

UNCCD CRIC 5 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 13 MARCH 2007

The fifth session of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 5) continued on Tuesday, 13 March 2007. During the morning delegates heard presentations and discussed and shared national experiences on legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements. In the afternoon, they considered ways and means of improving procedures for the communication of information and the quality and format of national reports prior to the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on this topic that will take place on Saturday, 17 March.

REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Franklin Moore, CRIC 5 Chair, introduced the second thematic topic on legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements. The Secretariat noted that parties to the UNCCD have committed to developing successful institutions, stressing that relevant national institutions require legal bases to carry out activities related to the UNCCD and that national coordination bodies (NCBs) must have the mandate to coordinate national-level activities in a concerted manner. He suggested that country experiences reveal that NCBs need consistent support and special attention from high-level government officials, adding that NCBs face a lack of resources and manpower for normal operation.

PANEL ON LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS OR ARRANGEMENTS: Sudhir Mital, India, provided an overview of relevant legislative and institutional frameworks in his country. He explained that India recently adopted a National Environment Policy, approved by all ministries and departments, which will serve as an umbrella framework for already-existing policies and legislation. He called for developing formal models for civil society and private sector participation, which requires incentives and resources.

Octavio Perez Pardo, Argentina, described seven strategic alliances enacted by his country under its National Action Programme (NAP). The strategies aim to: combat poverty; achieve sustainable development in the dryland rural areas; achieve synergy between environmental programmes under the UNCCD and the climate change and biodiversity conventions; develop indicators in cooperation with the science and research community; decentralize by developing provincial-level action programmes that dovetail with the NAP; achieve institutional-

level consensus through a national advisory commission; and strengthen donor, regional, South-South and international agency alliances.

Sajmir Hoxha, Albania, noted that his country has no deserts, but does suffer from land degradation problems such as soil erosion and risks of landslides caused by deforestation. He outlined measures taken to address these issues, including strengthening of land management legislation and adoption of integrated river basin management strategies. He noted the enactment of a law on environmental management and others addressing land degradation, as well as the establishment of institutions at national and local levels, including the National Council on Environmental Protection chaired by the Prime Minister.

Ashot Vardevanyan, Armenia, introduced his country's regulations on land management, including the Land Code enacted in 2001, the 2002 NAP to combat desertification, the establishment of two national parks and other measures that are being implemented at national and local levels. He also introduced the State Policy on Land Management, intended to empower local self-administration bodies, and highlighted projects undertaken with GEF and World Bank support.

Discussion: Responding to questions by ISRAEL and BENIN, Hoxha described his country's incentive programmes that promote the import of timber to address forest degradation and encourage gravel extraction from mountain areas rather than riverbeds.

GUINEA lamented, and Mital concurred, that transferring power to grass-roots levels through decentralization often amounts to transferring responsibility but not financial means. GUINEA argued that good partnerships require clear role definition and recognition that partners are not equally able to present their problems.

GUINEA-BISSAU inquired on the constraints and limits of regional approaches, and the US asked how to achieve coordination among different agencies with joint mandates. Perez Pardo replied that subregional strategies do not aim to achieve regulatory coordination at the international level, but rather seek to reinforce and strengthen existing national strategies through cooperation, adding that investments in desertification should be targeted at country and not at agency priorities. Mital also noted that each agency approaches desertification from the perspective of its own mandate. BRAZIL highlighted a congressional-level working group to ensure complementarity and participation by all sectors, and stressed the importance of changing the mindset of banks and funding bodies as well as local people.

On South Africa's question on monitoring the progress resulting from augmented national legislation, Mital stated that although no indicators exist to cut across programmes set up under different pieces of legislation, a general performance evaluation takes place at the development of each new national five-year plan. PANAMA noted that indicators on the impacts of policies are needed.

CHINA asked how to motivate participation by local governments and local people. In response, Mital reported on a new policy in which funds for reforestation that previously went directly to the government forestry department are now allocated to joint forest management committees which include local people, municipalities and experts from the forest department. Hoxha suggested a separate regional council for each watershed to allow participation by communes and local governments. Perez Pardo emphasized the need to respect cultural diversity in each province, including during NAP development, and warned against a one-size-fits-all approach. Vardevanyan added that local people often have the most knowledge about local land issues.

The EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES stated that devolution of power to local areas and the ability to raise fiscal revenues for empowerment at this level are critical topics, and that land tenure issues should be properly addressed within the Convention.

