

UNCCD CRIC 7 AND CST S-1: THURSDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2008

The first special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-1) concluded its work on 6 November 2008. The CST: discussed its four-year work plan, two-year work programme and an oral report to CRIC 7 on these items; considered its advice to CRIC 7 on measuring progress on Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the Strategy; and adopted its report.

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT MULTI-YEAR (FOUR-YEAR) WORK PLAN FOR THE CST: CST Chair Dar invited the Secretariat to respond to Wednesday's comments on the four-year work plan. The Secretariat: said the work programme was submitted for guidance and is being funded through supplementary funds, while the work plan, budget and accomplishments will be adopted at COP 9; agreed that the CST and the Secretariat's related work are complementary, thus indicators could be merged; and said it had noted the proposals to reduce the number of performance indicators and activities.

CONSIDERATION OF THE COSTED DRAFT TWO-YEAR WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE CST: Chair Dar opened the floor for discussion of the two-year work programme of the CST (ICCD/CST(S-1)/4/Add.2). GUINEA-BISSAU suggested focusing on the impact of drought. SENEGAL pointed out that there was no budget in the two-year work programme. PANAMA suggested focusing more on the four-year work plan, as the two-year work programme will end in one year. YEMEN said the work programme should be a 13.5-month programme, given that 2008 is almost over. The EU said the work programme should be realistic and include the means to carry it out. PERU suggested that the CST establish a calendar for effective implementation of the programme, while EQUATORIAL GUINEA called for precise timeframes.

Recalling the history of the UNCCD, CHAD, BENIN, NIGERIA, GUINEA and CHILE asked where the resources for the programme would come from, with NIGERIA arguing that resource-based budgeting would significantly reduce the activities to be implemented. NIGERIA and GUINEA highlighted some incorrect underlying assumptions about the work plan. JAPAN said without cost estimates, it is difficult to determine the appropriateness of activities and expressed concern at the mention of the need for supplementary funds.

TURKEY asked whether the DSD is collaborating with international institutions mentioned in the report, and when the thematic programme networks would be developed.

URUGUAY, supported by BRAZIL, suggested focusing on resource mobilization for implementing many of the activities. CÔTE D'IVOIRE emphasized the role of the national correspondents. Highlighting the CBD's experience, PAKISTAN stressed the importance of science and technology correspondents in promoting transboundary environmental activities. ITALY said the international scientific conference is instrumental to the achievement of the Strategic Objectives, and the work programme should highlight and connect the conference with the Objectives. SOUTH AFRICA emphasized the need for the Convention's institutions to strengthen their cooperation to avoid duplication of efforts and save costs.

The US noted that the work programme amounts to €510,000 and identifies 55 activities. He asked if the Secretariat would provide all the funds and whether it is feasible to expect the CST Chair and Bureau to be involved in all of the activities. ARGENTINA proposed matching the budget to expected outcomes.

Many parties highlighted the need to prioritize activities, given limited financial resources. GHANA stressed the role of traditional knowledge in developing indicators and CHILE highlighted, as CST priorities, holding regional scientific meetings and promoting the Convention. BURKINA FASO urged the CST to prioritize regional consultations on indicators and meetings of the working groups. VIET NAM suggested the work programme focus on the international scientific conference, and stressed the need to mobilize the active participation of parties. MOROCCO said some activities might be postponed until the next two-year period.

MEXICO said allocated funds are insufficient to raise the CST's profile. INDIA cautioned that development of a robust scientific basis must not be sacrificed when prioritizing activities. KYRGYZSTAN said information collection from scientific correspondents must be budgeted for. CAPE VERDE called on the GM to help mobilize funds to overcome financial constraints.

COLOMBIA emphasized that the Friends of the CST group, to be established under Operational Objective 3, should guarantee regional representation. JORDAN said coordination

between the focal points, CST and Secretariat should be more active. CHAD stressed establishing formal links between the CST and research institutions, particularly in Africa.

TUNISIA said financial resources and countries' preparedness to produce and harmonize the indicators are obstacles to implementing the work programme. ALGERIA and the CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC highlighted the need to establish priorities, and LEBANON stressed the need for a harmonized database. ZAMBIA emphasized the need to eliminate unnecessary activities, and underlined the importance of using national information and data.

NIGER asked when individual activities would be budgeted for. CSOs stressed the links between community involvement, information dissemination, behavior change and impact, and asked how much money is directed towards these activities. VENEZUELA said preparatory materials are needed to develop appropriate indicators. ISRAEL pointed out that no mechanism for quality control of scientific deliverables exists in the programme, and said voluntary peer review would not affect the budget. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC proposed redesigning the timeframe for the plan.

