunities for food production among other areas.

15. Recognizing the importance of land tenure and noting that it has implications for all Conventions, the GEF CEO suggested to organize a series of regional workshops bringing stakeholders together to advance the land tenure discourse as a priority across multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The workshops could also explore the possibility to include the discussion on payments for ecosystem services. The CEO further expressed interest in taking the collaboration with GCF to the next level in the Sahel, while bringing in the GEF's added advantage. The Executive Secretary responded positively, indicating that UNCCD is happy to work with the GEF to organize the workshops on this important topic.

16. In arguing that land is the 'glue' Convention, Gustavo Fonseca, Director of Programs of the GEF Secretariat, further noted with interest the support to the initiatives shared by the Executive Secretary including restoration and boosting private investment. The GEF has started to do this through the Non-Grant Instrument (NGI) program, recognizing the need that these efforts will need to be complemented by changes in policies such as land tenure rights, concessions schemes and finding options that can create asset classes that are safe.

17. Chizuru Aoki of the GEF Secretariat, in agreeing that land is an integrator and foundation for green recovery and building back better, also noted that this is the opportune time to identify concrete issues and actions across the MEAs with and beyond the Rio Conventions to advance the agenda, putting environment at the centre of recovery efforts.

18. In terms of Communication, the GEF Secretariat welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the joint campaign spearheaded by UNCCD. Furthermore, Claude Gascon and Robert Bisset of the GEF Secretariat indicated there is also a good opportunity to produce one unified statement centered around building back better, that will benefit all Conventions. This unified statement can be translated into action related to MEAs, GGW, restoration among others, putting environment at the centre. Melchiade Bukuru of the UNCCD Secretariat highlighted the foundational role of land, and the potential for UNCCD to work with other Conventions to unite efforts around land now increasingly seen as the meeting point of other GEF focal areas.

19. There was consensus around the fact that 2021 is the opportune time to take advantage of this initiative, as all COPs will take place next year, other large events and initiatives such as the beginning of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and the IUCN Congress and plans for recovery will be solidified.

Agenda Item 3 Senior Staff Discussion

Status and Scope of GEF-7 programming

20. Ulrich Apel of the GEF Secretariat presented the Land Degradation Focal area programming update with key highlights including – 69 percent of the LD resources programmed to date, projects are in line with LDN and there are an increasing number of projects including drought-smart sustainable land management activities; all Enabling Activities have been committed of which they include support to the Drought Agenda, LDN, as well the Global Support Program. Finally, the Focal area is on track to meet most of the GEF Core Indicator targets related to land with, with the target on area of land restored already achieved.

21. Comments and questions from the meeting participants included the timeline for approval of the Drought Enabling Activity (EA), the performance of the other focal areas in relation to Land focal area and a note that reporting is important for reporting purposes, but is also important to use reporting for real time decision making. It was also noted that there is an opportunity to look at synergies of integrated land use planning with the chemicals and sustainable cities agendas.

22. Jean-Marc Sinnassamy, of the GEF Secretariat highlighted the importance of EAs. The GEF started to finance the EAs since the GEF-5 funding cycle, which has been a game changer to increase the rate (in GEF-5) and the quality of reporting (in GEF-6). By the next CRIC, it is recommended to frame the EAs for the next reporting cycle, including the country umbrella projects, the global support projects, and the potential thematic projects.

23. The GEF Secretariat noted in their reply that the UNCCD and FAO should have a response on the Drought EA within a few weeks. Additionally, the average utilization for the portfolio is 62 percent with all expected to be 100 percent by the end of the replenishment given that there is no shortfall expected. It was further highlighted that the GEF Secretariat is encouraging a more systemic approach for the next replenishment. The Secretariat will need UNCCD's support to request a larger replenishment across all the focal areas, as they are integrated and so all will stand to benefit.

COP 15 planning and expectations

24. Louise Baker of UNCCD Secretariat indicated that the date of the COP has not yet been decided, but it is likely to be towards the end of the year. It was also noted that it is important that we convey the same message to the Parties about the pandemic.

25. In terms of the Agenda for the COP, this is also to be finalized. It is possible that it will include discussions on health, drought, which will also come up in the CRIC discussions. On drought, it was mentioned that it is important to think about the political push of what is needed versus the financing which is available.

26. Other considerations for the Agenda, are related to issues on developing pipeline of bankable projects across the entire land agenda for the varying donors including GEF and GCF; technology transfer; discussions on incentives, subsidies and taxation which have been frequent and was mentioned in relation to the Global Mechanism's role as an anchor agency for the track on Nature Positive Production for the 2021 Food Systems Summit. In addition, the Global Mechanism is awaiting the outcome of the forthcoming G20 Heads of Government meeting in November where the G20 Restoration Initiative will be discussed. This will present an opportunity for the G20 to converge around the restoration agenda.

