

## Eritrea Participates at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

According to its official document, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was established in 1994 to protect and restore our land and ensure a safer, just, and more sustainable future. It is also to be noted that the UNCCD is the only legally binding framework set up to address desertification and the effects of drought. As of now, there are 197 Parties to the Convention, including 196

country Parties and the European Union. The Convention – based on the principles of participation, partnership and decentralization – is a multilateral commitment to mitigate the impact of land degradation, and protect our land so we can provide food, water, shelter and economic opportunity to all people.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) was established by the Convention

as its main decision-making body. It is made up of governments and organizations such as the European Union and is responsible for guiding the Convention so that it can respond to global challenges and national needs.

COP is mandated to review reports submitted by the Parties detailing how they are generally striving to fight Desertification, Land degradation and drought;



and specifically carrying out their Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN); drought initiative and other interrelated commitments and make recommendations on the basis of these reports. It also has the power to make amendments to the Convention or to adopt new annexes (documents which specify how the Convention will be implemented), such as additional regional implementation annexes. The COP has been meeting biennially since 2001, and has held 14 sessions. The UNCCD COP15 was convened from 9-20 May 2022 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. A delegation of experts from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) headed by Mr. Michael Berhane, Director of Natural Resources and Irrigation Development Division at the Agricultural Extension Department (AED), participated at the Conference. The Public Relations Division of the MoA has conducted an interview with Mr. Michael with regards to Eritrea's engagement in the UNCCD COPs.

**Question: When did Eritrea become a member of this convention?**

**Answer:** UNCCD was established in 1994. The convention's core mission is fighting land degradation, drought and desertification. For obvious reason, these issues are among major challenges of Eritrea in its journey towards ensuring safe and nutritious food; and for that matter Eritrea ratified its membership in 1996.

**Q: What were the main agendas of the COP 15?**

**A:** Usually, the UNCCD COPs include a number of events within them. Prior to the official session, regional consultations of affected country Parties of the Convention's regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America



Mr. Michael Berhane

and the Caribbean, Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern European country Parties in preparation to COP15 was convened. Then, A High-level opening ceremony, including a Heads of States Summit, round tables and interactive dialogue sessions among ministers and other high-ranking officials usually take place on the first days of the COP.

Then after, negotiations that focus on the work of the fifteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 15), the twentieth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 20), and to other major issues were also included in the programme of work of the COP.

Side events and experience sharing among country parties and different development partners were also important components of the COPs.

**Q: Are there any targets set by this convention to fight drought, land degradation and desertification (DLDD)**

**A:** Dynamic targets were set globally and at national level by country parties. For instance, according to the UNCCD consolidated target, globally, around one billion hectares of degraded land is expected to be restored until 2030.

In September 2015, the global community agreed on "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets (United Nations, 2015). Target 15.3 aims to "combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world by 2030."

The twelfth session of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to

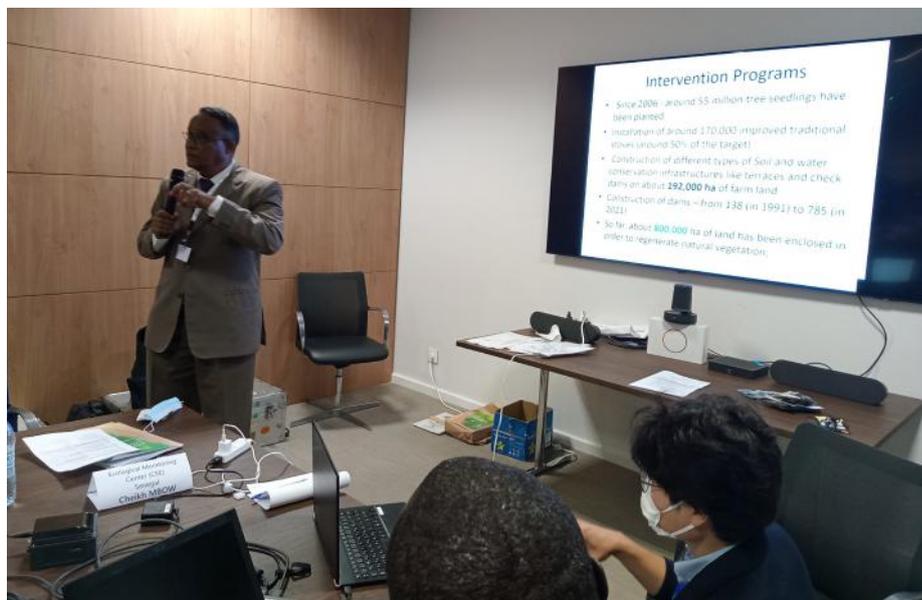
Combat Desertification (UNCCD), held in Ankara, Turkey in October 2015, endorsed SDG target 15.3 and the concept of land degradation neutrality (LDN) as a strong vehicle for driving the implementation of the Convention. It invited all UNCCD country Parties to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN and requested UNCCD bodies to provide “guidance for formulating national LDN targets and initiatives” and to facilitate “the use of the UNCCD indicator framework as a contribution to the monitoring, evaluation and communication of progress towards the national LDN targets”.

