

SBSTTA 12 HIGHLIGHTS:

MONDAY, 2 JULY 2007

On Monday, participants to the twelfth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 12) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) met in plenary to hear opening statements and address organizational matters. The Committee of the Whole then heard reports on intersessional meetings, and considered the new and emerging issue of biofuels and the review of the application of the ecosystem approach.

PLENARY

SBSTTA 12 Chair Christian Prip (Denmark) opened the meeting, welcoming its focus on: the review of the application of the ecosystem approach; the linkages between climate change and biodiversity conservation; and the operationalization of the 2010 biodiversity target through initiatives such as the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. He stressed SBSTTA 12's role in effectuating the transition from policy-setting to improved implementation of the Convention and reported on recent meetings to that effect, including a brainstorming session of past, current and future SBSTTA chairs, and a meeting of the chairs of scientific advisory bodies of biodiversity-related conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

Citing examples of climate change impacts on species' survival, ecosystem stability, culture and food security, CBD Executive Secretary Ahmed Djoghlaif urged delegates to prepare the scientific basis for addressing the linkages between biodiversity conservation and climate change. He underscored that partnerships among MEA scientific bodies are key to effectively addressing both challenges.

Bakary Kante, on behalf of UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, highlighted the challenge of reconciling environmental and economic objectives and underscored the importance of mainstreaming the ecosystem approach. He cautioned against gauging poverty exclusively in monetary terms and exacerbating hunger worldwide through biofuel production.

UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura highlighted his organization's contribution to the work of the CBD and its approach to science, education and culture, which promotes linkages between biological and cultural diversity. He noted UNESCO's work on applying the ecosystem approach in biosphere reserves and its task force on climate change and biodiversity. He emphasized that achieving the MDGs and the 2010 biodiversity target is dependent on translating scientific findings into action.

Jean-Louis Borloo, France's Minister for Ecology and Sustainable Planning and Development, underscored the CBD's efforts towards achieving the 2010 target while drawing attention to the challenge of measuring progress in implementation. He outlined France's sustainable development policies and initiatives and called for strengthening SBSTTA's key role of providing scientific advice, highlighting the International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB) process in this regard.

Noting that not a single part of our planet is spared from the impact of human activities, Nicolas Hulot, President of the Nicolas Hulot Foundation, called for immediate action to avoid further loss of living resources. He stressed the need for education and advocated transitioning from an economy that exploits nature to one that embraces it by developing incentives for ecosystem protection. Hulot expressed concern that increased biofuel production could lead to the loss of ecosystems and habitats of endangered species.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the meeting's agenda (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/1) and organization of work (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/1/Add.1) without amendment, and elected Shirin Karriyeva (Turkmenistan) as Rapporteur, Linus Spencer Thomas (Grenada) and Annemarie Watt (Australia) as Chairs of Working Groups I and II, respectively, and Chaweewan Hutacharern (Thailand) and Christian Prip (Denmark) as Co-Chairs of the Committee of the Whole. Delegates also elected Gabriele Obermayr (Austria) as a new member of the SBSTTA Bureau for the Western European and Others Group. Other nominations are forthcoming pending regional consultations.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

REPORTS: Chair Prip presented reports on improving the scientific, technical and technological debate during SBSTTA meetings (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/1/Add.2), and on the SBSTTA Bureau's meeting on ways and means to improve the effectiveness of SBSTTA (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/6), highlighting its findings that the Bureau should promote wider recognition of SBSTTA by the scientific community, governments and relevant organizations. He also noted that participants at the meeting of the chairs of the scientific advisory bodies of biodiversity-related conventions discussed, among others, ways to strengthen cooperation on climate change and biodiversity issues.

NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES: Biofuels: Chair Prip introduced the agenda item on new and emerging issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity

(UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/9), noting that the Bureau decided to focus SBSTTA 12 discussions on liquid biofuel production and biodiversity.

BRAZIL outlined his country's national experience with biofuels, stressing that their benefits outweigh negative impacts. He noted that biofuel production has not increased deforestation, does not necessarily impact negatively on biodiversity and can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With MALI, he highlighted biofuel production as a means to alleviate poverty.

The EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (EC) requested that SBSTTA inform the COP on the potential negative and positive effects of using biomass for energy production and consumption on biodiversity, rather than just biofuels, and develop biodiversity standards for certification schemes. He proposed that COP 9 request parties to develop a policy framework based on a set of principles, including: discouraging conversion of land with high biodiversity value; applying the ecosystem approach and relevant CBD guidelines; and taking into account socioeconomic factors. Supported by NORWAY, he suggested that the impacts of using biomass for energy production be considered by the next meeting of the CBD's Article 8(j) Working Group.