27. Chizuru Aoki of the GEF Secretariat noted that technology transfer is an area for further discussions that could take place between the Secretariats to be informed by similar efforts under UNFCCC and GEF's support. CBD is also discussing moving in this direction. On the topic of policies, taxation, and perverse incentives, these are of particular interest to the GEF, and merit further discussion and determination on how they can be reflected in programming.

28. Participants discussed that the GEF-8 replenishment process will be different as there will be no face to face meetings for a foreseeable future, COPs have been delayed and by the end of next year the replenishment process should be near completion. Resource availability may be affected and the process will likely be different, so there will be a need to make a case linked to the pandemic.

Drought and conclusion of COP-mandated Intergovernmental Working Group

29. Daniel Tsegai of the UNCCD Secretariat shared that the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) on drought was established at COP, with clear terms of references to develop a strategy on drought that is concrete and long lasting, focusing on issues such as drought risk, vulnerability and resilience. The IWG is looking at how they can make drought more inclusive, de-risking investment on drought, conducting vulnerability and impact assessments, enhancing monitoring and early warning systems and mechanisms of capacity building. One of the challenges highlighted in many of National Drought Plans developed by country parties, is that intersectoral coordination is missing on policy, only when drought becomes a national emergency do all sectors become involved. The aim of the IWG is to prepare an Interim Report for the CRIC and subsequently provide recommendations for decision at COP 15. It was further noted that drought has become the fifth pillar for UNCCD and is central in the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030, and GEF could play a critical role as a catalytic funding partner.

30. In terms of the COP 15, the Secretariat anticipates that the Parties will expect something significant and actionable recommendations from the IWG, with implementation high on the agenda of countries.

31. The GEF Secretariat indicated that the drought agenda, in particular for the GEF, needs to be looked at as an integrated problem with integrated solutions. In this regard, experts need to look at the relationship between land degradation and drought, not just drought as a climatic issue.

December 2020 Council and CCD engagement

32. The GEF Secretariat noted that the Council Meeting will be held virtually during the week of December 7, 2020, with three-hour sessions per day. There will be a session on Relations with Conventions which will cover one full year of activities undertaken by the Conventions. The means of engagement with the Convention Secretariats during this session is to be finalized. Additionally, it was noted that there will be no MEA Dialogue, but bilateral meetings will be organized as needed.

33. The UNCCD representatives underscored the importance of having the Executive Secretaries of the conventions take part and be accorded opportunities to make statements in person or via video in the December 2020 Council.

Conclusions and Next Steps

34. Tina Birmpili, the newly appointed UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary, outlined the key conclusions around the following seven points.

- i. There is an opportunity to link **restoration and large-scale land programs** to COVID and post-COVID lessons and solutions. Initiatives that we can capitalize on include G20 Restoration initiative and the India initiative. Connected to this is the need for bankable projects and building the capacity of stakeholders. The Global Mechanism has an important role in support Parties in this regard.
- ii. Additionally, we need to look at **large initiatives such as the GGW** and how we can do more at a different scale, and replicate and develop similar initiatives in other regions such as Latin America and Asia.
- iii. **Drought** is an important issue for the Convention, and we need to ensure that it is looked at from an integrated lens, in synergy with other environmental issues.
- iv. **Land tenure** and the potential connection to the private sector was also highlighted as an important issue to tackle going forward, and the need to disaggregate the building blocks for this. The issue touches on gender and equity, in particular women's access to technology and finance.
- v. **Integrated land use planning**, in particular the urban-rural pressures was also highlighted as an area where there is a need to further define land tenure and what it means across the three Rio Conventions.

- vi. Through **strategic communications** we need to focus on two issues in particular; to change the narrative of the Sahel, and have a unified message on COVID and green recovery, which can stream into the next GEF replenishment and the COP.
- vii. The need to think more about how to take advantage of **GEF Enabling Activities** and utilize the remainder of GEF-7 resources for the benefit of the Parties was also agreed, including the need to inform parties during the governance process as a part of the CRIC. In relation to the GEF-8 process, it will also be important to remember that donors will be pushed from different directions to support many processes linked to green recovery and the build back better agenda.

35. Chizuru Aoki of the GEF Secretariat reiterated that engaging with the UNCCD Secretariat, the COPs and all the Conventions that the GEF serves is very important for the GEF and this is what makes the GEF unique. She also stated the GEF is ready to further discuss the proposed series of regional land tenure workshops with UNCCD and other MEAs. The GEF is committed to strong collaboration with the UNCCD, with the view that land is an integrator/foundation and nature-based solutions can be promising options also for all Conventions. The GEF encourages collaborative work across the MEAs that can benefit all as a whole.