The GAMBIA pointed out that land tenure conflicts must be resolved to adequately address desertification, and asked for information on tenure processes at the local level. Vardevanyan said that his country has established a programme to address land tenure issues. Mital noted that land tenure conflicts may be solved through consultations organized by local governments and litigation at courts. Hoxha added that local councils often do not consider land management to be a funding priority and that unstable or uncertain land ownership is a disincentive to good management.

REGIONAL GROUP STATEMENT

Albania, for the EASTERN EUROPEAN GROUP, presented the regional report which had not been available on Monday when this agenda topic was addressed, stating that 19 national reports on implementation of the UNCCD have been prepared by members of his region for CRIC 5. He reiterated the importance of national reporting and expressed the region's willingness to contribute to the AHWG.

IMPROVING INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND NATIONAL REPORTS

The Secretariat introduced Agenda Item 7 on the consideration of ways and means of improving procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP (ICCD/CRIC(5)/9) and noted that nine of the 25 members of the AHWG on this issue had made submissions. He highlighted that, *inter alia*: it is difficult to distinguish UNCCD implementation from general implementation of sustainable land management; few submissions refer to the adoption of agreed standards; and more detailed information on the utilization of GEF resources is needed.

Regarding the process for the consideration of this agenda item, BELGIUM and JORDAN noted that the first meeting of the AHWG has not taken place yet, and sought clarification on the purpose of discussing the document at this stage. Chair Moore explained that this agenda item is intended to assist the work of the AHWG by giving all delegates a chance to present their input prior to the first AHWG meeting.

SWAZILAND voiced concerns over time constraints, noting that the AHWG must report to COP 8 based on the conclusions of the Intersessional Intergovernmental Working Group on the strategic plan, and that these conclusions are not yet available,

leaving almost no time for the AHWG to prepare and distribute a document prior to COP 8 in September 2007. He also highlighted the importance of thorough reporting by NCBs to reflect activities actually taking place at the local level.

The GLOBAL MECHANISM reiterated the need to improve national reporting and obtain more accurate financial information. The UNDP explained that 35 least-developed country parties whose national report development was supported by the UNDP completed self-evaluation forms containing information on issues such as the predictability of financial resources, the help guide, synergies, and the time required to produce reports.

Samoa, for the ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, encouraged the Secretariat to organize training sessions to improve understanding of reporting procedures and suggested that information-management systems need to be enhanced, citing the example of developing Internet-based clearing houses. The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC applauded the improved format for preparing national reports for CRIC 5 but noted that no reference to self-evaluation exercises exists in the document. BELIZE emphasized that scientific information is unavailable on some key aspects of desertification, but considered that activities performed and information available will allow the AHWG to present a comprehensive document for COP 8.

GERMANY requested information from parties on the degree of guidance they need on the reporting system. ETHIOPIA highlighted the need to establish indicators based on remote sensing and GIS and to provide capacity in this area to African countries. ROMANIA noted a submission by his region to the Secretariat with a new set of more concise, time-bounded indicators that may address some of the concerns expressed.

URUGUAY, supported by CHILE, TUNISIA and ARGENTINA, stressed linkages and synergies between the national reporting process under the UNCCD and those under other multilateral environmental agreements such as the climate change and biodiversity conventions.

CUBA highlighted the need for revitalizing the reporting process every 2-3 years, and with CHILE, PANAMA and TUNISIA emphasized the need for timely provision of funding to improve the quality of reporting. ARGENTINA noted that national reports should also point out problems. EL SALVADOR suggested a comparative table to allow easy identification of problem areas. BOTSWANA recommended including an ongoing national reporting mechanism as part of NAP processes to ensure that information is already at hand at reporting time.

In closing, Chair Moore said the first AHWG meeting should take on board the recent evolution in CRIC reporting procedures, and discuss, among other issues, benchmarks and indicators, comparative tables and linkages to other conventions. On the AHWG process, he suggested the AHWG should submit a progress report to COP 8.

IN THE CORRIDORS

In between plenary sessions, many delegates were heard wondering how to reconcile local policy-making priorities with the need to elaborate regional and subregional programmes that can attract international funding. Some said they were struggling to stretch already-limited resources to develop such programmes, and noted that important local issues risk being left aside if they don't resonate with the regional agenda. Others, including some funding agencies, recognized that multi-country partnerships can help developing countries to secure predictable resources for longer-term planning, which is needed to properly enable sustainable land management. On the CRIC process, participants expressed satisfaction with the new panel and discussion format, commenting that the extra time for discussion makes a big difference and allows a greater flow of relevant information.