



# Earth Negotiations Bulletin

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

Vol. 9 No. 69

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Tuesday, 2 September 1997

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE THIRD SESSION OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY FOR SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE 1 SEPTEMBER 1997

Delegates to the Third Session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-3) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) met in Plenary throughout the day. Organizational matters were discussed in the morning. Discussions in the afternoon focused on the pilot phase of the Clearinghouse Mechanism (CHM) and the progress report on the work of the SBSTTA.

### PLENARY

Mr. Peter Schei (Norway), outgoing SBSTTA Chair, noted the increased involvement in SBSTTA by Parties, international organizations and the scientific community, and highlighted the need to build on their work. He stressed the mandate of the COP to reduce the agenda of SBSTTA so that discussions remain focused. He thanked the Secretariat for raising the standards of the Secretariat's papers.

Professor Zakri A. Hamid (Malaysia), the new SBSTTA Chair, noted that more than half of the agenda items at each COP are issues that must first be addressed by SBSTTA. He stressed the crucial role that SBSTTA plays in achieving the goals of and ensuring the success of the Convention. Reiterating a comment made by the previous Chair, he cautioned that SBSTTA is neither a "mini-COP," nor a COP drafting committee. He also highlighted several areas in the current work programme that remain problematic: gaps in knowledge and lack of expertise concerning the extent of biological diversity; the need for capacity building, particularly in developing countries, in taxonomy and other relevant scientific disciplines; and the need for speedy dissemination of information, particularly through electronic means.

Rueben Olembo, the Deputy Executive Secretary of UNEP, highlighted SBSTTA's successful service to the CSD and ECOSOC as indicative of the need for SBSTTA to become not only an advisor to the CBD COP but the benchmark by which other conventions and institutions address biodiversity-related issues.

Calestous Juma, Executive Secretary of the CBD, highlighted the Secretariat's strong working relationship with the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), the governments of Canada, Quebec and Montreal, and the ICAO. He noted that the Secretariat continues to enjoy the full support of the Parties and has broadened its support from other organizations, due in part to the CHM. He commented that, in order for the Convention to achieve its aims, SBSTTA must evolve into the leading authority on scientific, technical and technological aspects of biodiversity within the UN system. Citing the decisions of the COP relating to cooperation with the Intergovernmental Panel on

Forests (IPF) and FAO, the Executive Secretary suggested that the advice of SBSTTA has already begun to influence other biodiversity-related processes.

Regarding the election of officers, INDIA nominated Mick Raga (Papua New Guinea) as Bureau member for Asia. LUXEMBOURG nominated Prof. Martin Uppenbrink (Germany) for Western Europe and ARGENTINA nominated a representative from Jamaica for GRULAC. For the African Group, TANZANIA nominated Prof. Seyani (Malawi) to replace Swaziland, and Nagahue di Mbungu-sodi (Democratic Republic of the Congo). HUNGARY nominated a representative from the Czech Republic on behalf of Eastern Europe.

A statement was made on behalf of participants in the GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FORUM (GBF-8), held 28-31 August 1997. GBF-8 conducted workshops on: biodiversity communication and education; policy research capacity to implement the CBD; incentives, private sector partnership and the marine and coastal environment; forest biodiversity; and biodiversity and inland water systems. Recommendations call for, *inter alia*: COP-4 prioritization of CBD Article 13 on Public Awareness and Education; inclusion of educators on SBSTTA delegations; information on policy analysis capacity in national reports; financial strengthening of policy research capacity; mechanisms for transparency and multiple stakeholder participation; information on inland water ecosystems' environmental services; an ecosystem-based approach; environmental economics methodologies; removal of market disincentives for conservation; and strengthened negotiating capacity of weaker stakeholder groups.

CITES reported on CITES COP-10, which called for national measures to reduce duplication of activities for the two Conventions, investigation of opportunities for CITES participation in implementing provisions of the CBD, and support for harmonization of reporting requirements of biodiversity-related conventions. A memorandum of cooperation between the CITES and CBD Secretariats stresses the development of working relations with organizations addressing trade and intellectual property rights.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs stressed the need for actions to protect forest and aquatic ecosystems and to identify measures for their sustainable use. He also acknowledged the valuable input of the CBD to the IPF and the Inter-agency Task Force on Forests.

FAO drew attention to its mandate of assuring sustainable food security and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for food and agriculture. She noted the complexity of addressing agrobiodiversity linkages and suggested that FAO act as a broker for the scientific and policy needs of Parties. FAO continues its work on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources and has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the CBD Secretariat on: assessment of genetic resources;

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technologies for agrobiodiversity management; gender and local knowledge; biodiversity valuation and trade; policies, standards and codes of conduct; and biodiversity indicators and information systems.

UNESCO noted its: research and education expertise; the work of commissions and centers on biological diversity, particularly marine and coastal biodiversity; support for 300 biosphere reserves in over 100 countries; and co-launching of DIVERSITAS, the Integrated Programme of Biodiversity Science, to further mobilize the international scientific community.

The INTERNATIONAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION is developing a marine biodiversity strategy consistent with the three CBD objectives and collaborating with its 125 members on the scientific research and monitoring of ocean and coastal areas. The WORLD BANK is mainstreaming biodiversity into its policies and projects. He highlighted the importance of inland freshwater biodiversity and holistic ecosystem management.

