

Integrated Drought Management Programme

Meeting Summary of Virtual Exchange

"From COP17 to COP18 and Beyond: Finding Common Ground on Drought"

14 October 2026, 13:00-14:30 CEST

The discussion focused on the implications of UNCCD COP17 for global drought governance and on how to maintain momentum toward COP18 despite the lack of agreement on a formal drought framework. Participants broadly agreed that drought is an escalating global challenge requiring stronger coordination, investment, and integrated, proactive management.

COP17 Outcomes and the Road to COP18

Participants emphasized that COP17 should be viewed as a step forward rather than a setback. While Parties did not reach consensus on a new global drought instrument, they secured drought's continuing place on the negotiating agenda. [Decision 16/COP.17](#) explicitly establishes drought as a standalone agenda item at COP18 and every ordinary session thereafter, ensuring dedicated consideration beyond the current negotiations. The decision also requests participatory consultations before COP18, subject to available resources, to advance discussions on proactive drought management at all levels.

Speakers highlighted several initiatives already underway, including the International Drought Resilience Observatory (IDRO), the Drought Resilience Investment Facility (DRIF), and the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership (RGDRP). The general view was that implementation efforts should continue while discussions on governance evolve.

Governance: Broad Agreement on Goals, Less Agreement on Form

The central debate concerned whether the international community should eventually adopt a stronger global drought governance mechanism.

Many participants argued that existing efforts are too fragmented and that countries need stronger support, financing, and coordination. At the same time, there appeared to be substantial common ground on the substance of drought management, including the need for:

- National drought plans.
- Early warning systems.
- Anticipatory action and preparedness.
- Improved financing and investment.
- Greater international cooperation.

The primary disagreement remains over the legal and institutional form such cooperation should take. While many participants supported stronger international coordination on drought, views differed on whether this should eventually take the form of a legally binding instrument, a voluntary framework, or a strengthened set of existing UNCCD mechanisms. Several speakers noted that the debate appears to be less about the need for action itself and more about how responsibilities, commitments, and implementation support should be structured at the international level.

Open question: What type of international drought governance arrangement, if any, can attract consensus at COP18?

Implementation and Financing Challenges

A recurring theme was the gap between planning and implementation. Participants noted that many countries have strategies and technical tools but lack the financial, institutional, or technical capacity needed for effective action.

Several speakers stressed the need for:

- Easier access to drought finance.
- Stronger national institutions and coordination mechanisms.
- Greater support for implementation rather than additional planning processes.

Chat contributions from participants reinforced the importance of framing drought as a global development, food security, and economic issue rather than a narrowly environmental one. Participants noted that drought affects livelihoods, economic growth, food systems, and social stability, and argued that this broader framing is necessary to mobilize political support, cross-sectoral action, and investment.

Open questions:

- How can countries, particularly those with limited capacity, better access drought-related finance?
- How can public and private investment in drought resilience be scaled up?

Evidence, Data, and Learning

Participants supported using the period before COP18 to gather evidence from country experiences and practical case studies. The objective is to better understand what enables successful drought resilience and where implementation barriers persist.

There was also broad agreement on the importance of improving data sharing, monitoring, forecasting, and early warning systems. Resources and tools shared in the chat included drought monitoring platforms, communities of practice, and datasets that can support reporting and decision-making.

Open questions:

- How can existing data initiatives and indicators be better aligned?
- How can early warning information be translated more effectively into early action?

Regional Cooperation and Practical Examples

Participants highlighted regional cooperation as an area where progress can be made regardless of the outcome of governance negotiations. Examples from the Western Balkans, Cameroon, India, and other regions illustrated the value of transboundary cooperation, watershed management, ecosystem restoration, community engagement, and locally led drought resilience initiatives.

These examples were presented as evidence that proactive drought management can deliver tangible social, environmental, and economic benefits.

Key Takeaway

The meeting revealed broad consensus on the need for stronger drought resilience, improved financing, better data and early warning systems, and more proactive management. However, the major unresolved issue remains whether and how these objectives should be supported by a new international drought governance framework. Participants agreed that the period leading to COP18 should focus on consultation, evidence gathering, implementation, and building common ground around practical solutions.