

SBSTTA 13 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2008

Delegates to the thirteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 13) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) met in plenary to hear opening statements and address organizational matters. The committee of the whole then considered SBSTTA's *modus operandi* for addressing new and emerging issues, and the in-depth review of the work programme on agricultural biodiversity.

PLENARY

Asghar Mohammadi Fazel (Iran), SBSTTA 13 Chair, welcomed delegates to the meeting, noting the challenge of providing timely and informed scientific advice to decision makers in a rapidly changing world. Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, Italian Minister for the Environment, Land and Sea, highlighted climate change as one of the major threats to ecosystems in the Mediterranean region, and underscored the importance of linking the Rio Conventions in order to address this challenge. Underlining the importance of the Bali Action Plan for reaching agreement on post-2012 emission reduction commitments, he called for urgent and ambitious actions to reduce the negative effects of climate change.

Dario Esposito, on behalf of Walter Veltroni, the Mayor of Rome, outlined the city's efforts to protect its green areas and its intention to incorporate 31% of Rome's land area into protected areas. He then signed the Countdown 2010 Declaration, a commitment to reduce emissions, increase the city's biodiversity and undertake biodiversity restoration efforts.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, CBD Executive Secretary, underscored the importance of agricultural biodiversity in achieving food security and development. He thanked the FAO for continued support to the CBD, as part of its global efforts to combat hunger. Highlighting accelerating urban demand for food, he invited local authorities to join other mayors in signing the Countdown 2010 Declaration.

James G. Butler, FAO Deputy Director General, reaffirmed the close links between FAO's core mandate and the need to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. He noted that the recently adopted Multi-year Programme of Work for the FAO Commission on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) provides an excellent means to strengthen relationships within FAO and with other partners for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the CBD's 2010 target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss.

Professor Rosalía Arteaga Serrano, Ecuador, presented on reconciling forestry, agriculture and environment in the context of the 2010 biodiversity target. She introduced the term "glocal issues" to highlight the importance of integrating global and local perspectives. She further outlined the reasons why environmental concerns had become disconnected from agriculture and forestry, including: increased pressure for intensification resulting from increasing demand for food, energy, and housing; the separation of public sector responsibilities for environment from those for agriculture, forestry, and water; and the emergence of market demand for biofuel, agrofuel and organic products. She explained that achieving reintegration will require greatly increased application of the principles of sustainable development.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates elected Angheluta Vadineanu (Romania) as the rapporteur; Gabriele Obermayr (Austria) and Linus Spencer Thomas (Grenada) as chairs of working groups I and II respectively, and Hesiquio Benitez (Mexico) and Asghar Fazel as co-chairs of the committee of the whole. JUSCANZ nominated Norway as new SBSTTA Bureau member. Nominations from other regional groups are pending regional consultations. Delegates then adopted the meeting's agenda and organization of work (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/1 and 1/Add.1). In response to a request for clarification on suggestions for SBSTTA procedure outlined in UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/1/Add.2, including the practice of forwarding options on issues for which no consensus can be achieved, Chair Fazel explained that this procedure would follow past SBSTTA practice.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

MODUS OPERANDI FOR NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES: Chair Fazel invited comments on the SBSTTA *modus operandi* for addressing new and emerging issues (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/8), including three options on the procedure for their selection and prioritization. Tanzania, for the AFRICAN GROUP, CANADA, FRANCE, INDONESIA, PORTUGAL, SLOVENIA, SWITZERLAND and THAILAND preferred for the SBSTTA Bureau to decide whether to consider a new and emerging issue. ARGENTINA, AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL, CUBA, and PERU supported an option specifying that no prioritization should be done before the next meeting of the COP, noting that the procedure must respect the COP's agenda-setting authority and requesting that the Secretariat, rather than the Bureau, should annotate SBSTTA's agenda. INDIA, MALAYSIA, NEW ZEALAND and others preferred considerations on the basis

of an option outlining a two-step procedure, whereby the first meeting of SBSTTA following a COP would recommend ways in which the second meeting could address the issues. A Friends of the Chair Group was established to work towards a compromise.

AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY: Presentations: Peter Kenmore, FAO, highlighted the impacts of agricultural practices on agricultural biodiversity in particular and biodiversity in general, pointing to the need to increase food production by 50% by 2050 to feed the projected global population. He called for a paradigm shift in agricultural production, away from chemically-based intensification, reliant on conventional inputs such as pesticides, fertilizers and large quantities of water, to biological intensification, which draws on the richness of plant and microbial genetic resources and has the potential to increase food production. He also discussed the impacts of climate change on food security, and of invasive alien species, introduced through lengthening food supply chains, on biodiversity. On biofuels, he observed that their intensified production would compromise efforts towards sustainable agricultural production.

