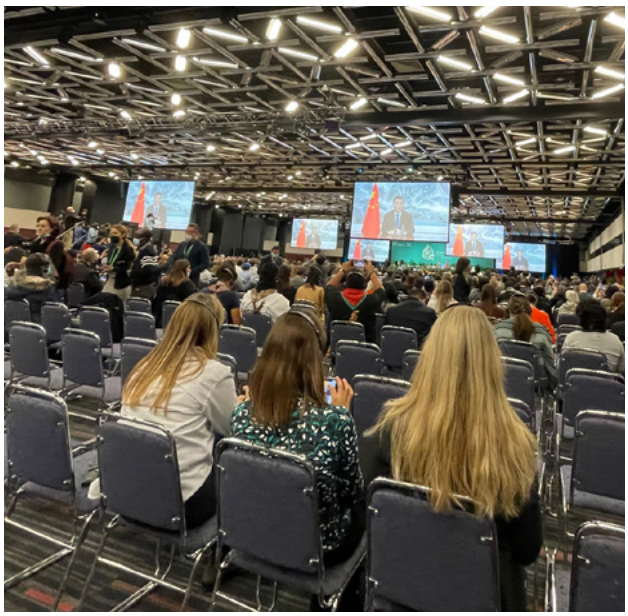
SOIL CARBON NOTES / EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

# 2022, THE YEAR OF THE 3 RIO CONVENTIONS' COPS ON DESERTIFICATION, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED IN TERMS OF CONSIDERING SOILS AND SOIL HEALTH?



For several years now, the international "4 per 1000" initiative has been promoting the recognition of soil health as a central leverage for concrete actions to meet the multiple challenges of climate change, desertification, biodiversity erosion and food security. In this respect, 2022 was a special year with the concomitant Conferences of the Parties of the three major United Nations Conventions resulting from the 1992 Rio Summit, namely the UNFCCC (COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh in November), the UNCCD (COP 15 in Abidjan in May) and the UNCBD (COP 15 in Montreal for Kunming in December).

What is the outcome of these three COPs in 2022 in terms of considering soils, soil health, and more broadly agriculture (particularly in the context of the post-UN Summit on Food Systems)?

## COP 15 UNCCD IN ABIDJAN (REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE)

The protection and restoration of land is the core mandate of the UNCCD, recognizing soil, in line with water and biodiversity, as a central resource of the land. Due to this holistic approach to land, the commitments made by the parties under the convention directly or indirectly benefit soil and soil health, even when it is not always explicitly mentioned.

During COP 15, there were some new and reinforced commitments to

- Accelerating the restoration of 1 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030
- Building resilience to drought
- Combatting sand and dust storms
- Strengthening the synergies between the three Rio Conventions, including complementarities in the implementation through nature-based solutions and target-setting at the nation level.

Also in light of the antecedent Food Systems Summit, the final Land, Life, Legacy Declaration called upon parties and stakeholder to move towards sustainable food systems and an open dialogue session took place on Agroecological approaches and regenerative agricultural practices as solution to positive transformative change, achieving Land Degradation Neutrality and addressing Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought issues.

## COP 27 UNFCCC IN SHARM EL SHEIKH (EGYPT)

The cover decision, i.e. the Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan, still does not mention soils or land at all, but it addresses agriculture at two levels:

- It explicitly refers to water several times (the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring water systems and related ecosystems), nature (the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems, including forests, and terrestrial and marine systems that act as sinks and reservoirs for greenhouse gases), forests (in the context of nature-based solutions and systems-based approaches)
- It welcomes the establishment of the four-year Sharm El Sheikh Joint Work on Implemention of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security.

Ultimately, more negotiation time was dedicated to agriculture than to any other issue, which stresses the changing level of recognition for the central role of the agricultural sector for climate action. The outcome was a new mandate for the subsidiary bodies to implement the outcomes of the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture and to extend the discussion on central issues as part of the effort to integrate the transformation of the sector more fully into the mechanisms of the UNFCCC.