In response to comments, the GM recalled its mandate, reiterated the need for robust technical and scientific arguments in resource mobilization, highlighted ongoing discussion with the DSD on collaboration and expressed its willingness to offer its financial advisory services to parties.

The Secretariat said the work programme was developed to achieve the results that parties requested through their adoption of the Strategy. She said the 2008-2009 work programme was developed for information purposes, but CST 9 and COP 9 will consider a 2010-2011 work programme that will be accompanied by a detailed budget, and the CST will identify priorities in that and future work programmes. She noted that of the 55 activities, some 20 serve multiple purposes and thus are redundant but not repetitive, adding that many entail no significant cost.

CST S-1 REPORT ON THE FOUR-YEAR WORK PLAN AND THE TWO-YEAR WORK PROGRAMME: Chair Dar outlined the main contents of the report on the four-year work plan and two-year work programme of the CST to be presented to CRIC 7. He pointed out that the parties made a number of statements and endorsed the two documents. Regarding the 2008-2009 work programme, the priorities for which adequate funding should be mobilized include: selection of minimum indicators; organization of the CST 9 scientific conference; involvement of science and technology correspondents in activities identified in 2009; organization of the scientific policy dialogue together with the scientific conference; and planning of the next four-year work plan (2010-2013) and the next work programme. The CST decided to task the Chair to present the report to CRIC 7.

DRAFT ADVICE FROM THE CST TO THE CRIC ON HOW BEST TO MEASURE PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 1, 2 AND 3 OF THE STRATEGY: Chair Dar introduced the draft advice from the CST to the CRIC on measuring progress on Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3 for consideration and approval by the CST. The EU recommended several changes, including stating who is responsible for various tasks. NIGERIA, supported by SYRIA, suggested that detailed changes to the text at this time are inappropriate because they had only just received the draft.

In response to ALGERIA's concern that the draft recommendations were available in English only, the text was read out and translated orally.

On selection of a minimum set of indicators, ISRAEL said there is a contradiction in the text, which calls for a minimum set of indicators but then lists numerous possible sources for them. BRAZIL, supported by SYRIA, said indicators should account for countries' special circumstances and needs. PERU stressed the importance of making indicators more explicit and of using available indicators. ECUADOR recommended inclusion of existing indicators from the FAO.

On benchmarks and baselines, the US, supported by ARGENTINA, suggested that the terms "benchmark" and "baseline" be clearly defined.

On methods for collecting and analyzing relevant data for use with the minimum set of indicators, the EU suggested methods should be "identified," "defined" and "developed," in addition to being "harmonized."

SUDAN cautioned that combating desertification does not always improve living conditions, which is a difficult Strategic Objective to achieve. COLOMBIA drew attention to the need for financial resources to accomplish the work, and suggested that mention be made of the GM. ALGERIA underlined the importance of costing and determining actual dates for accomplishing the tasks.

Chair Dar said that a Bureau meeting would be held with participation of interested parties to finalize the document at the close of the CST.

DRAFT REPORT OF CST S-1: Chair Dar invited Committee members to adopt the draft report of CST S-1 (ICCD/CST(S-1)/L.1). CST Rapporteur Maria Nery Urquiza Rodriguez (Cuba) introduced the report, noting that the final version would include a report of the debates under each item discussed during CST S-1, as completed by the Bureau and Secretariat. The Committee adopted the report without amendment and authorized the Rapporteur, with the assistance of the Secretariat, to complete it.

Chair Dar thanked participants for supporting the enhancement of the scientific and technological basis of the Convention, and closed CST S-1 at 4:44pm.

IN THE CORRIDORS

While the CST concluded its first special session and passed the discussion about indicators onto the CRIC, some delegates expressed their hope that the contact group that will consider this issue during the second week will give it appropriate attention, with participants indicating that debate has already begun regarding the contact group's composition. Attention was also given to what the most appropriate model for bringing science into the UNCCD would be, with some discussions focusing on the lessons from the IPCC model and how they might be incorporated into the CST's activities. Some stressed the value of an independent scientific body while others highlighted the merits of a representative group to ensure the incorporation of diverse perspectives. Meanwhile, the Western European and Others Group, the one UN regional group without a matching Convention Annex, was said to be slated to receive a briefing from the Executive Secretary on Friday. The other UN regional groups received similar briefings during their Annex meetings on the first two days in Istanbul.