

AGROECOLOGY

CONNECTING PEOPLE, LAND, CLIMATE, AND BIODIVERSITY

REFLECTIONS FROM THE 2024 COPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ROAD TO BELÉM

- The outcomes of the 2024 Rio Convention COPs underscore the necessity to enhance and utilize **synergies among the Conventions**. Agroecology is a promising approach that simultaneously contributes to the goals of the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD. By adopting a **systemic approach** to food system transformation based on agroecological principles, countries can achieve multiple socio-ecological and economic benefits while fulfilling their commitments to the Rio Conventions.
- At the COP level, there are significant entry points for strengthening agroecology within the negotiation processes of the three Conventions. These include indicators under the **GBF Monitoring Framework for the CBD**, the **UNFCCC Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)**, and practical approaches to implement the UNCCD Strategic Objectives, as well as processes involving **Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLC)**, especially under the CBD and UNCCD. Additional opportunities may arise to foster agroecological approaches within various COP initiatives on food systems.
- We present six concrete recommendations to leverage partnerships and collaborative efforts to anchor agroecology within the Conventions. Strengthening agroecological approaches in **national policies** and implementations will generate further evidence for agroecology and simultaneously contribute to the **mobilization of funding**. This includes fostering an inclusive multistakeholder approach to ensure the participation of underrepresented communities, women, IPLC, youth, smallholder farmers and pastoralists in these processes.

1. Introduction

In response to the growing challenges of biodiversity loss, land degradation, climate impacts, and food insecurity, agroecology has emerged as one of several promising transformational approaches to fostering sustainable agriculture and food systems (GIZ, 2024a).

Agroecology is anchored in a set of 13 principles and 10 elements, defined respectively by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Agroecology is defined as:

- Being a “dynamic and systemic approach that addresses the ecological, socio-cultural, technological, economic and political dimensions of food systems – from production to consumption – and provides guidance on their future development” (GIZ, 2024b, p. 6).
- Addressing food and nutrition security through the holistic integration of various measures: strengthening the use of natural processes, promoting closed production cycles, reducing the use of purchased inputs, and emphasizing the importance of local knowledge and participatory processes to develop knowledge and practice through experience in addition to conventional scientific methods (HLPE, 2019).
- Highlighting equity, inclusion and justice as social values, and empowering people and communities to promote human rights and stewardship of the environment (FAO, 2018).

Agroecological approaches simultaneously contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the three Rio Conventions: protecting biological diversity, addressing climate change, and combating land degradation (GIZ, 2024a; Hartmann et al., 2024). This brief, written shortly after all three Conventions held their Conferences of the Parties (COPs) in late 2024¹, aims to highlight policy advancements related to agroecology in the official decisions of the Rio Conventions up to 2023. It also reflects on the progress made during the 2024 conferences in recognizing and supporting agroecology as a sustainability solution and provides recommendations to support the promotion of agroecology as an approach to strengthening synergies between the three Conventions and transforming our agriculture and food systems. These recommendations focus on the road towards COP30 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Belém in November 2025.

¹CBD’s COP16 in Colombia, UNFCCC’s COP29 in Azerbaijan and UNCCD’s COP 16 in Saudi Arabia.



