

SBSTTA 23 Highlights: Monday, 25 November 2019

The 23rd meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 23) met throughout the day to hear opening and regional statements, address organizational matters, and exchange views on informing the scientific and technical evidence base for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Opening Plenary

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico) opened the meeting by reminding participants that “biodiversity is not only an environmental problem, but also a question of social, economic, and moral development”. Highlighting the “crucial stage” of the process in building the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, he urged participants to work together; focus on building recommendations; and “set aside political decisions” for the upcoming Conference of Parties (COP).

Underscoring the importance of SBSTTA’s discussions, Elizabeth Mrema, Officer-in-Charge, CBD Secretariat, declared that the challenges facing the world “are urgent, but the solutions are available.” She cited that assessments from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation are interlinked. Mrema stressed that humans have the evidence, knowledge, and ability to address the challenges “on a scale unimaginable a few years ago.”

Organizational Matters

Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (CBD/SBSTTA/23/1) and the organization of work (CBD/SBSTTA/23/1/Add.1/Rev.1) without amendment. Larbi Sbai (Morocco) was elected rapporteur.

Informing the Scientific and Technical Base for the Post-2020 Framework

Thematic presentations: Eduardo Brondizio, Co-Chair of the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, described the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity decline. He explained that regional improvements did not prevent aggregated global biodiversity from deteriorating. Brondizio made clear that transformative change “of our norms and values” is needed for a meaningful post-2020 framework.

Andreas Schei, Norwegian Environment Agency, emphasized the need to better understand direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, including their interlinkages. He underscored the need to consider biodiversity as part of the solution rather than solely focusing on biodiversity loss.

Tim Hirsch, Science writer for the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5), stressed that while the extent to which the Aichi Targets have been achieved provides a bleak picture, impressive examples of success also exist, including eradication programmes for invasive alien species.

Joji Cariño, Forest Peoples Programme, presented on the second edition of the Local Biodiversity Outlook, noting that: indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) remain marginal in decision making; IPLCs’ customary land tenure should be fully recognized to help deliver conservation outcomes; and financial resources must be deployed to support IPLC collective actions.

Maité Delmas, Global Partnership for Plant Conservation, showcased progress towards the targets of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation 2020 at the global and national levels.

Wadzanayi Goredema-Mandivenyi, South Africa, reported on a workshop which took place on 23 November, affirming that the draft GBO-5 is “a good example” of the need to draw on the best available evidence and science to build the post-2020 framework.

Scientific and Technical Base: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (CBD/SBSTTA/23/2 and Add.1-3).

Many noted that the documents constitute a good basis for discussions; outlined national efforts to address biodiversity loss; highlighted synergies among the Rio Conventions and the need to involve relevant bodies in the development of the post-2020 framework; and encouraged taking the IPBES Global Assessment into account in the development of the post-2020 framework.

Trinidad and Tobago, for SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS), stressed that the countries most affected are often without the resources to reverse biodiversity loss, and highlighted limitations of the IPBES assessment reports regarding oceans and marine ecosystems.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), emphasized the delay of financial support; and, with the UK, urged for better use of the information found in national reports in the development of GBO-5. Malaysia, for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), underscored the importance of regional and sub-regional assessments.

BRAZIL and ARGENTINA stressed that using 1970 as baseline to measure biodiversity decline is “an unfair choice,” as many developing countries have only recently gained independence. MEXICO suggested strengthening the mainstreaming of biodiversity and including the five levers for transformative change identified by the IPBES Global Assessment into the post-2020 framework, while COLOMBIA suggested the same for the five drivers of biodiversity loss.

CAMBODIA and JAPAN advocated for an integrated landscape approach to address biodiversity loss and implement transformative change. THAILAND highlighted marine debris, noting the need

to scale up action. JORDAN, with SYRIA and the PHILIPPINES, pleaded to address the effect of both climate change and infrastructure expansion on biodiversity. JAPAN urged for further analysis of information from national reports, cautioning against duplication of work. TIMOR LESTE proposed linking Aichi Targets on pollution and on mobilizing financial resources to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CANADA highlighted the need to: clearly mention elements within the IPBES assessment that could guide the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG); focus on identifying specific goals, targets, and baselines; and work on determining the key drivers of biodiversity loss. SWITZERLAND called for urgent action to address biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation; and for making the implementation of the new framework a priority. NEW ZEALAND noted recommendations should stay within the mandate of SBSTTA.

SWEDEN, EGYPT, SUDAN, and others underlined that an inclusive approach including IPLCs is needed for post-2020 actions. GERMANY noted that “never before we were as informed on biodiversity and ecosystem services as we are today.” The NETHERLANDS recommended that SBSTTA focus on science and review.

SOUTH AFRICA highlighted mainstreaming of biodiversity concerns into economic sectors, with GERMANY and others, and the need for inclusive, fair, and equitable benefit-sharing. MALAWI stressed the need to assess the effectiveness of measures taken to identify future pathways and support implementation at the national level. TURKEY stressed that the link of the post-2020 process to the SDGs must be strengthened, with MOROCCO explicitly suggesting inclusion of the SDG voluntary national reports.

