



SBSTTA-8 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 10 MARCH 2003

Delegates to the eighth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) met in Plenary to hear opening statements and address organizational matters. They also considered progress reports on the implementation of the thematic programmes and cross-cutting issues, and heard general comments on the multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties (COP) up to 2010. A keynote presentation on mountain biodiversity was also delivered.

PLENARY

STATEMENTS: SBSTTA Chair Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic) opened the meeting and outlined the agenda. Referring to the meeting's main theme of mountain biodiversity, he recalled that 2002 was the International Year of Mountains and of Eco-tourism. He stressed SBSTTA's mandate to develop an indicative list of technologies for mountain biodiversity, and to support the outcomes of COP-6 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which each emphasized biodiversity as a key to sustainable development.

Plesnik then reported on the Bureau's intersessional activities, aimed at developing a manageable agenda and monitoring implementation. Paul Chabeda, on behalf of Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, stressed the importance of the indicative list of technologies for mountain biodiversity and its socio-economic implications. Chabeda also referenced UNEP's activities regarding mountain ecosystems.

Hamdallah Zedan, CBD Executive Secretary, highlighted the links between biodiversity, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Noting that 45 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, he hoped that the Protocol's first meeting of the Parties would be held jointly with CBD COP-7. Thomas Hofer, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), underscored the crucial role of water and mountain ecosystems to secure the livelihoods of poor communities and reduce poverty. He noted that the FAO was the lead UN agency for the International Year of Mountains and that it collaborated with other institutions to raise global awareness on the issue.

Peter Bridgewater, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), presented UNESCO's joint activities with other UN agencies and programmes, related to the 2003 International Year of Freshwater. He highlighted UNESCO's role as the Secretariat of the World Water Assessment Programme, whose report will be available at the 3rd World Water Forum. He stressed the linkages between biodiversity, ecosystem functions and services, and water-related issues. Nick Davidson, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, presented the Ramsar Convention's COP-8 decisions relevant to mountains, inland waters, and marine and coastal biodiversity, including on water allocation and management, dams, the River Basin Initiative, invasive species, impact assessment and temporary pools. He reported on the implementation of the joint work programme with the CBD, and recalled that wetlands and water are a cross-cutting feature of SBSTTA-8 agenda items.

Hanna Hoffmann, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), reported on UNFCCC COP-8 decisions and conclusions regarding cooperation with the CBD and other conventions. Cristián Samper, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), presented the MA's conceptual framework and activities. He said that the MA addresses: the condition of and trends in ecosystems and their contribution to human well-being; options for conserving ecosystems and increasing their contribution to human welfare; and future scenarios for change. He noted that several assessments include mountain regions and stressed the MA's contribution to scientific knowledge.

Tunisia, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP said that Africa is at the center of discussions on poverty alleviation and sustainable development, stressed regional efforts, and urged delegates to build on the progress made on access and benefit-sharing. Iran, on behalf of the ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION, reported on regional meetings and called for more preparatory meetings in light of COP-7 being hosted in Asia. Greece, on behalf of the EU, reported on a preparatory workshop for SBSTTA-8 held in Germany.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: The election of regional representatives to the SBSTTA Bureau was postponed pending further consultations in regional groups.

Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/8/1) and established two working groups as proposed in the annotated provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/8/1/Add.1). They then elected Robert Andren (Sweden) as chair of



Working Group I, Asghar Mohammadi Fazel (Iran) as chair of Working Group II and Grace Thitai (Kenya) as the meeting's rapporteur.

During discussions on the provisional agenda, BRAZIL suggested adding a footnote to relevant documentation to reflect on-going discussion regarding the procedural shortcomings of Decision VI/23 on invasive alien species. Delegates debated the suggestion and agreed to wait for legal advice.

BRAZIL, supported by ARGENTINA and COLOMBIA, suggested technology transfer as a main theme for COP-9.

REPORTS: The Secretariat introduced the progress reports on implementation of thematic programmes and cross-cutting issues (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/8/2 and 3). ARGENTINA prioritized implementation of the work programme on dry and sub-humid lands. Regarding agricultural biodiversity, COLOMBIA said the work programme should focus on priorities and ways of implementation, and BRAZIL called for Parties' involvement in preparing an outline paper on the impacts of trade liberalization.

On cross-cutting issues, COLOMBIA highlighted sustainable use and called for including topics such as technology transfer, capacity building, financial mechanisms and information exchange. AUSTRALIA noted its reservation regarding invasive alien species.

MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK: On the Multi-year Programme of Work (UNEP/CDB/COP/6/5/Add.2/Rev.1 and 6/INF/30; SBSTTA/8/14; and MYPOW/4), several delegates opposed adding new agenda items to the existing programme of work, favouring in-depth review and implementation of existing themes. MEXICO stressed the need to revise SBSTTA's *modus operandi*. GREECE said the CBD Strategic Plan should guide the programme of work and recommended that the COPs' agendas be more focused. Supported by the NETHERLANDS, he proposed reviewing forest biodiversity at COP-8, while BRAZIL and KENYA preferred postponing the review until COP-10. The UK recommended, *inter alia*, that each COP consider progress in achieving the 2010 target for reducing biodiversity loss and that new agenda items be limited to no more than three according to their potential to contribute to the target. Several countries called for emphasis on national programmes and priorities. NORWAY stressed the need for decentralized support for implementation and better use of the Clearing-house Mechanism for scientific cooperation. COLOMBIA called for a leadership role of the CBD in its relationship with the World Trade Organization and World Intellectual Property Organization. HAITI suggested focusing on social issues. SYRIA recommended strengthening institutional capacity and transfer of technology. CHINA suggested international trade as a focus area. GERMANY said the programme of work should aim at furthering progress on existing items.

OTHER ISSUES: The Secretariat presented the draft reporting formats on forest and agricultural biodiversity, forwarded to the Parties for comments. He said some Parties commented on the length of the questionnaires and stressed the need for harmonization with other international processes. Canada said countries can prioritize and limit their reporting to activities included in the programme of work. The UK called for strategic questions to reduce the burden of reporting.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS: Christian Körner, Chair of the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment, made a presentation on mountain biodiversity, focusing on global hot spots,

regional insurance and local livelihood. Explaining the reasons for caring for diversity, he underscored ethics, ecology and economy. He said that the concept of mountain should include altitude and latitude and explained the definitions of lowlands, montane, alpine and nival areas. He stressed that the safety of one sixth of the world's human population depends on mountain ecosystems. He noted that mountains are the last wilderness areas, which should be preserved for their own sake and for future generations. He said that hot spots in mountain ecosystems contain approximately one third of all existing plant species. Körner called for a "lowland-upland contract," emphasizing the importance of mountain-captured water to lowland communities and the importance of lowland food production for mountain communities. He stressed that sustainable upland management could help to retain livelihoods and traditional culture in the mountains, and provide food and water security for both communities. He also said that human diversity is a key element for sustainable land use at high altitudes.

Andrei Iatsenia, UNEP Mountain Programme, highlighted the deterioration of mountain ecosystems in both developed and developing countries. He focused on the issue of payments for environmental services as an alternative source of income for communities living in mountain ecosystems.

In response to questions from delegates, Körner confirmed the genetic diversity of mountain dwellers and stressed the sensitivity of volcanic strata and marginal ecosystems. He clarified that mountain ecosystems do not always contain all bio-climatic zones. He commented on the "upland-lowland contract" as a model for redistributing wealth over generations, and on models for food production that maintain agricultural biodiversity and overcome population pressures. Körner suggested that land use is not sustainable when it accelerates natural erosion, and stressed that soil integrity is an inclusive criterion for ecosystem integrity. He said that rare species have value beyond science and opposed treating biodiversity as a purely scientific issue. Körner also highlighted the importance of education, particularly of women, and stressed the need to expand forest areas.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the first major CBD meeting after the WSSD began, general comments on various agenda items reflected attempts to integrate the Summit's outcomes into the activities of the Convention. Some delegates anticipated that the multi-year programme of work may be the focus of numerous informal discussions before next week's meeting, noting that today's disagreement on whether forest biodiversity should be reviewed in 2006 at COP-8 or later, could be considered as one of the least controversial issues.

While discussions on the procedural shortcomings of the COP-6 decision on invasive alien species are still on-going, some feared that the meeting's main theme would be overshadowed by a re-opening of the debate on the topic. Some delegates opposed considering the issue within the SBSTTA framework and others hoped that it might be resolved through informal consultations in the Bureau over the week.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

WORKING GROUP I: WG-I will meet at 10:00 am in Conference Hall 1 to discuss mountain biodiversity.

WORKING GROUP II: WG-II will meet at 10:00 am in Conference Hall 2 to consider inland water ecosystems.