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First Open Dialogue Session of COP10

A fruitful dialogue between CSOs and Parties during the first ODS of COP10

A unique feature of the UNCCD is the commitment to promoting civil society participation, and the Open Dialogue Sessions (ODS) where CSOs and Parties to the UNCCD meet during the COP is an occasion to discuss and dialogue on the experience, contributions and burning concerns of civil society. In 2009, decision DEC5/COP9 contributed to improving the scheduling of the ODS in order for CSOs to provide timely input into the agenda of the COP.

Friday 14 October the first ODS of COP10 took place. The ODS was successful judging both from the rich presentations of NGOs from all continents and from the reactions by the country Parties discussing best practices and sustainable land management to the benefit of the UNCCD as well as strengthening civil society.

It was with pleasure that the CSOs contributed to this exercise of environmental democracy to illustrate the

diversity of civil society interventions, considering: gender and youth, education, the link between CSOs and the local community, participatory approach, action research, and sustainable agriculture.

The first presentation, made by Mr Ko, Jaekwang from Korea presented examples from East Asia, focusing on an example of reforestation in Inner Mongolia, China; the Great Green Wall of 16 km to stop sandy winds, and other examples, before he denounced the inefficiency of intergovernmental agencies and called on Parties to support an alliance of NGOs for improved efficiency of NGO participation in the UNCCD process. Another important message delivered to the Parties was that tree-planting and support to communities in North Korea is the most peaceful way of help to the people of North Korea. And he emphasized that this should not only be supported by South Korea.

Mrs. Halima Simani from Algeria proceeded to present a case study of the alarming situation in Algeria where the

disappearance of the Alfa-grass from the pastoral steppes is directly linked to land degradation. The plant provides both as fodder in pastoral areas and through fixing the soil, and it is also valued for paper production. After presenting a project on sustainable management of Alfa-grass in the El Bayadh region, Mrs. Simani called on Parties to both take preventive actions and to rehabilitate important natural resources such as the Alfa-grass.

Cecila Leal Franco from the NGO Fundacion Ambiental Oasis de Vida in Colombia drew attention to the links between imbalances in the ecosystem, and poverty and migration, making the case for sustainable land management that also recognizes the value of traditional knowledge through employing action research methodology. She stressed the need for collaboration with local communities as well as the need for immediate and sustainable action to ensure that this is also achievable on a larger scale and with longer duration.

Maria Bivol from BIOS in Moldova added the gender dimension putting forward the complementarity of men and women and the crucial role played of women and youths. She particularly encouraged decision makers to recognize women and youths as invaluable agents in ensuring sustainable land management, and stressed that a respectful attitude must be shown for youth and women participations.

Célia Barbero from IPADE in Spain called

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on Parties to realize the gravity of desertification and the devastating consequences land degradation has on peoples' lives. After illustrating IPADE's information work and capacity building efforts, she urged Parties to see the Rio conventions as complimentary and ensure policy coherence.

The last presenter Subrata Bhattacharyya from the NGO Gramin Vikas Trust in India presented an example of integrated farming combining agro-forestry, vermicomposting, drip-irrigation, horticulture, livestock management, and aqua culture. He stressed that farming is a complex integrated system with many components that need to be taken into account and that the involvement of farmers in the process, using participatory methodology, is the best method for an up-take plan.

The floor was then opened to Parties asking the following questions: Are we really conscious of the urgency of the situation? Is the inertia of the UNCCD acceptable? What resources are invested? And what is the level of political commitment in this process?

All of the Parties intervening recognized the value of civil society participation, noting CSOs proximity to local communities, but also for the importance of their actions in the implementation of the convention. This is precisely why the UNCCD should reinforce its engagement with civil society. In this regard, some of the speakers called for a more precise accreditation procedure, and a clear and transparent financing of CSO participation to ensure that every region in the World could be better represented.

Reinforcement of the link between CSOs and national and international focal points was also demanded for. Active and strong cooperation with civil society would both respond to the goodwill of the CSO alliance and add energy and vigor to the implementation of the UNCCD.

CSOs representation in the UNCCD process

Already in the opening statement CSOs made it explicitly clear that their representation in UNCCD process is diminishing and the trend shows that their representation is not felt important in the decision making of UNCCD while contemplating on the mitigating process of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). Whereas, the fact is that CSOs are only making effort on the ground to fight against the global threat of land degradation and loss of food security. The Conference is only conferring sanctity to the Parties who frame legislations and appear as source of funding. It is forgotten that CSOs are also to be considered as Party since they are passionately and tirelessly working with the



communities to address not only the land degradation but also livelihood issues taking into account the vulnerability context in which decisions about livelihood strategies take place.

CSOs do feel that in the light of the decisions of UNCCD, the convention is deprived of having the real situation on the ground related to production losses due to land degradation and rising level of poverty. The statistics generated out of the governmental process may not indicate the reality of crisis. Only CSOs have the taste of real crisis of land degradation, shocks and vulnerabilities emanating out of it. How sustainable land management helps to ensure the productivity of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and hydrology can only be showcased by CSOs since they are closely linked with the implementation and dissemination of the same. The decision on skeleton representation of CSOs is only depriving the community who should be at the centre stage through CSOs while dealing with the DLDD. The discussion in the Conventions on the issue of DLDD, more or less, routine in nature and a show of lackluster since there is no content sprouted from the grassroots and no sharing of experiential learning having gained from the ground reality.

It is oft-repeatedly said that resource constraint is the main reason for not having adequate representation of the CSOs in the conventions. The resource mobilization for the UNCCD process is dependent on a complex financial mechanism which has lot of ramifications also. However, conventions are resourced by definite participation of donor country parties. Is it a fact that the donor countries are not willing to provide fund for inviting CSOs in the conventions? If this is in reality then we urge upon to request the donor country parties to revisit their decision since without adequate representation of the CSOs the objective of

News 2011 shows that the participation of civil society has become an issue of global society in the profound changes currently taking place.

For too long words have not been followed by effective participation.

The UNCCD is a multilateral framework in which the will and the principles of participation are given prominence; the decisions of COP8 and COP9 on the subject are a significant advance in terms of implementation and efficiency.

combating desertification and saving the earth could not be achieved.

Who can save the earth from degradation- the indigenous people and local community who are nearest to the soil. CSOs are the organic linkages with the indigenous people since they act as a catalyst to enable the socially and economically disadvantaged rural communities to improve their livelihoods on sustainable basis through addressing the issues of DLDD. CSOs know only that conserving the natural resources amidst poor is more challenging. So, we request the country parties to take up the issue of increased participation of the CSOs during the convention to have more concerted interventions on combating desertification.



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Civil Society Organization
Network to Combat
Desertification