François Pythoud, Switzerland, reported on the outcomes of the first International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, held in Interlaken, Switzerland in September 2007. The conference launched the FAO's *State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources* and adopted the Global Plan of Action comprising 23 strategic priorities for the conservation and sustainable use of animal genetic resources for food and agriculture. He stressed that the Global Plan of Action represents an opportunity to further develop linkages with CGRFA's work on plant genetic resources and the CBD's work programme on agricultural biodiversity.

Review of the Programme of Work: Delegates considered an in-depth review of the work programme on agricultural biodiversity (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/2). Many countries called for enhanced cooperation with FAO and other organizations, with: the EC stressing cooperation in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, and genetic resource conservation; NEW ZEALAND calling for capacity building for national-level application of the ecosystem approach; and JAPAN warning against duplicating efforts.

SLOVENIA, BRAZIL, SWITZERLAND, PERU and others underlined the need to consider both positive and negative impacts of agriculture on biodiversity, with PERU stressing the role of traditional agriculture. YEMEN underlined the need to study and document traditional methods of agriculture and animal husbandry, and ECUADOR asked for increased information exchange regarding underutilized crops. COLOMBIA highlighted the need for comprehensive research, especially on the ongoing expansion of the agricultural frontier, whereas CHILE and UGANDA stressed research on animal biodiversity issues, and MEXICO requested FAO to compile successful practices in agriculture and livestock management. MALAYSIA called for activities to sustain agricultural ecosystem functions and services.

On biofuels, the EC suggested that COP 9 develop guidelines to minimize potential negative impacts of biofuel production and consumption. ARGENTINA noted that climate change and biofuel issues are already addressed in other fora, while BRAZIL opposed recommendations going beyond the collection and dissemination of information. The AFRICAN GROUP called for additional knowledge and guidance on bioenergy production and consumption, GERMANY for full life-cycle analysis of the production of biomass fuels and its climate-related impacts, and NORWAY for mechanisms and systems for sustainable biofuel production. LIBERIA, BELGIUM and QATAR drew attention to the negative impacts of biofuels, with LIBERIA calling for clear national-level policies to prevent large-scale monoculture.

The NETHERLANDS underlined the challenge of balancing agricultural uses and wildlife conservation. GHANA called for the identification, recognition and support of regional initiatives for sustainable agriculture and development. BRAZIL suggested focusing on sustainable use of soil biodiversity, water resources and integrated pest management. ETHIOPIA emphasized rehabilitation of degraded agricultural ecosystems, and YEMEN stressed the need to protect the most fragile areas. The NETHERLANDS noted the need for joint ventures on technology transfer to implement the Addis Ababa principles on sustainable use of biodiversity.

TURKEY called for developing indicators to monitor CBD implementation and support for long term research on climate links. SWITZERLAND suggested using the indicators currently being developed by the EC, while INDIA questioned the use of a universal set of indicators, noting that parties should select their own indicators. EL SALVADOR highlighted mainstreaming agricultural biodiversity into policy in other sectors, and focusing the work programme's mission statement on the CBD's three objectives. THAILAND prioritized invasive alien species and nitrate loading as threats to agricultural biodiversity. POLAND noted the need to strengthen recommendations on instruments for national implementation.

FAO outlined its achievements as lead partner in implementation, emphasizing cooperation across organizations and from the food producer to policy level. The CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH welcomed the invitation to support implementation of the International Initiative on Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition, while the GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION FACILITY described how its taxonomic work supports the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Pollinators. The PLATFORM FOR AGROBIODIVERSITY RESEARCH explained its research role, including identifying uses for agricultural biodiversity in climate change adaptation and mitigation. UNEP described an initiative aiming to minimize trade liberalization's negative impacts on agrobiodiversity in developing countries. The INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE highlighted the need for sustainable, intensive farming practices. The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY noted that preserving agrobiodiversity requires protecting local land rights and socio-cultural systems.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Despite SBSTTA 13's heavy agenda, which one delegate described as being "loaded with explosive items," the meeting began with a palpable sense of purpose, reflected by a business-like plenary session. A number of delegates expressed their satisfaction with the way in which the substance of the meeting was immediately engaged, with one delegate noting that "for once people had respected the Chair's plea to avoid time-wasting formalities such as congratulating the Chair and thanking the Secretariat." Another participant commended the Chair's proactive approach, evidenced by the rapid establishment of a Friends' of the Chair group to work on the first contentious issue: how SBSTTA will deal with new and emerging issues. On a related point, several delegates welcomed the Bureau's suggestion that SBSTTA should forward options to the COP in areas on which they can't agree so as to prevent getting bogged down by political differences. As one delegate put it, such a procedure recognizes that SBSTTA's role is to "propose" and not "decide."