In the decision, i.a., by adopting the conclusions of the workshops under the foregoing Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, the COP officially recognised:

- The key role of farmers (including smallholder farmers and pastoralists) in land management, as well as their willingness to apply sustainable land management approaches, and the importance to consider them as key agents of change in policy responses.
- Soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility issues, as well as sustainable soil and water management, are context-specific and need to be addressed in a holistic and inclusive manner to realise the full potential of increased productivity in contributing to food security, adaptation, and adaptation co-benefits while enhancing carbon sinks.
- The importance of soil and nutrient management practices including the use of organic fertilisers for climate-resilient and sustainable food production systems.
- The vulnerability of livestock management systems to the impacts of climate change, but also the high adaptive capacities and resilience of sustainably managed livestock systems, as well as their role in carbon management, including their capacity to enhance carbon sinks in pastures and rangelands through sustainable production.
- The implementation of sustainable approaches can deliver multiple benefits to society such as improved water quality, increased biodiversity and increased soil organic matter.

We will follow up on the process with great interest, as, under the previous mandate, it has shown its usefulness in gaining recognition of the subjects that we advocate for.

## COP 15 UNCBD IN MONTREAL (CANADA) FOR KUNMING (CHINA)

The final communiqué reports an ambitious and unprecedented agreement, which many compare to the 2015 Paris Agreement of the UNFCCC. Among the key issues, parties agreed on by 2030

- Effective protection of at least 30% of land, inland waters, coastal areas and oceans, especially areas of importance for biodiversity
- Halving food loss and waste
- Reducing by half excess nutrients and the overall risk posed by pesticides and hazardous chemicals
- Reduce or redirect biodiversity-damaging subsidies by at least US$500 billion per year.

The Kunming-Montreal Framework for Global Biodiversity is articulated in four goals, the second of which concerns the sustainable use and management of biodiversity and nature's contribution to people. It contains 23 targets, the most relevant to agriculture are:

- Target 7, which concerns the reduction of excess nutrients and pesticides.
- Target 8, which aims to reduce the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem approaches.
- Target 10, which reads: "Ensure that the area under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry is managed sustainably, in particular through the sustainable use of biodiversity, including through a substantial increase in the application of biodiversity-friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification, agroecology and other innovative approaches contributing to the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems and to food security, the conservation and restoration of biodiversity and the maintenance of nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services. "

- Target 11, which is the only one to refer to "soil health", reads: "Restore, maintain and enhance nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, such as air, water and climate regulation, soil health, pollination and disease risk reduction, as well as protection against natural hazards and disasters, through nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, for the benefit of all people and nature."

## EPILOGUE:

So what has emerged from these three COPs in 2022 with regard to the consideration of soil health, soils, and more broadly agriculture (particularly in the context of the post-UN Summit on Food Systems)?

As the first Rio Conventions COP happening in 2022, UNCCD COP15 sent out a strong call about the importance of healthy and productive land and soils for strengthening the synergies between the conventions, especially when it comes to implementation. Interestingly, though, media coverage and recognition of the Convention's proceedings in the other two conventions lacks behind, stressing that the central role of land and soils is still not reflected in common perception and political action.

Besides the promising decision, to continue the joint work on agriculture, in Sharm El Sheikh, there were many pavilions and side events addressing the issue of agriculture, food security, soils and soil health, both in the Blue and in the Green Zone of COP27. It is likely that this is a sign of even greater attention for the topic in the future, as further driven by the resolution on soil health, co-designed by the Coalition for Action on Soil Health (CA4SH) and the "4 per 1000" Initiative, and introduced during COP 27.

It is clear to many actors that agriculture is a unique economic sector in terms of its impact on soils and soil health, as it is the only economic sector that is part of the emissions problem, but also part of the solution through carbon sequestration in soils.

Finally, it should be noted that while in the framework of the UNFCCC, agriculture is increasingly considered to be a key element of the solution, thanks to soils, in the framework of the UNCBD, though, i.e. in Montreal, agriculture is pointed out as being directly (conventional agriculture) or indirectly (via deforestation) responsible for the massive erosion of global biodiversity. There is still a long way to go for a global and unanimous recognition of agriculture, through agroecology and the role of healthy living soils, as a solution to our main challenges.

In 2023, even though only COP 28 of the UNFCCC will be meeting, we will continue our advocacy for soil health and carbon sequestration through agroecology.