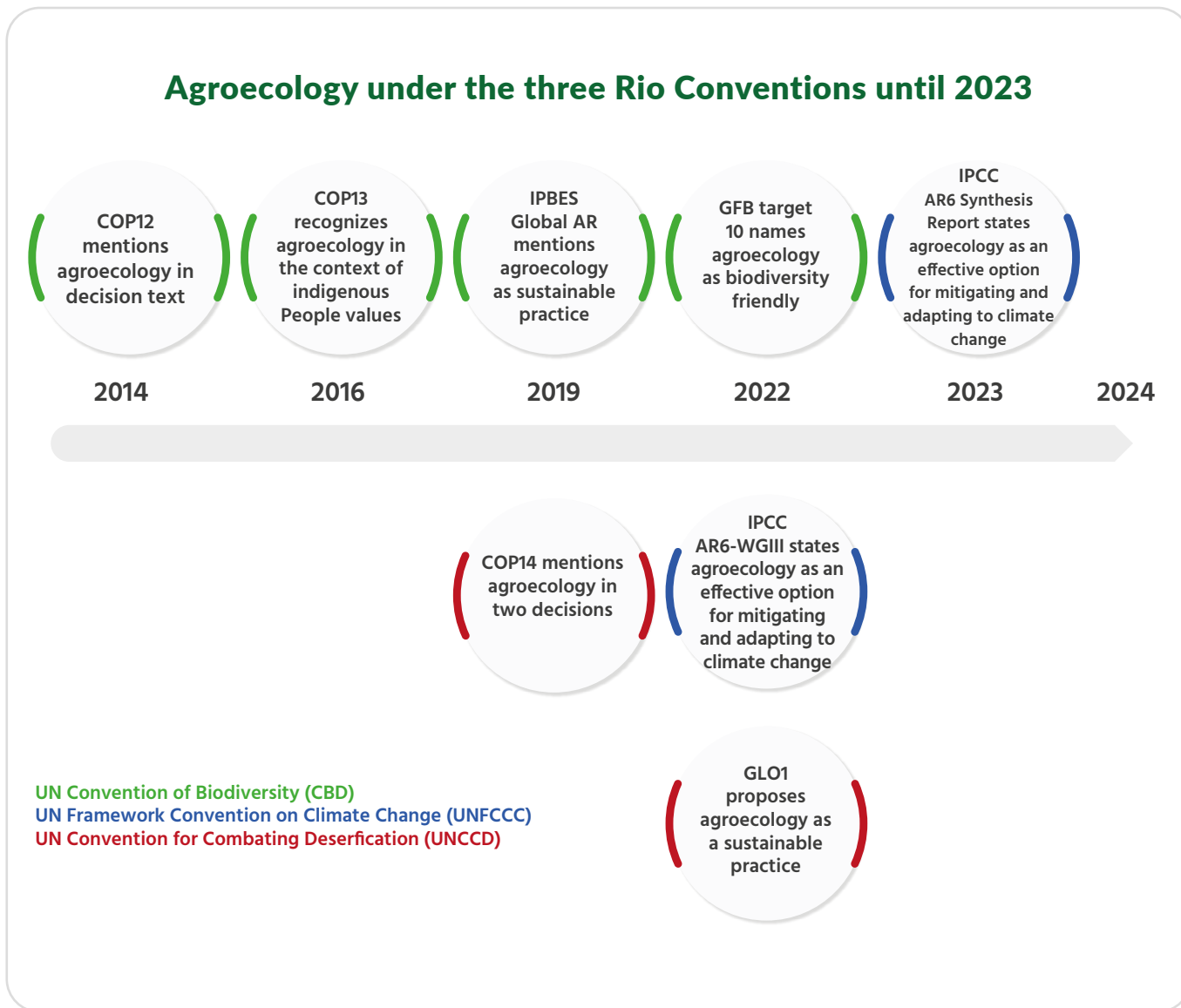
2. Agroecology: the lead-up to Cali, Baku, and Riyadh

In recent years, agroecology has increasingly been referenced in the official decision texts, reports, and other outputs under the three Rio Conventions, although to varying extents (see Figure 1 in Derkimba et al., 2024).

- The **UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** first mentioned agroecology in its COP12 report in 2014, highlighting it as a promising solution to support biodiversity conservation (CBD, 2014). Two years later, at COP13, agroecology was recognized in the context of valuing Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' (IPLC) knowledge (CBD, 2016). The 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) identifies agroecology as a biodiversity-friendly and innovative approach, underlining its contribution to "the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems, and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem services and functions" (GBF target 10, CBD, 2022). This recognition is one of the clearest and most comprehensive within existing decision texts of all Rio Conventions. In 2019, the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), also mentioned agroecology as a sustainable agricultural practice (IPBES, 2019).
- The **UNFCCC** has not referenced agroecology in any official decision texts. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has stated in its latest Assessment Report (AR) that agroecology is an effective option for mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts (IPCC, 2022; IPCC, 2023).

- The **UN Convention for Combating Desertification (UNCCD)** mentioned agroecology in two decisions (20 and 23) at COP14 in 2019 in New Delhi (Derkimba et al., 2024). In 2022, the Global Land Outlook (GLO) highlighted the role of today’s global food systems in land degradation and proposed agroecology as a sustainable alternative to transform agriculture from a primary cause of degradation to a driver of land and soil restoration (UNCCD, 2022b).

Figure 1. Overview agroecology under the three Rio Conventions until 2023
(Own illustration based on Derkimba et al., 2024)





Agroecology Coalition

3. Reflecting on the enabling environment for agroecology, and the recognition of its role, within the 2024 Rio Convention COPs

In 2024, the role of agroecology under the three Rio Conventions garnered increased attention. This is reflected on the one hand in official decision texts, which reference agroecology, and on the other hand in the growing number of actors releasing new publications, tools, and communication resources, and organizing events within each COP. As agroecology gains momentum across the Rio Conventions, the International Agroecology Coalition² also sees a surge in visibility, attracting interest in their activities and expanding its membership. The following section highlights relevant decision texts, initiatives and supporting activities for agroecology from each of the 2024 Rio Convention COPs.

