Editorial

In mid-November, the twenty-first meeting of the Committee to Review Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21) will convene in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Although civil society participation is likely to be very limited, Drynet will be present, with a delegation of at least thirteen from eleven member CSOs on four continents.

At the CRIC, the Parties will inform each other about the implementation of the Convention and the COP decisions. It is not a decision-making meeting of the UNCCD, but an intercessional one (i.e. between two COPs) that will shape the agenda that will subsequently be considered by COP 16 in 2024. In this way, the CRIC discussions provide guidelines and proposals for decision-making at the next COP.

At the CRIC plenary sessions, the Parties will review the contributions from regional preparatory meetings, monitor the implementation of the Convention and review the implementation of voluntary targets for land degradation neutrality. Financial flows to implement the Convention will be reported on by the UNCCD Secretariat.

Attention will also be given to actions “on the ground” linked to the implementation of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and restoration practices that contribute to the well-being of ecosystems; the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, and the establishment of systems for sharing information and knowledge on best practices and approaches to drought management. In addition, policy frameworks and thematic issues related to sand and dust storms, land tenure, gender equality and drought will be discussed.

The reporting system used by the UNCCD in the current reporting cycle is PRAIS 4. The data are voluntarily submitted by countries via online forms and are used to produce the preliminary analysis reports that will be examined at the CRIC. 115 of 197 countries have submitted their reports on SDG 15.3, which corresponds with 56% of the total global land area. At a time when global ecosystems are collapsing under the combined pressure of expansion of mining, agriculture, industries, infrastructure and human settlements and climate change, it is important to critically reflect on whether the range of the reported land and the outputs of the PRAIS system are an accurate reflection of what is taking place in countries and globally. If they are not, all the investment in reporting might be of value only to prop up illusions about SLM.

An intergovernmental working group (IWG) is overseeing the consultants who are designing and carrying out a mid-term evaluation of the UNCCD's 2018-2030 strategy. This IWG will hold its second of 3 scheduled meetings in Samarkand during the CRIC, and consultations with the Parties and other relevant organizations will be launched at an evening event at CRIC21. Drynet’s Manon Albagnac serves as one of two CSO Observers on the IWG, along with current CSO Panel Chair Charles Balogoun Oyeoussi. These observers can provide the wider CSO community with insights into what is being planned, as well as an opportunity to contribute our perspectives. Information regarding the working group can be accessed online: https://www.unccd.int/convention/governance/ad-hoc-intersessional-groups/iwg-mte

Drynet is uniquely positioned to contribute to the processes of the UNCCD. Although our network and its members are merely observers in the process, the structure of the UNCCD and its culture of inclusion provide opportunities for civil society to make a real difference. Starting next year, the GEF-supported project Strengthening Civil Society’s Role in Achieving...
*Land Degradation Neutrality* will provide additional opportunities for civil society to shape the UNCCD agenda.

We are a global network that is in touch with the realities of dryland communities. We must self-critically ask ourselves what is needed to enable us to make a positive contribution to the UNCCD. Former Drynet Chair Patrice Burger has long fought for us to be regarded as “speaking partners” by Parties and agencies so that we can provide positive critique, share experiences from the field and insert sound ideas and possible solutions. For this, we must be reliable and authoritative colleagues, and not merely repeat slogans or score cheap points of argument. We must build sound relationships with all players in the UNCCD family.

The CRIC provides Drynet with a unique opportunity to achieve closer partnerships. Let us use it optimally and shine in Samarkand!

**A Drynet Contribution to the Debate on Agroecology and the UNCCD**

On Monday 30th Ana di Pangracio, CSO Panel member for LAC and Drynet Board member organised and facilitated a webinar for the LAC UNCCD CSO network to share experiences and explore the opportunities for advancing the agroecology agenda within the UNCCD.

Other Drynet members contributing were Miguel Angel Crespo of Probioma, Paulo Pedro de Carvalho of CAATINGA and Drynet Coordinator Noel Oettle.