**Q: How is Eritrea rated in its performance within the convention?**

**A:** Eritrea, like many other countries, has set voluntary land degradation neutrality targets. However, the set targets are not only meant for the sake of the country’s commitment to global agendas but to rehabilitate its degraded land to boost agricultural productivity.

The country has shown its commitment in achieving the strategies and objectives of UNCCD. To mention but a few; The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has aligned the National Action Program (NAP) with the UNCCD 10-Years Strategy (2008-2018). This ensured the government’s commitment and compliance with the UNCCD’s decision (3/COP.8 of 2007) that states affected country parties “to align their action programmes and other relevant implementation activities relating to the convention with the strategy by, inter alia, addressing the outcomes under the five operational objectives.”

Hence, the Government of the State of Eritrea (GoSE) reaffirms NAP as a working document for the past five years to meet the



national and international UNCCD obligations in implementing the provision of the Convention.

Moreover, the Government adopted Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN-TSP) voluntarily because it forms part of its continued efforts for sustainable land management.

According to the study of the LDN-TSP conducted in 2017, a total of 1,190,553 hectares of land were identified as hot spot areas (that seek immediate action) which is 9.77 % of the total land mass of Eritrea.

As an overall national target, the country is working to achieve LDN by 2030 as compared to 2015 (no net loss). In addition, the country has set a target to fully accomplish dissemination of improved traditional stoves (Adhanet) before 2030.

All in all, even though a lot has yet to be done, the country has made remarkable progress in land restoration and reclamation that lead towards achieving the LDN.

**Q: Let’s come back to Eritrea’s participation in the COPs and other UNCCD events. How does the country engage in the events?**

**A:** Eritrea is always pro-active in executing its duties including contribution fees, participation in the UNCCD events, sharing its experiences in different platforms and so on. For instance, it is one of the few countries that regularly shares and presents its experience in different platforms. During the COPs, Eritrea has been participating in audio-visual exhibitions that display good practices and country experience with regard to land restoration and reclamation programs as well as drought mitigation activities.

Generally, the country participates in the regular meetings of UNCCD including the annual meeting of the Committee for Review and Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), bi-annual meeting of the Committee for Science and Technology (CST) and bi-annual meeting of Conference of Parties (COP) biannual meeting.

**Q: What were the main deliberations of the UNCCD COP 15?**

**A:** The following are among the key outcomes of COP-15; Restore one billion hectares of degraded land between now and 2030; boost drought preparedness, response and resilience; future-proof land use against the impacts of climate

change; tackle escalating disaster risks such as sand and dust storms; address desertification and land degradation as drivers of forced migration and displacement; strengthen land right and gender equality as important enablers for effective land restoration, and promote decent land-based jobs for youth and strength youth participation in the UNCCD process.

**Q: What's unique with COP 15?**

**A:** COP 15 was the first official physical meeting of the UNCCD country parties after the covid-19 pandemic. The COP was attended by more than 2000 participants from 196 country parties and the European Union.

A number of heads of states, ministers and high level countries' representatives participated in this important event.

The African group played an important role to include issues that are relevant to the continent in the UNCCD deliberations. However, there is still a need for a coordinated effort to address the issue of drought.

When it comes to Eritrea's participation, the country's delegation was gender-sensitive with two young males and two young females, composed of directors and experts from the Ministry of Agriculture and a member from Eritrea's UN permanent representative in New York.

The demise of the long serving Eritrea's National Focal Point (NFP) to the UNCCD, the late Heruy Asghedom, just few days before the kick-off of the COP 15 was also specially noted and was observed with one-minute of silence in two platforms namely; the

African Working Group Session, and African Initiative to Combat Desertification (AI-CD).

Moreover, the delegation got a chance to celebrate Eritrea's Independence with the small but very vibrant Eritrean community in Ivory Coast.

**Q: If you have final words to deliver?**

**A:** Fighting land degradation, drought, desertification and biodiversity loss are still among the top priorities of the Government of the State of Eritrea. Hence, we have to seriously address these national and global issues and their interrelated problems so that we play our role in creating a safer, just, and more sustainable planet.

Thank you Mr. Michael



A minute of silence for the late Heruy Asghedom in the AI-CD Platform

**Editor-In-Chief**

Ermias Solomon, Director of Public Relations Division

Email:- [ersohab@gmail.com](mailto:ersohab@gmail.com), Tel: 182225/ 07143877, P.O.Box 1048, Asmara, Eritrea

**Assistant-Editor-In-Chief**

Filmawit Measho, Public Relations Division, Information and Protocol Unit Head

Email:- [fili.megeb@gmail.com](mailto:fili.megeb@gmail.com), Tel: 182225/ 07182662, Asmara, Eritrea

**Editorial Board**

Hara Weldetsae, Shushan Okbay, Andemeskel Berhe

Photo credit: Aradom Bereket, Habteab Andemariam, Thomas Mehari