3.1. Supporting ecosystems and biodiversity – CBD COP16

CBD COP16, held in Colombia, resulted in several key outcomes that can enable agroecological transitions and enhance its role in achieving the targets set by the GBF:

- A confirmation of the close **integration of biodiversity and climate mitigation and adaptation** was achieved through a cross-convention work program aimed at enhancing cooperation and policy coherence until the next CBD COP in Armenia in 2026 (CBD, 2024a). This decision provides a strong enabling framework for agroecological transitions by emphasizing ecosystem-based approaches, recognizing IPLC knowledge systems, and highlighting the need for integrated and coherent approaches to address interconnected climate and biodiversity goals.

² The Agroecology Coalition was created in 2021 and aims to accelerate the transformation of food systems through agroecology. As of January 2025, it comprises over 280 member organisations and 52 governments.

- A dedicated strand of work was established, along with a new permanent subsidiary body focused on the traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices of IPLC in relation to biodiversity (CBD, 2024a). This recognizes **IPLC’s contributions towards the objectives of the Convention** and strengthens their role in biodiversity conservation. IPLC are at the forefront of agroecological practices, bringing invaluable traditional knowledge and sustainable practices essential for the success of agroecology. Local and Indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in agroecology, particularly in the principles of co-creation of knowledge, social values, and dietary practices.
- The inclusion of a **land tenure indicator** in the GBF Monitoring Framework represents a significant step in monitoring land use change and land tenure in the traditional territories of IPLC. It is anchored as a headline indicator, meaning Parties will be required to report on it. The indicator will monitor the situation of IPLCs’ lands and waters, as well as changes in their use. Importantly, indicator monitoring is supposed to operate in partnership with IPLC. Currently, community-based monitoring and information systems are also referenced in the decision text, along with proposed **indicators on pesticides**. The latter would contribute to reporting on GBF target 7, particularly “reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half” (GBF target 7 (b) in CBD, 2022), which aligns with the agroecological element on input reduction. However, since Parties did not approve the updated monitoring framework before COP16 was suspended, these decisions are not yet formally adopted (Forest Peoples Programme, 2024).
- Another important decision of COP16 was the creation of a fund for the fair distribution of profits from the use of genetic data from plants and animals, known as the “**Cali Fund** for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of digital sequence information”. The fund aims to enable local structures to gain access to additional funds (CBD, 2024a). Discussions on carbon-market-based biodiversity finance revealed diverging opinions, primarily due to the complexities of ecosystems and the serious negative impacts offset markets can have on IPLC and their land tenure rights (HBS, 2024).
- The **Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health** references agroecology as an example for sustainable approaches that reduce the negative effects of agriculture on biodiversity and health (CBD, 2024b).

In addition to the COP decisions, agroecology is increasingly being incorporated into **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans** (NBSAP). As of 13 February 2025, 18 out of 39 post-COP15 NBSAPs submitted to the CBD explicitly include agroecology within their national objectives (Agroecology Coalition, 2025). Furthermore, Colombia published its NBSAP, which integrates various agroecological targets and interventions, while launching its National Agroecology Strategy during COP16.

At COP16, numerous activities advocated for agroecology as a solution to biodiversity conservation. For example, the **guidance tool on agroecology** mainstreaming in NBSAPs was launched, with several countries currently interested in applying the tool to support the planning of their NBSAP (see Global Alliance for the Future of Food et al., 2024). Brazil’s Minister for Agrarian Development and Family Farming made a clear statement affirming agroecology as part of the strategy to transform food systems (Teixeira, 2024). In summary, COP16 demonstrated that agroecology is gaining momentum as a viable approach for biodiversity conservation under the CBD.

3.2. Adapting to and mitigating climate change – UNFCCC COP29

The final decision texts of COP29 do not explicitly mention agroecology; however, several results indirectly relate to agroecology and its principles. The most direct link is found in the work on the **Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)** (UNFCCC, n.d.). The initial mapping of indicators included in the COP29's negotiations features many indicators related to food systems, with several explicitly mentioning agroecology (UNFCCC, 2024a; see box below). The current list contains almost 10,000 indicators and will need to be refined and shortened. Further discussions on this matter are scheduled for the Intersessional SB62 in 2025 (Carbon Brief, 2024).

