

SBSTTA 25 and Resumed Second Part of CBD COP 15 Highlights: Thursday, 19 October 2023

On Thursday morning, the twenty-fifth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 25) finalized its work, adopting a series of key recommendations to further the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

In the afternoon, the resumed second part of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) convened. Delegates addressed procedural matters left over from the first part of the meeting in December 2022, including elections of the bureau and chairpersons for subsidiary bodies.

SBSTTA 25

Election of Officers

SAINT LUCIA nominated Francis Omar Reyes Polanco (Dominican Republic), as the substitute for Latin America and Caribbean Group (GRULAC). AUSTRALIA nominated Jane Stratford (UK) to replace their original nominee as Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) substitute.

Facilitating the Implementation of the GBF and the Monitoring of its Progress

Plant Conservation: Delegates considered CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.2 on plant conservation. JAPAN reserved the right to make comments on references to digital sequence information (DSI) at future meetings. AUSTRIA, with SWEDEN, noted that complementary action on support for research had not been discussed, calling for the action to remain in brackets. BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, EGYPT, and INDONESIA regretted that parties were reopening recommendations after the conclusive discussions during the previous plenary session. Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz called on delegates to provide written statements to be recorded in the meeting report, and noted their right to reserve on any issue. Delegates then approved the recommendation.

Monitoring framework of the GBF: Delegates considered CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.8 on the monitoring framework for the GBF. FINLAND noted that some targets have not been discussed. Delegates approved the recommendation, with editorial amendments from NORWAY.

Mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review: Delegates approved the recommendation on scientific, technical and technological inputs that should inform the global review of collective progress in the implementation of the GBF (CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.7).

Approaches to identifying scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the Framework, including its implication for the Convention's work programmes: Parties discussed the document CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.5. BRAZIL and CANADA noted that the paragraph on the preparation of technical advice did not accurately reflect the discussions from the previous evening. Delegates agreed that the technical advice would be

deferred for consideration by SBSTTA 26 “and” the fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI 4), and not “or.” Parties further agreed to the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO’s (DRC) suggestion to add reference to women and youth. They also agreed to ARGENTINA’s suggestion on simplifying the recommendation inviting other intergovernmental organizations to submit their inputs and suggestions without limiting their views. Delegates approved the document as amended.

David Cooper, acting Executive Secretary, emphasized that the Secretariat will need to assess the resources required for the work, and noted that they would seek additional resources if necessary.

Findings from the IPBES and IPCC assessments and their implications for the Convention

Delegates considered CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.3 on the review of findings from the Methodological Assessment Report on the Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and their implications for the Convention’s work. Even though they were unable to agree on whether to “welcome,” “welcome with appreciation,” or “endorse” the assessment, they approved the recommendation.

Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

In discussing the document on IAS (CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.4), delegates agreed to the proposal by ARGENTINA to keep the reference to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) without necessarily mentioning its membership or task force. BELGIUM noted that the proposal by JAPAN to include reference to the key messages of the IPBES IAS report was not reflected. As such, the paragraph was reintroduced, subject to further consideration by the COP. Delegates approved the recommendation as amended.

Sustainable Wildlife Management

Delegates approved the recommendation contained in CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.6 on sustainable wildlife management. DRC requested deleting all references to “subject to the availability of funding.” After addressing other unresolved issues, delegates approved this recommendation.

Biodiversity and Climate Change

Chair Benítez requested the small group tasked with resolving outstanding issues on biodiversity and climate change (CBD/SBSTTA/25/CRP.8) to report back on their work. MALAWI reported that the group has reached a compromise on text related to collaborative efforts between the CBD and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and on the reference to nature-based solutions (NbS).

Delegates approved the draft recommendation, with Chair Benítez noting that document would be issued as an L.doc. EQUATORIAL GUINEA, with ESWATINI and DRC, requested for time to consider the L.doc. Delegates thereafter approved the recommendation on biodiversity and climate change (CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.9).

Other Matters

IRAQ highlighted the importance of finding viable solutions for water scarcity occasioned by the building of dams. COLOMBIA raised the issue of CBD Article 8(j) on traditional knowledge, innovations and practices, noting the importance of effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

Meeting Report and Closure

Rapporteur Bilal Qtishat (Jordan) introduced the report of the meeting (CBD/SBSTTA/25/L.1). Delegates adopted it with editorial amendments.

Acting Executive Secretary Cooper noted that the strength of the CBD lies in the open engagement of various groups and emphasized that this participation was essential for the “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach to the GBF. He also thanked SBSTTA Chair Benítez for his hard work and dedication to science for the past five years.

After a standing ovation from delegates for his successful tenure, Chair Benítez expressed hope that momentum at SBSTTA 25 will build up towards the successful completion of work for consideration at COP 16. He reminded delegates to find the common denominator for consensus and maintain high levels of ambition, discipline, and commitment. Chair Benítez closed the meeting at 12:54 pm.

Resumed Second Part of CBD COP 15

In the afternoon, Zhou Guomei (China), speaking for the COP 15 President, opened the resumed second part of COP 15, the tenth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CP-MOP 10), and the fourth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol (NP-MOP 4). Acting Executive Secretary Cooper welcomed delegates and called for a spirit of cooperation to complete all the outstanding items.

Organizational Matters

Adoption of the agenda: Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (CBD/COP/15/1/Rev.1, CBD/CP/MOP/10/1/Rev.1, and CBD/NP/MOP/4/1/Rev.1) including slight modifications on the order of business. Leina El-Awadhi (Kuwait) was elected as rapporteur for this meeting.