The webinar got down to business with a talk by Miguel, who pointed out how important biodiversity is as a fundamental part of agriculture. One way to retain and restore biodiversity in productive tropical farming systems is analogue forestry. Analog forestry provides an alternative to “slash and burn” agriculture in the Amazon basin by creating multi-storied, productive agroforestry production systems that emulate the diversity of the natural forest. This creates spaces for other species to flourish in the farming system and thus increases biodiversity and resilience.
In Bolivia 528,000 farmers have changed their production systems to agroecology, resulting in a reduction of 455,871 kgs or litres in the use of toxic agrochemical products. 67 varieties of open-pollinated, non-GMO corn are propagated by the farmers, as well as are wealth of other crops including soya and quinoa. A seed bank has been established for 60 agroecologically produced crops.

During the COVID pandemic movement of people and goods in and out of indigenous communities was severely restricted, and at this time there was a great boom in agroecological production as people realised how important self-sufficiency and circular economies are.

Currently, more than 40 different agroecological products are being sold in markets, using the seal for agroecological products that was adopted 8 years ago by the national platform.

Carlos Morias of Centro Sabiá (a sister organisation of CAATINGA) explained how 27 million people live in the Caatinga, which is a unique Brazilian Biome that is home to 50% of the peasant farmers of the country. In the past 30 years, NGOs have built more than 1 million water storage tanks with and for small-scale farmers. He explained “We looked at the region with a new perspective and did not focus on the narrative of poverty and lack of education, but rather started with the knowledge and resilience of the people, introducing social technologies that belong to everyone.

Change does not just happen on its own: we believe that agroecology should address all three aspects of the ecological, the socio-economic, and the political. We have been implementing a huge plan that is spreading throughout the country, and we look critically at which aspects of the agroecological approach are not working well and then address the challenges at the right level. The economic independence of women is a great driver of change.”

Over time, in response to global climate change, rainfall in the Caatinga has drastically reduced by more than 40%, while at the same time, the ability of the soil to absorb water has been greatly reduced.
Paulo from CAATINGA spoke of how the organisation works with farmers to develop new technologies. Water management is crucial in this environment. They have developed an integrated greywater management system at the household level which is sufficient to irrigate a small garden. The water produced by the system is filtered through pebbles, gravel, sand, and finally, sawdust or dry grass, providing clear water. In some cases, larger systems are set up for communities that work together.

Paulo Pedro explained that in Brazil, the ANA, or National Articulation of Agroecology, has been developing a communication and political advocacy campaign to make agroecology better known and defended by the population and to make it more important for the political agenda. This campaign currently has the slogan: "Agroecology in People’s Mouths"

The Brazilian colleagues shared a video illustrating the approach that they support: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0eu4z3Gxasv
Science and the UNCCD

By Association CARI

Experts from the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification met in Montpellier (France) from 11 to 15 September. The SPI members continued their work on two topics: (1) sustainable land use systems, and (2) aridity trends, projections, and impacts.

Their ultimate outcomes will be technical reports including science-based recommendations for the next Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2024.

During the week, CARI Project Officer and Drynet Board member, Manon Albagnac was elected as an alternate observer for CSOs on the SPI. Until UNCCD COP16 she will support the current observer, Ms Jiajia Luo (China Green Foundation) before assuming the role of CSO Observer to the SPI for the biennium 2024-2026.

The role of the CSO Observer is to follow the meetings and work of the SPI to keep civil society organizations regularly informed, and also to facilitate consultation with CSOs on the SPI’s areas of work.

Updates on the SPI work program

Objective 1 of the SPI program aims at guiding countries with land use planning, based on the sustainable land use systems approach. This approach is defined as a comprehensive and integrated framework that encourages stakeholders’ engagement, promotes long-term integrated thinking, and facilitates monitoring and iterative evaluation of land use decisions. With the support of a consultant, the SPI members will determine criteria, features and governance schemes of sustainable land use systems and identify the needs of countries for support in facilitating sustainable land use systems.

The SPI is currently reviewing scientific literature on land use systems, to identify case studies that could be included in the report. CSOs are called to contribute by providing scientific articles and grey literature on sustainable land use systems they support.

Regarding Objective 2 of the SPI program, the group mainly works on science-based evidence on the historical regional and global aridity trends and future projections that may contribute to expanding drylands and affected populations and the adaptation approaches that reduce risks to environmental, social, and economic systems.

Dialogue between the SPI and CSOs

On 12 September 2023, UNCCD co-hosted a workshop with the French Scientific Committee on Desertification, to allow exchange and debate between the SPI members, civil society organizations and policymakers.

Patrice Burger*, President of the CARI, delivered a speech during the session focused on strengthening the dialogue between Science, Policy and Society.

