



# Service Report

## Brahma Kumaris at UNCCD COP 15

### Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (the Ivory Coast)



The UNCCD COP15 (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification – 15th Conference of Parties) theme, ‘Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity’, is a call to action to ensure land, the lifeline on this planet, continues to benefit present and future generations. It aims to bring together leaders from governments, the private sector, civil society and other key stakeholders from around the world to drive progress in the future sustainable management of one of our most precious commodities: land.



Outside of the formal negotiations, COP15 will feature the Rio Conventions Pavilion, Business Forum, Gender Caucus, Youth Forum, as well as interactive dialogues and high-level roundtables that will bring together stakeholders from public and private sectors, civil society and academia to find solutions to some of the most pressing environmental problems we face today. Many side events will take place, addressing various challenges related to drought, desertification, land degradation & restoration.



The Brahma Kumaris have been accredited to the UNCCD as an observer organisation. We are registered as a CSO (Civil Society Organisation).



The BK delegation arrived on 6th & 7th May. Members of the delegation: Sister Pratibha Patel (Kenya), John Ndiritu (South Africa), Aneta Loj (Poland), Grace Lopez-Charles (Ghana), and arriving on 12th May Sonja Ohlsson (Denmark).

On arrival in Abidjan, we received a warm and cordial welcome from the Keshwani and Makhija families.



Registration at the venue, Sofitel Hotel, was on 8th May followed by an opening session of the CSO groups. In this meeting we were introduced to all CSO Thematic Working Groups, out of which we will contribute to roundtable interventions on Land Restoration; Policy framework issues, such as Drought and Gender; Open dialogue sessions on Agroecology and Migration, Conflict, Land Tenure. It was a pleasure to reconnect with colleagues after more than two years.



Our BK participation will include a side event, “Legacy of Natural Living” co-organised with different partners on 17th May and attendance to various side events.

We are organising outside programmes for COP15 friends, local BKs and the local Hindu community.

## 9th May

### First official day of the conference

We attended the daily briefing of the CSO and submitted our commitment to contribute in the different working groups already mentioned.



Sr Grace worked in the CSO group on the statement for Land Restoration – Future-proofing.



BK delegates meet Sadhguru

Side event - 'Save Soil' campaign initiated by Sadhguru.

Sadhguru informed the delegates about the motivating factors and the aims of this campaign before opening the floor to questions. He believes that soil is in reality a complex living system that has been degraded over the decades by inappropriate farming methods. He informed that, as a living system, the required organic content of the soil should range from 3-6% but this has been depleted to less than 1% leading to an alarming loss in the ability of soil to sustain farming. The 'Save Soil' campaign is aimed at creating a global awareness of this loss and enable the formulation of policies by Governments and actions on farming land to reverse this trend.

For more details on this campaign can be found at Global Movement to #SaveSoil ([consciousplanet.org](http://consciousplanet.org)).

The Gender Caucus is a space for advancing gender equality within the implementation of the Convention. It focuses on the four priorities for action of the Gender Action Plan, which was adopted by Parties at COP13:

- Women's participation in decisions taken during the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to implement the UNCCD
- Integrating women's economic empowerment in UNCCD implementation activities to eradicate their extreme poverty
- Strengthening women's land rights and access to resources
- Enhancing women's access to improved knowledge and technologies that relate to effective UNCCD implementation



It was very significant and unique to have the Gender Caucus on the first day of the Conference. Her Excellency, the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire Dominique Ouattara hosted the session.





Several speakers spoke on the differentiated impacts of land degradation on women and men and the discriminatory laws and social norms that undercut women's access to the transformative power of land. The Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations Amina Mohammed stated that there cannot be gender equality without women's right to own land. Other speakers shared their views, including the First Lady of DR Congo, Denise Tshisekedi.





We met with The Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations Amina Mohammed after the Gender Caucus meeting.



## 10th May

On a daily basis, CSO ensures their voice is heard through preparation and presentation of statements for all the opening ceremonies, roundtables and interactive dialogues of the parties.