Supporting the EC: GERMANY requested the Secretariat to compile further information on the impacts of biomass consumption and production for consideration by COP 9 and make it available to the members of the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions; BELGIUM stressed the need for cooperation between the UNFCCC and the CBD; the NETHERLANDS proposed sharing experiences with biofuels through the CHM; SLOVENIA noted the timeliness of scientific guidance as many countries are developing their biofuel policies; and the UK proposed developing guidelines for consideration by COP 9.

Noting the lack of knowledge on potential impacts of biofuels on biodiversity, CHINA asked SBSTTA to further consider the issue and, with INDIA, advocated technology transfer and international cooperation on the sustainable production of biofuels. Underscoring strict national measures on biofuel production, MALAYSIA, supported by AUSTRALIA, suggested that SBSTTA undertake a comprehensive assessment of the full lifecycle of biofuels, urging a precautionary approach. UGANDA noted that integrated assessments and environmental impact assessments should be used to identify the social, economic and environmental impacts of biofuels.

CANADA supported the development of guidelines and standards, calling for broader consideration of impacts on land and water resources, as well as biosafety implications. SWITZERLAND said biofuel impacts depend on feedstocks and processes used, suggesting that SBSTTA develop guidance based on assessments of existing standards and experiences in coordination with the FAO and UNFCCC. THAILAND urged consideration of recent studies on the release of carcinogens and other pollutants from biofuel production. HAITI proposed looking at solid as well as liquid biofuels, and underscored the need to consider broader energy policies. SENEGAL called for taking into account the socioeconomic impacts of biofuels. INDONESIA supported further research on the impacts of biofuels on biodiversity and food security. MALAWI prioritized non-food biofuel sources, cautioning against negative impacts on food security and, with ETHIOPIA, TUNISIA and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA, called for a technical expert group on the impacts of biofuels. TURKEY cautioned against promoting biofuels made from genetically-modified crops. SWEDEN, the COUNCIL OF EUROPE and the GLOBAL INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAMME drew attention to the threat posed by invasive alien species used for biofuel production.

AUSTRALIA, supported by MEXICO, requested clarification on how SBSTTA selects and addresses new and emerging issues. Chair Prip explained that COP 8 mandated SBSTTA to

define such issues, and that the Bureau will decide on how to progress the matter, including whether to develop a SBSTTA 12 recommendation on biofuels.

On integrating biofuels into CBD's work programmes, CANADA noted opportunities presented by SBSTTA 13's review of thematic work programmes on forest and agriculture.

The FAO reported on the work of its Committee on Agriculture on linkages between biodiversity, climate change and bioenergy, and underscored that UN-Energy is the principle interagency mechanism for coordinating work on bioenergy. The International Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, cautioned against duplicating work undertaken by other processes.

The GLOBAL FOREST COALITION and the CBD ALLIANCE expressed concerns with the extensive use of agrochemicals in agrofuel production, rural unemployment resulting from large-scale monoculture plantations, and commodity booms resulting in increased crop prices. The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, on behalf of INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, called for an immediate ban on agrofuel exports.

APPLICATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH: Chair Prip introduced the in-depth review of the application of the ecosystem approach (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/2). Delegates heard several presentations on experiences with the ecosystem approach and challenges for its broader application. William Settle, FAO, addressed the application of the ecosystem approach to fisheries, forestry and agriculture (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/INF/3); Hillary Masundire, University of Botswana and Chair of the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management, and Dawn Pierre-Nathoniell, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Saint Lucia, discussed barriers to and options for applying the ecosystem approach (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/INF/4 and 5); and Diana Mortimer, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, presented the ecosystem approach sourcebook and case study database (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/INF/6).

Speakers emphasized, *inter alia*: showcasing the value of the approach to stakeholders through education and capacity building; using success stories to promote its application in other sectors; tailoring its application to national and sectoral contexts; and integrating it into NBSAPs.

SINGAPORE noted insufficient application of the approach in the fisheries sector. SLOVENIA favored clarifying the concept and collecting case studies rather than developing a strategy and action plan for marketing it. Discussions will continue on Tuesday.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Convening in Paris, the birthplace of both SBSTTA and the consultative process towards an International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB), a number of SBSTTA 12 delegates were overheard commenting on efforts to improve SBSTTA's efficiency, such as Sunday's first-ever meeting of chairs of scientific bodies of biodiversity-related MEAs. Some welcomed the pragmatic and positive approach taken by the meeting's participants, particularly on biodiversity and climate change, whilst others reported a greater acceptance of the need to further develop an IMoSEB, following extensive regional consultations on the issue in the intersessional period.

Meanwhile, biofuels fuelled the debate in the Committee of the Whole, leading to speculation about the formal outcome of the issue. Many delegates anticipated a SBSTTA 12 recommendation paving the way for CBD's involvement in standard-setting on these booming commodities, some even hoping to institutionalize a process on the issue within CBD. Others however expressed concern regarding the "fast-tracking" of biofuels in the CBD process, favoring limited involvement of the Convention and citing overlaps with existing trade regulations.