

SBSTTA 16 HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 2 MAY 2012

SBSTTA 16 delegates met in two working groups (WGs) throughout the day. WG I discussed: collaborative work on forests, agriculture and health; the fourth Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO 4); and proposals on integrating biodiversity considerations into climate-change related activities.

WG II considered: capacity building for the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI); new and emerging issues; and island biodiversity. A contact group on marine and coastal biodiversity met in the afternoon and evening.

WORKING GROUP I

COLLABORATIVE WORK ON FORESTS, AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH: The PHILIPPINES proposed an international decade of small farmers. ETHIOPIA called for capacity building on the ground.

A revised draft recommendation will be prepared.

GBO 4: Delegates considered a revised draft recommendation on GBO 4. BRAZIL, supported by MEXICO, suggested, and delegates agreed, that SBSTTA “take note” of rather than “welcome” the evaluation of the GBO 3. The EU, opposed by ARGENTINA, suggested emphasizing that the GBO 4 mid-term assessment of progress towards the Aichi Targets based on, *inter alia*, indicator information provided by the members of the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP). Delegates eventually agreed to retain the original text.

Underscoring the role of the advisory group to provide “guidance,” and the role of the SBSTTA Bureau to provide “oversight,” to the GBO 4 preparation, the UK, supported by the EU, suggested deleting “oversight” in relation to the advisory group.

On the composition of the advisory group, ETHIOPIA suggested referring to the UN regions. After informal consultations, delegates agreed to take the SBSTTA *modus operandi* into account, which considers geographical and gender balance.

A paragraph on exploring with the advisory group and the SBSTTA Bureau options to engage IPBES in the preparation of GBO 4 was bracketed. CANADA proposed, and delegates agreed, to language on seeking the help of the BIP in updating indicators used in GBO 3 and in preparing new indicators to support goals and targets of the Strategic Plan 2011-2020.

Delegates addressed draft text recommending that the COP urge parties and invite other governments and organizations, including ILCs, to make available data, information and case-

studies, including by using appropriate indicator frameworks, in their fifth national reports or through earlier submissions. The EU suggested using the flexible framework and the indicative list of indicators referred to in SBSTTA Recommendation XV/11 (Indicator Framework for the Strategic Plan and the Aichi Targets) instead of “appropriate indicator framework,” and recommended bracketing the reference pending their adoption by COP 11. MEXICO suggested “using appropriate indicator frameworks, including” the flexible framework and the indicative list of indicators. After further deliberations, delegates agreed to this proposal which remains bracketed.

COLOMBIA supported reference to the CBD Consortium of Scientific Partners on Biodiversity when further developing collaboration with relevant partners for the communication strategy. MEXICO suggested requesting the Secretariat to highlight those key elements for the preparation of GBO 4 when providing guidance to parties on the preparation of the fifth national report,” with CANADA adding “and encourage parties to submit those elements early.”

On a request to the Secretariat to continue collaborating with other biodiversity-related conventions and other relevant processes and organizations and to engage them in the preparation of GBO 4, AUSTRALIA suggested, and delegates eventually agreed, to include a particular reference to IPBES.

A revised draft recommendation will be prepared.

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: Integration of Biodiversity Considerations into Climate-Change Related Activities: Delegates considered a revised draft recommendation, including addressing gaps in knowledge and information. They extensively debated a paragraph relating to the dissemination and use of local and traditional knowledge with the prior informed consent (PIC) of ILCs. BRAZIL, supported by GUATEMALA, preferred promoting conservation and use, rather than improving documentation, dissemination and use of such knowledge. CANADA suggested that PIC or approval and involvement of ILCs be in compliance with the Convention and its protocols. DENMARK, opposed by CANADA, suggested making reference to the Nagoya Protocol. The UK proposed alternative language, “subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovation and practices of ILCs.” References to equitable sharing of benefits in the paragraph were bracketed.

Discussion will continue on Thursday.

WORKING GROUP II

TAXONOMY: Several parties underlined the fundamental role taxonomy plays in achieving the CBD Strategic Plan, and also favored focusing on training at the university and post-graduate level, as originally called for by South Africa. GHANA and THAILAND emphasized financial support. BRAZIL underscored that the GTI is a cross-cutting issue supporting all the Aichi Targets. TRINIDAD and TOBAGO said the GTI should seek to generate and “maintain” taxonomic collections. BURUNDI called for a technical framework and information sharing among specialized institutions. FAO noted the utility of the FishFinder Initiative to the GTI.

A revised draft recommendation will be prepared.

NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES: The Secretariat introduced UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/16/13 and INF/35. MEXICO, BELGIUM, THAILAND, GUATEMALA, AUSTRALIA, ARGENTINA, PERU and ICELAND opposed adding new and emerging issues to SBSTTA’s agenda. Many stressed SBSTTA’s heavy agenda.

On synthetic biology, CHINA said this is not the appropriate time to address the issue. BELGIUM and BRAZIL suggested requesting IPBES to examine it. A number of countries expressed support for the option requesting the Secretariat to compile and synthesize scientific information on synthetic biology, stressing the precautionary approach. Several also inquired about the links and overlaps between synthetic biology and the mandate of the Cartagena Protocol. SAUDIA ARABIA and MALAYSIA noted SBSTTA is a supporting body of the Cartagena Protocol. ETC GROUP and FRIENDS OF THE EARTH urged consideration of synthetic biology, stressing that no group currently provides oversight on this issue.

On tropospheric ozone, INDIA and JORDAN stressed the importance of the issue.

On overfishing, including deep sea fishing, NORWAY encouraged cooperation with FAO and RFMOs. ICELAND said that deep-sea fishing, overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are separate issues. CANADA proposed deleting the item. JAPAN emphasized avoiding duplication of work, stating UNGA covers fishing. CANADA also proposed deletion of an item on climate change in coastal and offshore zones.

A revised draft recommendation will be prepared.

ISLAND BIODIVERSITY: ARGENTINA requested replacing reference to “governments” with “states” throughout the revised draft recommendation. The EU and the PHILIPPINES opposed, arguing this would have implications beyond this recommendation. Delegates agreed to add a footnote recording Argentina’s concern. On a proposed summit of island states, SOUTH AFRICA requested references to parties managing islands for conservation and research.

CONTACT GROUP

In the afternoon and evening, a contact group, co-chaired by Paulino Franco (Brazil) and Alexander Shestakov (Russia), met to discuss a non-paper on EBSAs, focusing on the description of areas meeting the scientific criteria for EBSAs, the repository and information sharing and capacity building. Chair Shestakov underlined that SBSTTA aims to make recommendations to COP 11 and not “endorse” results, and that recommendations would be based on the “description” rather than “identification” of EBSAs.

Parties debated the value of retaining or deleting preambular text that contextualizes the draft recommendations within UNGA and CBD COP 10 decisions. The Secretariat agreed to prepare new draft preambular text using agreed language.

Participants agreed on, *inter alia*, text recognizing support for EBSA workshops, promoting additional research and facilitating participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition. On the regional workshop reports, NORWAY and others questioned the scientific credibility and robustness of workshop outcomes and opposed endorsing areas for inclusion in the repository. SOUTH AFRICA noted outstanding regional workshops. Delegates agreed in principle to refer to the reporting as a dynamic and continuous process. Bracketed text also remains on a potential SBSTTA 16 synthesis report on the scientific and technical evaluation of workshop information and areas that meet EBSA criteria. Delegates were divided on how or if SBSTTA should refer to the synthesis report in its recommendation to COP 11. After consultation, most delegates supported that SBSTTA recommend that the COP “endorse” the synthesis report, while ARGENTINA preferred that the COP “take note” of it.

On further collaboration, ARGENTINA requested bracketing reference specifying regional initiatives saying it was not previously discussed, while CANADA countered that the reference reflected work of COP 10.

Discussions continued into the night.

IN THE CORRIDORS

On Wednesday, WG I took discussion on the preparations of the fourth edition of the GBO down to “the very last detail,” and made “achingly slow progress” on biodiversity and climate change, as one observer put it. WG II, on the other hand, established a contact group to get down to the “nitty-gritty” on marine and coastal biodiversity and the recommendations SBSTTA may or may not make with regard to EBSAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Despite the prolonged discussion on references to other processes in the contact group, delegates were cautiously optimistic that SBSTTA could make headway on the “non-identification” of EBSAs, as one delegate quipped, since work focuses on “describing” EBSAs, not their identification. While some noted that the concerns raised about the scientific adequacy of the criteria were a matter of finding the right way of “dealing with imperfection,” another said that this was an issue between a regional organization and its member states, rather than something that SBSTTA could resolve. Reservations expressed by some about regional research initiatives were seen as more serious but not unresolvable. “We have seen worse in this process” noted one, while others feared that this is the kind of issue that will keep delegates here until late on Friday night.

Pace was also an issue in the discussion on new and emerging issues, as many delegates opposed adding more issues to SBSTTA’s “overweight” agenda. This included wavering on the touchy issue of synthetic biology, a topic which a number of parties felt deserved attention and application of the precautionary approach. Though NGOs were adamant about addressing this “earth changing” science, it seemed clear that the first next step would be to identify the role of yet another international instrument, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.