We worked in the CSO working group preparing the first open dialogue session on “Lands we use, Lands we protect, Lands we own – Opportunities & solutions to equity and equality.” Here CSOs are able to present their statements and interact with parties, which is a unique formula among all Rio Conventions.

High-level opening ceremony with the Prime Minister of Cote d'Ivoire addressing dignitaries from around the world. Sr Prathiba was in attendance. She met with the Executive Secretary of UNCCD, Mr Ibrahim Thiaw; the honourable Minister of Labour & Employment and Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, Mr Bhupender Yadav.



A Happy Encounter ...  
Sr Prathiba meets with Mr Wilson  
Tonkei, PA-Cabinet Secretary,  
Ministry of Environment & Forestry,  
Kenya.



In the evening we all attended The Sadhguru “Save Soil” programme in a theatre in Abidjan, where a few thousand people were in attendance. It was quite a lively programme with Sadhguru giving information on soil restoration through policy generation and incentives to farmers to increase organic content in soil.



Bhupender Yadav, Union Cabinet Minister of Labour and Employment, Environment, Forest and Climate Change in the Government of India, gave the opening address.





Before the "Save Soil event.



During the programme

# 11th May

COP opening session attended by Aneta and Grace.

Opening statement by the president of the conference of parties at its fourteenth session, Mr Bhupendra Yadav.



Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, Alain-Richard Donwahi, COP 15 President, and Bhupender Yadav, COP 14 President

There were organisational matters and the election of the president of the conference of parties at its fifteenth session Mr Alain Richard Donwahi, who made a statement thanking the President of Cote d'Ivoire for having faith in him. The executive secretary of UNCCD, Mr Ibrahim Thiaw, also made a statement.

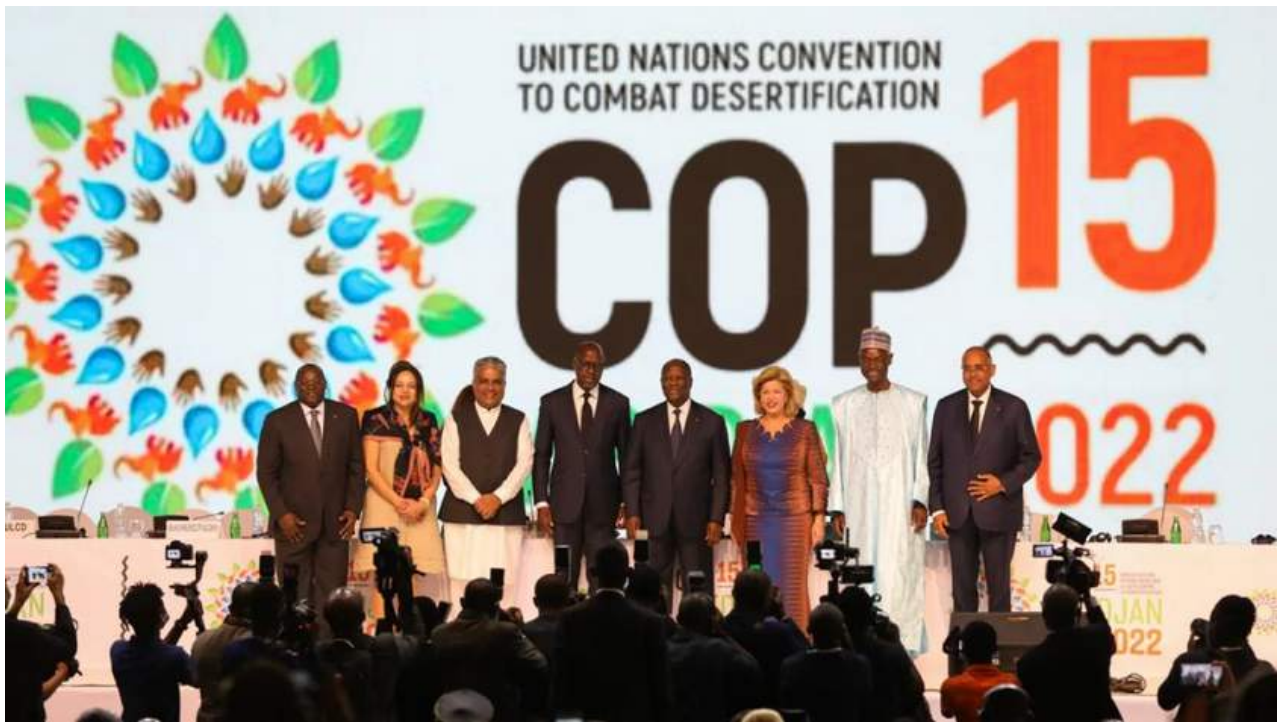
There was also election of officers other than the president of cop Intergovernment organisations, civil society organisations and representatives from the private sector were accredited.