Regarding indicators, FINLAND and SOUTH AFRICA stressed that the knowledge base provided by the IPBES and other global assessments needs to lead to smart, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) targets and indicators. NORWAY, with AUSTRALIA, COSTA RICA, and COLOMBIA, pointed to the importance of indicators that underpin a robust and transformative post-2020 framework, adapted to regions and sectors. FRANCE called for specific and “inspiring” objectives to be implemented at a strategic level, as well as for realistic, assessable, and compatible indicators. COSTA RICA stressed the importance of guidance for parties to design and implement national and local indicators.

CUBA, SAUDI ARABIA, SUDAN, and ETHIOPIA also stressed the importance of having clear indicators in the post-2020 framework, with CHINA suggesting that the framework must be “targeted, inclusive, feasible, and effective.” SUDAN argued for the need to develop environmental incentives for the post-2020 framework. UGANDA suggested that poverty should be included as an indirect driver of biodiversity loss. CUBA and ETHIOPIA called for further evidence to inform deliberations towards the post-2020 framework.

IPBES outlined its work programme up to 2030 and the FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) called for a holistic approach to address food security in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes. The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) reminded participants of the important contributions of IPLCs to biodiversity conservation benefitting society as a whole. WORLD AGROFORESTRY (ICRAF) referred to the importance of incorporating trees into sustainable agriculture, while BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL and the INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TROPICAL AGRICULTURE (CIAT) asked for a review of the Aichi Targets so that “food security and nutrition are ensured for all.”

UN WOMEN and the CBD WOMEN’S CAUCUS deplored gender equality gaps in the Aichi Targets and urged that gender issues must better inform the post-2020 framework. The GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (GYBN) reiterated that

“bending the biodiversity curve means bending the inequality curve,” asking for human rights considerations to be addressed in the post-2020 process. The CBD ALLIANCE, with the INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC), called for change in unsustainable economic sectors and a recognition of the role of small-scale food producers.

Potential elements for the post-2020 framework: Francis Ogwal (Uganda) and Basile van Havre (Canada), Co-Chairs of the OEWG on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, outlined their expectations concerning SBSTTA’s input to the Working Group, particularly on: the organization of the key structural elements of the post-2020 framework; options for an inspirational 2030 mission; and thematic areas for goals and targets.

The Secretariat introduced the relevant document CBD/SBSTTA/23/2/Add.4.

Seychelles, for SIDS, MEXICO, and MALDIVES pressed for further consideration of oceans, marine, and coastal biodiversity. FRANCE called for a consideration of indirect drivers of biodiversity loss; genetic diversity; and soil biodiversity. NORWAY and FINLAND recommended a strong review mechanism and for the post-2020 framework to be “future-proof”. FINLAND supported a small number of overarching objectives and action-oriented targets promoting transformational change. Regarding global warming, SIDS argued that 1.5 degrees is the tipping point for biodiversity loss. BOTSWANA, with ARGENTINA, stressed the need to address the developmental needs of countries.

On goals, FRANCE stated that global goals must be “concrete and implementational,” while COLOMBIA pressed that they consider consumption and production trends driving biodiversity loss. MEXICO, BELGIUM, NEW ZEALAND, and COLOMBIA stressed the need for simplicity. BELGIUM called for goals to include broader land and ocean use rather than only protected areas. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA recalled the importance of wetland and wildlife habitats. BRAZIL expressed concerns regarding potential establishment of non-tariff barriers and setting a target on climate change, noting the CBD is not the right forum. NEW ZEALAND supported setting 2030 goals. BELGIUM pointed to gaps concerning reducing consumption, soil and health, and urban areas.

On indicators, FRANCE, KOREA, MEXICO, NORWAY, BELGIUM, NEW ZEALAND, and the MALDIVES supported CANADA’s proposal that indicators be developed alongside a monitoring framework. CANADA highlighted the role of IPLCs, the need for gender responsive efforts, and the need for synergies to mobilize resources for implementation. INDONESIA suggested potential targets and indicators, including the proportion of critical habitats in conservation areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and the number of sites and trends in representation of critical habitats that are managed or maintained.

On means of implementation, SIDS said that enabling conditions should be linked with implementation, while the MALDIVES called for them to be identified and committed.

In the Corridors

Some delegates felt a palpable sense of impatience on Monday while listening to opening statements. “It’s good to catch up, but let’s not kid ourselves—everything important is going to go to contact groups,” one seasoned delegate shared, pointing to divides on such subjects as benefit-sharing, unlikely to change in plenary discussions.

The SBSTTA Chair’s request for parties to “set politics aside” resonated with young students who had come to observe proceedings with their teachers. Asked about their impressions of this meeting, their desire for change was unambiguous: “We know the evidence, and we know what must be changed, so let’s get it done – for us!”