The Secretariat on the CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (RAMSAR) reported on the memorandum of understanding with the CBD Secretariat and said it could be a lead partner on wetlands and inland water ecosystems. SBSTTA's work programme could incorporate RAMSAR's strategic plan and "wise use of wetlands" concept.

The INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LIVING RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (ICLARM) highlighted its training and information activities on aquaculture and fisheries, including genetic resources. ICLARM is collaborating with IUCN and WWF on the Fishes for the Future Project to document the status and threats to the world's freshwater species.

The SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL (STAP) of the Global Environmental Facility is actively collaborating with SBSTTA. It is currently organizing a workshop on the sustainable use of biodiversity and related social, economic and ecological dimensions such as the interplay between local and global benefits, possible indicators, best practices and case studies on marine and arid ecosystems.

**CLEARINGHOUSE MECHANISM:** The Secretariat introduced a report on the implementation of the pilot phase of the Clearinghouse Mechanism (CHM) in facilitating and promoting technical and scientific cooperation in research and development (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/3/3). Many delegations thanked the German government for their efforts to develop the CHM. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA encouraged countries to host regional workshops and said the Secretariat should develop a list of country-specific needs and priorities. COLOMBIA emphasized the importance of regional workshops to define priorities and, with PERU, said the CHM should focus on improving the content of its information. With ARGENTINA, she expressed concern at the lack of financial support offered to support regional meetings. INDIA proposed using a common agenda for all regional workshops.

CANADA expressed concern regarding the workload of the Secretariat and questioned, *inter alia*, the need for a "decision-support" function, under which the CHM would provide syntheses of global trends and priorities. He supported establishing an informal advising committee. GERMANY urged the Secretariat to explore the development of synergies with existing international programmes and modalities for integrating information from biodiversity-related conventions. He said SBSTTA should explore ways to make national clearinghouse activities self-sustaining after the pilot phase. PERU supported the development of a common format for information to aid understanding. AUSTRALIA said the pilot phase needs to be finalized rapidly and suggested conducting a survey of national focal points.

The EU expressed disappointment that the report did not elaborate on how the CHM will be maintained and sought detailed information on the operational framework. NEW ZEALAND noted its efforts to develop databases and said they should be made accessible to others. With AUSTRALIA, she supported the development of discussion groups for national focal points. SWITZERLAND noted that few models of national CHMs have been developed and called upon the Secretariat to develop an indicative body of information that could be used at the national level.

MALAYSIA, COLOMBIA and MALAWI said the CHM should not be limited to information exchange, but should identify technology and facilitate its acquisition and transfer. NORWAY said developed countries should identify relevant technologies, as well as the institutions and companies that own them. He stressed the importance of providing information on how developing countries can obtain technology and possible sources for assistance. BRAZIL noted that the scope of CHM's activities, although originally focused on information exchange, has been expanded by several subsequent COP decisions. SWEDEN, supported by SWITZERLAND, said limiting the CHM to facilitating information exchange, rather than investigating scientific and technical cooperation, would not comply with the Convention. He requested a study on ways to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO said that many developing countries are concerned with obtaining the principle tools needed for information distribution and, with INDIA and KENYA, noted that many countries lack Internet access. KENYA also stated that the CHM should be decentralized, support the decision-making process and involve the private sector. The BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION INFORMATION SYSTEM highlighted other ongoing initiatives and networks regarding biodiversity information. He recommended a consultative process for creating a coordination mechanism that would facilitate information exchange between existing networks.

The Secretariat will prepare a draft recommendation with the assistance of the Vice-Chair of the Bureau for the SBSTTA to review later in the week.

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE SBSTTA:** In the SBSTTA's discussions of the progress report on the work of the SBSTTA and the effectiveness of its advice (1995-1997) (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/3/10), the Secretariat noted that since the preparation of the report, it had received further information from Parties. The Secretariat proposed the preparation of an information document containing those submissions that would be made available to Parties during the course of the meeting. The Secretariat also proposed that an informal session be held so that Parties can explore the role of the SBSTTA in the wider context of the review of the operation of the Convention.

CANADA welcomed the suggestion of the Secretariat to facilitate the informal exchange of views but felt that if such deliberations would ultimately be the decision of the SBSTTA, the outcome of those deliberations should be submitted in Plenary for consideration. In particular, CANADA noted its interest in proposing suggestions regarding transparency and clarity, as well as authorization and preparation of information documents. SWITZERLAND, supported by GERMANY, commented that a recommendation should be made that synthesizes the opinions of the Parties and agreed to establish such a group so long as it is not convened parallel to the Working Groups or Plenary sessions.

### IN THE CORRIDORS

Participants expressed differing views about what they would like to emerge from SBSTTA-3, as well as their expectations. Several indigenous peoples' representatives expressed their hope for improvements in consultation mechanisms for indigenous peoples, but admitted low expectations on how far-reaching these improvements might be. Other participants were eager to tackle forest biodiversity, but were unconvinced of the draft work programme's utility, given its emphasis on defining the "ecosystem approach." Some delegates commented that at this early stage no clearly controversial issues had emerged.

### THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

**Working Group I:** Working Group I will meet at 10:00 am to consider agenda item 3 (inland water ecosystems).

**Working Group II:** Working Group II will meet at 10:00 am to consider agenda item 5 (forest biological diversity).