Dominique Ouattara, First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, and Alassane Ouattara, President of Côte d'Ivoire, join dignitaries for the opening ceremony



On behalf of the host country, President Alassane Ouattara called for COP 15 to be an event for action, partnership and solidarity by the international community for those in drought distress, saying progress has been undermined by climate change, security and economic crises, with negative consequences for food, energy and society, consequently increasing migration flows.



Dignitaries who attended the opening ceremony

## Drought Day at the Rio Pavilion

John Ndiritu attended



Recalling a devastating drought he witnessed as a child, UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw opens "Drought Day" at the Rio Conventions Pavilion.



Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity



Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)



Oulimata Sarr, UN Women Regional Director for West and Central Africa



Abdoulaye Sene, Executive Secretary of the 9th World Water Forum



Patricia Kombo, UNCCD Land Hero, Kenya



Ibrahima Diong, UN Assistant Secretary General & Director  
General of African Risk Capacity Group

## Meeting up with old acquaintances



Dharmendeer Nadimetla, GBS India; Marcos Montoiro, NGO and Civil Society Liaison Officer; Aneta Loj Brahma Kumaris delegate; Kusum, GBS India





Aneta and Grace Bonding with friends



We had our vegan pack lunch at the hotel's poolside

# 12th May

## Food Day at the Rio Pavilion

Seeds of Change for a Nature-Positive Future.



"We really need to rethink the way we produce and the way we consume."  
UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw and CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema open Food Day at the Rio Conventions Pavilion.



Grace attended the morning sessions

Session 1: Land tenure rights for food security, climate resilience,  
and ecosystem restoration;



Susan Gardner, UNEP; Motsomi Maletjane, UNFCCC; Tarja Halonen, UNCCD Land Ambassador and former President of Finland



Melisa Ho, WWF US; Tony Simons, CIFOR-ICRAF; Maria Helena Semedo, FAO; Juan Lucas Restrepo, CGIAR; Jorge Laguna Celis, One Planet Network

the impact of women and Indigenous groups on food systems transformation;



Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, l'Association des femmes peules et peuples autochtones du Tchad, and Violet Shivutse, Shibuye Community Workers, Kenya

Session 5: Shifting consumption and diets for healthy people and a healthy planet.



**Amadou Sall; Nicole Harari, University of Bern; Lorena Aguilar, UNCCD; Patricia Kombo, UNCCD Land Hero, Kenya; Sharon Myambura Ruthia, Women4Biodiversity**



Rockaya Aidara, UNCCD



The open dialogue session with CSOs was held to discuss 'lands we use, lands we protect, lands we own - opportunities and solutions to equity and equality'



Ndiritu, Aneta and Grace attended.



Sabina Gasimova, International Dialogue for  
Environmental Action

The session opened with participants paying posthumous homage to 'land heroes' Khadija Catherine Razavi, Bhawani Shanker Kusum, and Marc Bied-Charreton, followed by a moment of silence.