Indicators explicitly mentioning agroecology in the GGA Indicator Mapping (UNFCCC, 2024a)

- Degree of inclusion of agroecology within national food system transformation pathways, NAPs and Adaptation Communications.
- Number of municipalities and local governments engaged in food systems, agroecology transitions or just transitions for agriculture processes.
- Increased number and proportion of farmers transitioning to locally-led agroecological systems.
- Accelerated progress in repurposing all agricultural subsidies to support agroecology, agroforestry and other productive, climate resilient and nature-enhancing agriculture and food systems by 2030.
- Increased proportion/number of women farmers, currently receiving only 5% of advisory support, with access to financial (incl. grants, investment in community-managed revolving/microcredit, etc. funds, direct CVA support, etc.) and advisory support for transitions to climate-resilient agroecology and agroforestry.
- Percentage of the area managed with an agroecological approach (national or international certification).
- Number of agroecological systems.
- Percentage use of agroecological methods.
- Increase in sowing extensions with minimal soil tillage and applying vegetal covers and other agroecological techniques.
- Number of legal instruments to implement actions for agroecological crop production to reduce the toxic load and minimize the impacts of climate change, as well as for the regulation or prohibition of the agricultural use of highly toxic synthetic pesticides.
- Number of recruitment, training and support activities for agroecological or organic production for producers, nationwide.

At COP29, diverging opinions were expressed regarding the rules for the **UN carbon market** (Paris Agreement, Article 6) and its potential impacts on IPLC, particularly concerning access to land and secure land tenure rights (Carbon Brief, 2024). Further debate emerged regarding the language on **gender and climate change**, where stronger terms related to human rights and gender diversity were removed from the final decision texts. Nevertheless, COP29 reached a decision to extend the work programme on gender and maintain references to human rights in the decision text. The decision emphasizes the need to enhance access to climate finance for grassroots women's organizations and IPLC, thereby improving their participation in decision making (UNFCCC, 2024b). The next step will involve the development of a new gender action plan for adoption at COP30 to support concrete implementation. Given that participation, agency, equality, justice, and rights are core to the principles and elements of agroecology; these developments are significant processes to monitor. The decision regarding the **"Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security" (SJWA)** clarified submission modalities for its online portal (UNFCCC, 2024c). Future submissions to this portal may also include projects, initiatives or policies related to agroecology.

The COP29 Presidency, in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), launched the **"Baku Harmoniya Climate Initiative for Farmers"**. The initiative aims to highlight the relevance of agriculture, food systems, and water resources for climate action and to foster cooperation among various international initiatives and actors in the realm of climate change, agriculture, and food systems. It also collaborates with the "Food and Agriculture for Sustainable Transformation (FAST) Partnership", which was initiated at COP27.

An increasing number of national governments are recognizing the potential of agroecology and its elements to enhance climate action in their **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**. A recent review of NDCs indicated progress in the inclusion of agroecology in the updates of 146 NDCs (WWF/Climate Focus, 2024a). Nineteen updated NDCs explicitly include agroecology, compared to 15 in the last analysis conducted in 2022. Additionally, various principles of agroecology are present in the updated NDCs; for example, agroforestry measures are mentioned in 76 updated NDCs. Forty updated NDCs address post-harvest food measures, while 28 explicitly include measures to reduce food loss and waste. Equity plays a more substantial role in the updated NDCs, with 69 explicitly considering the role of IPLC (compared to 62 in 2022) and 54 explicitly mentioning the role of smallholder farmers (compared to 50 in 2022). However, the report also identifies several gaps; notably, only ten updated NDCs mention dietary shift measures (WWF/Climate Focus, 2024a). Further, a guidance on mainstreaming agroecological principles for food governance was published, to support the integration of agroecology into food systems-related policies and implementation. The guidance highlights entry points for agroecology, lists tools to monitor progress, and provides practical examples of good practices (WWF/Climate Focus, 2024b).

Additionally, the expression of interest from Tanzania and Vietnam during COP29 to join the **Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation** could leverage transformative actions based on agroecological principles, as both countries have published national policy initiatives that strongly support agroecology (Carbon, Brief 2024; Ministry of Agriculture, 2024; Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2023).

COP29 emphasized that the food community was coordinated and cohesive, maintaining momentum from COP28 in Dubai and paving the way for COP30 in Belém. This was reflected in several official side events and activities of pavilions such as the Action on Food Hub, which focused on the benefits of agroecology for countries' climate objectives, both for national commitments on mitigation and adaptation (Fegert & Fleckenstein, 2024; EIT Food, 2024).