Patrice Burger’s main messages are summarized here:

- This meeting is an illustration of this dialogue. In the context of the Convention in France, for more than two decades there has been close cooperation between dedicated civil society organizations via CARI, the Desertification Working Group (GTD), scientists via the Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD) and the responsible French public authorities (French Development Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Environment). In this manner, the implementation of the UNCCD is monitored.
- The participation of civil society is a crucial element in combating desertification at the local level of territories and populations. CSOs contribute both scientifically and technically and also provide unequalled expertise from the ground. In this respect, we cannot
emphasize enough that CSOs and the SPI should work together regularly, particularly at COPs, CRICs and other events.

- As reflected in the last report from the countries implementing the Convention, land degradation continues to accelerate globally. This means that the efforts undertaken within the framework of the Convention have not been adequate to reverse the trend and that we have collectively failed. One of the weak points is that Land Degradation Neutrality does not appear to be an objective in most sectoral policies relating to water, agriculture and forestry. There is an urgent need to invest in this area, and the SPI must play a leading role in informing and persuading the Parties and donors.

We need to be clear-sighted and aware that the current global environmental catastrophe is entirely man-made and that, if viable solutions are to be found, people must also be fully involved. This in turn requires an informed understanding of how people and their societies operate and can change the way they use and abuse the planet's natural resources. In this context, the SPI must acquire the skills needed to deal with the complexity of the human side of the equation. It is therefore necessary for the SPI to also include development experts with expertise in gender; human rights; indigenous peoples; behavioral and transformative change; sociology; anthropology; governance; and political science.

You can access Patrice Burger’s full speech.

*Patrice Burger is president and founder of CARI (France). This year CARI is celebrating its 25th anniversary: 25 years of commitment to the drylands.

**Global EbA Fund Application: Summary and Process**

*By Dr. Dharmender Nadimetla, Program Director, Gram Bharati Samiti, India*

In response to a call for project submissions by the Global EbA Fund, several Drynet members collaborated to generate a joint proposal. Gram Bharati Samiti (India) served as the lead applicant for the Drynet Consortium and applied for funding with DYDF (Bangladesh), AJESH (Cameroon), and ENDA (Senegal) as co-applicants. The process had three stages: Eligibility Screening, Due Diligence and Financial Capacity, and Application Form.

Online meetings, email communication, and WhatsApp conversations were used in developing the proposal. The partners decided on the title, “Towards supporting Community Ecosystem-based Adaptation (CEbA) Processes - Conservation, sustainable use and restoration of degraded lands and territories”. The proposed project will be implemented over 24 months, and require a budget of USD 407,352.

The strategic objective of the project will be to build awareness, capacity and understanding of the critical role of natural assets in underpinning resilience, expand the knowledge and evidence base to help make the case for working with nature, and enhance institutional capacities for mainstreaming EbA within the identified target groups, using their Traditional Knowledge, adaptation strategies and technologies. In line with the Global EbA Fund guidelines, the project is designed around two action pillars: Education, Capacity Building and Skills Development, and Traditional Knowledge and Technologies.

Read here for more information.
Some of the work of Drynet Members

Since 2022, Tenmiya (Mauritania) and CARI (France) have been implementing the project “Oasis Women, Builders of Development and Creators of Value” (PROFOB), in partnership with the El Velah association. This project, funded by the European Union, aims to support the emancipation of women in the oases of Atar and Tawaz in the Adrar region.

The PROFOB partners have set themselves two main objectives:

- To increase female leadership in the oases of the communes of Atar and Tawaz.
- To increase the economy of the oases in the communes of Atar and Tawaz based on individual and collective initiatives led by women.

To achieve these objectives, the partners are engaged in the production of knowledge (gender-oriented sector diagnostics, etc.) while also providing technical and financial support for women’s entrepreneurial initiatives. Awareness-raising and capacity-building are undertaken for local stakeholders (women entrepreneurs, members of cooperatives, and local authorities).

During the first year of the project, the project partners carried out studies and diagnostics to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing the region, with a particular focus on the role of women in governance and local industries. Portraits of women and video clips will be published to illustrate inspiring stories for women and local actors.