Credentials: Eric Okoree (Ghana) presented the credentials report (CBD/COP/15/INF/29, CBD/CP/MOP/10/INF/11, CBD/NP/MOP/4/INF/8). Delegates took note of it.

Election of officers: Guomei reminded delegations that due to procedural challenges, the election of officers (CBD/COP/15/INF/28/Rev.1) was not completed at the meeting in December 2022. For vice-presidency, regions nominated as follows: Ghana, for the AFRICAN GROUP, nominated Hlobile P. Siko (Eswatini) and Abderahman Zino Izourar (Algeria); Jordan, for ASIA PACIFIC, nominated Sandeep K. Singh (Fiji) and Somaly Chan (Cambodia); COSTA RICA, for GRULAC, nominated Gillian Guthrie (Jamaica), and Maria Teresa Becerra Ramirez (Colombia); and AUSTRIA, for WEOG, nominated Eric Schauls (Luxemburg) and Norbert Baerlocher (Switzerland).

Georgia, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), announced their region nominees as Teona Karchava (Georgia), Angela Lozan (Moldova), and Alexander Shestakov (Russian Federation). She explained that as their region could not reach consensus, they had gone through an internal voting process, resulting in Georgia and Moldova garnering the highest number of votes. RUSSIAN FEDERATION commented that the intricacies of discussions within the group were irrelevant, and that since no consensus was reached, all the nominees from the region should be considered in accordance with the rules of procedure.

MONTENEGRO, speaking for several Eastern European countries, called on the COP to honor the region's preferred nominees by electing Georgia and Moldova to the bureau. Speaking on a point of order, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION emphasized that political statements should not be permitted during decision making and called for a vote on the WEOG nominee from Luxemburg.

Guomei proposed proceeding first with the elections of nominees that were unopposed. Delegates elected by acclamation nominees from the African Group, Asia Pacific, GRULAC, and WEOG.

She then announced that the COP would undertake three secret ballots to elect COP Vice Presidents from CEE and WEOG, and the SBSTTA Chair. The Secretariat explained the voting procedure, including that only parties present would have vote and that the EU would not participate as individual states from the bloc would exercise their right to vote. Peru, Jordan, and Nigeria served as tellers, assisted by the Secretariat.

Following the vote for COP Vice Presidents from Central and Eastern Europe, Guomei announced the results, stating that of the 130 ballot papers received, there were two invalid votes, 128 valid votes, and 12 abstentions. Representatives from Georgia and Moldova were elected as vice presidents, with 84 and 79 votes respectively. Russian Federation garnered 47 votes.

Following the vote on the contested WEOG nominee, Guomei announced the results, stating that of the 130 ballot papers received, there were 130 valid votes, with 31 abstentions. Eric Schauls (Luxemburg) was elected as Vice President, with 99 votes.

For SBSTTA Chair, Georgia, for CEE, presented the nominee as Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The RUSSIAN FEDERATION underlined that there was no agreement in the region, and presented Alexander Shestakov (Russian Federation) as an additional candidate. Guomei stated that elections would be held by secret ballot. Following the vote on the SBSTTA Chair, Guomei announced the results, stating that out of the 130 ballot papers received, there was one invalid vote, 129 valid votes, with 11 abstentions. Senka Barudanovic was elected as SBSTTA Chair, with 69 votes. Alexander Shestakov garnered 49 votes. Guomei noted that, as Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a party to the Nagoya Protocol, a substitute would need to be nominated at a later date.

For SBI Chair, Kuwait, for ASIA PACIFIC, nominated Shri Reddy (India). Delegates elected him by acclamation.

In the Breezeways

After a night of extensive negotiations, delegates returned for the final day of the SBSTTA meeting on Thursday to complete the last leg of the meeting: adoption of the decisions from the 5-day SBSTTA25 negotiations. Instead of the anticipated sleepy and quiet morning they expected, they were met with a protest by a concerned group, decrying the current state of indicators for the GBF. The protestors were impossible to ignore as they chanted and displayed placards bearing messages such as, “wrong indicators = fake success” and “GBF without proper monitoring is worthless!” This message did not escape the attention of the CBD, as several unresolved issues regarding the monitoring of GBF implementation will carry forward into upcoming meetings of the Convention. Hopefully, the anticipated consensus will represent the wide range and diversity of stakeholders.

As SBSTTA 25 drew to a close, things took an emotional turn, as delegates bid farewell to the body's stalwart Chair, Hesiquio Benítez Díaz, who has faithfully led the process for over five years. After a prolonged standing ovation, he shared his parting words, commending the participation of all stakeholders in the work of the Convention and reminding delegates of the importance of collaboration and commitment to their mandate.

The meeting transitioned almost seamlessly into the resumed second part of the CBD COP15, which convened to tackle some outstanding issues. For the first time in the history of the Convention, delegates conducted a vote by secret ballot to determine contested nominations. The voting, which took several delegates out of their element, was marked with anticipation as many held their breath to the final announcement.

The tense mood eased into that of cheer, as delegates celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Biosafety Protocol. Delegates finally had some free moments to speak casually and enjoy the fruits of their labor. One delegate, quoting Shakespeare remarked, “all's well that ends well.”

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of SBSTTA 25 and the resumed COP 15 will be available on Monday, 23 October 2023 at bit.ly/CBDNairobi