3.3. Combating land degradation – UNCCD COP16

The UNCCD COP16 allowed for unprecedented progress for recognition of agroecology, symbolized by two direct mentions in the Riyadh political declaration and multiple direct and indirect references included in the final decisions of COP16 (UNCCD, 2024):

- A decision on the **implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Framework** requests the secretariat and the Global Mechanism to promote sustainable land management (SLM) approaches such as agroecology. Furthermore, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is invited to consider the co-benefits between SLM approaches and agroecology.
- The decision on **knowledge sharing, technology transfer and innovation** encourages Parties to support agroecological organizations and practitioners through voluntary technology transfer.
- A new decision addresses the **role of agriculture** as a primary driver of land and soil degradation, highlighting agroecology's potential to contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation while combating desertification, land degradation, and drought, and enhancing food security.
- The most comprehensive reference to agroecology in the COP16 decisions relates to the decision on improving the **implementation of objectives 1-4 of the UNCCD 2018-2030 Strategic Framework**. The decision recommends including agroecological approaches, as defined by the 10 FAO Elements and the CFS HLPE-FSN's 13 Principles of agroecology, to combat desertification and promote LDN.

An **Indigenous Peoples Caucus** was introduced as a platform to integrate Indigenous perspectives into the Convention's work, aligning with the agroecological principles of participation and co-creation of knowledge. The importance of reliable access to land and secure land rights, especially for women, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalized groups, was emphasized.

For the first time at a UNCCD COP, the COP Presidency introduced an action agenda and thematic days that included non-state actors. The official agri-food systems day featured various events on agroecology. Additionally, the launch of the **"Riyadh Action Agenda for Healthy Land and Ecosystems for People, Nature and Climate"** brought agriculture and food systems to the centre of discussions (Ambition Loop, 2024). Agroecology and the Agroecology Coalition, as a partner initiative, are mentioned in Action Area 3 of the agenda, which aims to promote sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agri-food systems.

Several publications and events underlined the interlinkages between agroecology, SLM and drought management. For example, a factsheet launched during COP16 links the agroecological principles with the intervention areas of the UNCCD strategic objectives to demonstrate how agroecology supports the implementation of the UNCCD strategy (GIZ, 2024a). Further, several briefing notes provided guidance on linking agroecology, agriculture, and food systems, and droughts with relevant negotiation streams (CARI 2024a; CARI 2024b).



4. The way forward: Action steps for agroecology on the road to Belém

The outcomes of the three COPs underscore the growing interest in agroecology as a viable solution for promoting synergies between biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and combating land degradation. Key entry points include land use planning, land tenure, and strengthening the engagement of IPLCs' within the Conventions and national processes and policies.

However, further action is needed. Based on our observations during the three COPs and discussions with stakeholders, we propose **six action steps** to pave the way for UNFCCC's COP30 in Belém:



Pursue strategic opportunities:

Engage with existing negotiation work streams and initiatives to foster agroecological approaches. Opportunities may arise within the UNCCD Riyadh Action Agenda, the UNFCCC SJWA³, the GGA, the Harmoniya Initiative and the FAST Partnership, and the CBD submission process on enhanced policy coherence across climate and biodiversity.



Engage with national governments and non-state actors:

Support efforts to mainstream transformative approaches for agriculture and food systems, including agroecology, in national planning processes and documents: NBSAPs, NDCs, National Adaptation Plans (NAP), and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets. This involves fostering coherence between national policies and strengthening the role of national focal points to enhance coordination and cost-efficient national reporting and monitoring. The upcoming NDC update in 2025 offers a concrete link to advance mainstreaming.



Develop standardized indicators:

Develop and promote standardized indicators for monitoring agroecological transitions that align with the frameworks of the CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD, while focusing on socio-economic and environmental co-benefits. Additionally, provide guidance on agroecological policy instruments to support countries in ensuring a programmatic perspective.



Explore financing mechanisms:

Analyse emerging financing mechanisms from the CBD and UNFCCC as well as other initiatives to explore how these can be utilized to promote agroecology. This includes fostering an enabling environment for funding and investment for agroecological actors on the ground.



Showcase concrete cases and economic evidence:

Identify, document, and promote case studies at sub-national and national level that illustrate the simultaneous benefits of agroecological systems for biodiversity, climate, and land degradation. Provide guidance on linking project outcomes to the goals of the three Conventions and the SDGs.



Foster an inclusive multistakeholder approach:

Ensure the active participation of underrepresented communities, including women, IPLC, youth, smallholder farmers and pastoralists in the COP processes, building on their knowledge and acknowledging their role in combatting biodiversity loss, land degradation and climate change. Leverage decisions made by the CBD and UNCCD to enhance the recognition of IPLC while interlinking those with agroecological principles that integrate their knowledge systems, practices, and participation in governance.

³ Particularly the workshops planned for SB62 and SB64 as part of the SJWA, where observers are invited to submit workshop topics and potential speakers.

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