The project is now entering a more practical phase, to support 10 young women entrepreneurs and 30 cooperatives in their enterprises. In addition, the project partners are already in contact with the local authorities in the communes of Atar and Tawaz, who will be sensitized on gender issues.
News and Updates

**Drynet Annual Assembly**

The 2023 Drynet Annual Assembly will take place on Friday 17th November between 17:00 and 19:00 (local time, UTC +5) at a venue in Samarkand (to be confirmed).

Members who are not physically present to participate on line. Please save the date: the link for the meeting will be circulated with the agenda.

**Inter-platform Dialogue between Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ organizations engaged with the UNCCD and the CFS**

Held online on 6 October 2023, this Dialogue was made possible by the combined efforts of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the CSO Panel of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and Drynet.

It provided a space for discussions, sharing perspectives, and finding common ground in the areas of:

1. Exchange on history, achievements, and challenges in effective and meaningful participation
2. Exchange on common priorities
3. Proposals for improvements towards the future

The Dialogue was well-attended and generated thought-provoking insights into experiences within the networks of engaging with decision-makers in the context of multi-lateral agreements to introduce changes in global governance, such as the introduction of the VGGTs in the text of the UNCCD COP.

**Strengthening Civil Society's Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality**

Following approval of a joint Drynet/ IUCN project concept by the GEF last year, in the first half of 2023 two workshops were held to develop the full project proposal. It was approved in June this year and is due to be launched in January 2024.

IUCN will serve as the GEF Implementing Agency for the project, while Both ENDS, who are IUCN and Drynet members, will serve as Executing Agencies. The Drynet Coordinator based at Indigo will serve as the Technical Lead for the project.

To prepare for the launch, IUCN and Drynet will host a Side Event on Friday 17th November 2023 at 13:00 in MET 13 to inform CRIC delegates and observers about the project and its planned activities (see below).

A preparatory meeting will also be convened on Saturday 18th November 2023 in Samarkand. This meeting will serve to kickstart consultations among the project’s Steering Committee and project partners to provide clear direction for the project’s first months of implementation.
Drynet Side Events

Drynet at CRIC 21

CSO Panel Key Messages

The UNCCD CSO Panel, including Ana di Pangracio of FARN will host a side event at 13:00 - 15:00 on Monday 13th November in MET 13 to share the key messages that the Panel would like to convey to the delegates at the CRIC.

Gender Caucus

A side event to explore how we can contribute to an inclusive, pro-active Gender Caucus within the UNCCD in order to achieve our common goals. The event will take place between 13:00 - 15:00 on Wednesday 15th November in MET 11, and speakers will include Ana di Pangracio (FARN), Verona Collantes (Senior Gender Specialist, GEF), Juliet-Grace Luwedde (UNCCD Youth Caucus) and Karen Bernard (Gender Policy Officer, UNCCD)

Invest in resilience: what agroecology has to offer to public policies combatting drought

A side event hosted by CARI will also take place at 13:00 - 15:00 on Wednesday 15th November in MET 10. It will share insights into how agroecology increases the resilience of farming systems to the impacts of drought. Speakers will include a French Ministry representative, CARI, Drynet and IRD (Research and Development Institution)

Strengthening Civil Society’s Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality

IUCN and Drynet will host a Side Event at CRIC 21 on Friday 17th November 2023 at 13:00 in MET 13 to inform CRIC delegates and observers about the project and its planned activities. Speakers will include Bora Masumuko (IUCN), Noel Oettle (Indigo/ Drynet Coordinator), Nathalie van Haren (Both ENDS), Marcos Montoiro (UNCCD) and Ana di Pangracio (FARN).

Drynet at the UNFCCC

Both ENDS, together with AFSA, PELUM, and IED Afrique will present a side event entitled “Agroecology as a Pathway for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation” at the UNFCCC COP in Dubai. The side event aims to showcase agroecology as a sustainable approach to food systems and adaptation to the climate crisis in Africa and make a case for access to climate finance for local communities.

It will take place on Wednesday 06 December 2023 from 15:00 to 16:30 in SE Room 8.

Both ENDS are also co-hosting the Side Event "Gender-just climate policy and finance: from barriers to actionable solutions" with CASA, FCAM and NTFP-EP. The event will shine a spotlight on current climate finance and decision-making processes, which are hardly accessible for women-led community-based organizations, even though they are leading holistic gender-just climate solutions. This session will discuss concrete recommendations on how to ensure gender-just climate policy and finance.

It will take place on Sunday 03 December 2023 from 13:15 to 14:45 in SE Room 7.