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## **Summary of the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UNCCD CSO Panel (15 October 2020)**

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Panel got together online for its 9<sup>th</sup> meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

The meeting was chaired by Nahid Naghizadeh and covered the following: identifying of a lead person from the Panel for collaboration with UNCCD CBM team and another lead to be involved in the GLO steering committee, election of NFPs and regional coordinators for the African region, communication matters with CSOs, adjustments in the Panel's work program and VGGT technical guide.

During the meeting, the Panel assigned Pablo Motta as a lead person to collaborate with the UNCCD CBM team and set up a training course for the CSOs. The Panel also designated Manon Albagnac as the lead person to participate in the Global Land Outlook's steering committee meetings.

Panel work program was discussed and some assignments within the work packages were agreed to be adjusted for the avoidance of duplicity.

Collaboration with other UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations were touched upon.

Congratulations letter on behalf of all accredited CSOs to the newly appointed Deputy Executive Secretary, Ms. Tina Birmbili was prepared by the Panel to be sent in the next few days.

Election of national CSO focal points and sub-regional coordinators for the African region was proposed by the Panel member. The initiative aimed to bring together the CSOs across the African continent and to enhance the possibilities of the CSOs to get involved in the activities of the UNCCD through their national focal points and regional coordinators and improve the possibilities to gain access to financial support. Currently there are approximately 350 CSOs involved including organizations accredited to the UNCCD (180 CSOs) and the UNEP. Information is usually shared among these organizations via a WhatsApp group.

The following concerns were raised about this initiative by CSO Panel members and Secretariat:

- a) There are approximately 180 African CSOs accredited with the UNCCD Convention, and there is no way to ascertain that all the accredited organizations are part of this initiative. An initiative involving CSOs that are not accredited with the Convention is not acceptable as this might lead to the work of the CSOs within Convention being steered by CSOs not officially accredited.
- b) Nominating focal points without elections is risky, it is important that decisions are made democratically and using a transparent process involving all accredited CSOs.
- c) The last point of concern was the nomination of sub-regional CSO focal points which is not endorsed by Conference of the Parties. In this regard, it was suggested to review the terms of reference outlined for this initiative and to ensure that the initiative respects the mandate given to the CSOs by the Parties.

The Panel discussed the details of the initiative and didn't endorse it, raising the concern that information may not been shared via the accredited CSOs mailing lists but through a WhatsApp group, which may not include all accredited CSOs. The Panel reminded that all information regarding the accredited CSOs should be shared through the UNCCD CSO mailing lists. The Panel requested to be copied in emails sent through the email lists to keep the rest of the panel informed about ongoing activities.



- d) The Panel requested to receive the terms of reference for the CSO national focal points and sub-regional coordinators as well as a brief on the process. The Panel stressed the importance to ensure that these TORs do not conflict with the roles and responsibilities given to the Panel.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned discussions and concerns raised at the meeting, it was agreed to withdraw the intention to nominate sub-regional focal points and to reconsider the possibility in the future to engage with the elections of CSO national focal points.

The Panel agreed to include a standing item on the agenda of each one of their meetings aiming at reporting on the activities undertaken by each one of the Panel members at since the last meeting.

It was also suggested that the CSO Newsletter covers news from every region equally.

The Panel stated that the CSOs have requested to be updated about the discussions of the VGGT technical guide. Due to the remaining uncertainties with the Covid-19 situation and the unlikelihood of a physical meeting, the possibility of a virtual meeting was being currently considered.

The Panel requested the Secretariat about their involvement in the process for the preparation of the technical guide with FAO to fulfill the requirements stated by decision 26/COP14. It was mentioned that some CSO participants attended several multi-stakeholder meetings organized by FAO, however they have not been invited for any additional events. The Secretariat will raise the Panel's concern with FAO and the interest of the CSOs accredited to the UNCCD to continue to be involved in the preparation of the technical guide and inform about the ongoing work.