Patrice Burger, CARI France



Dharmendeer Nadimetla,  
GBS India



Nahid Naghizadeh,  
Senior Researcher, Member of  
the Board, CENESTA and the  
CSO panel member for Asia



Delegates observe a moment of silence to recognise 'land heroes who died



Ismaël Allahi Bizo, Youth Association for the Environment and Civic Education, for African CSOs



Ruth Spencer, Zero Waste, Antigua and Barbuda, representing Latin America and the Caribbean CSOs



Oscar Soria, Avaaz, for International NGOs

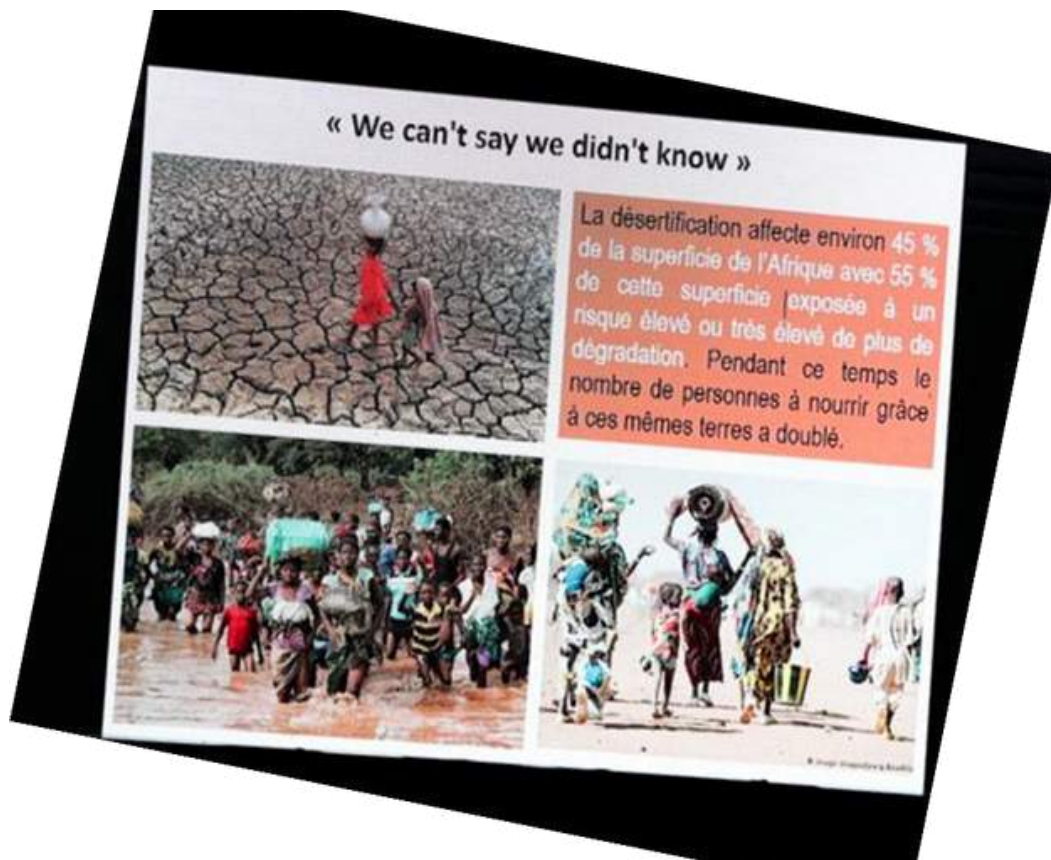




Hemantha Withanage, the  
Centre for  
Environmental Justice,  
representing Asian CSOs



Beth Roberts, Landesa, for  
Western European and Others  
Group CSOs



A presentation highlights that 'we cannot say we didn't know'  
about the impact of land degradation on local communities



As Brahma Kumaris was part of the CSO working group planning of the first Open Dialogue Statements, it was agreed that the session will end with a 10 minutes Meditation as our contribution to the dialogue. Aneta guided the delegates through a peaceful and powerful experience of silence and reflection.

