



SUMMARY OF THE 17TH SESSION OF THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FORUM 15-17 NOVEMBER 2002

The Seventeenth Session of the Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF17) was held from 15-17 November 2002 in Valencia, Spain. The meeting took as its theme the issue of "managing wetlands for global change and local livelihoods." The GBF was founded by the World Resources Institute (WRI), UNEP, the African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS) and IUCN-The World Conservation Union. GBF17 was organized in cooperation with more than a dozen inter-governmental and non-governmental agencies, government departments and ministries from several donor countries, UN agencies, and multinational corporations. Two hundred and twenty-five participants attended the session.

GBF17, which took place immediately prior to the Eighth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP8), was comprised of workshops on four topics:

- wetlands restoration and mitigation;
- environmental governance and sustainable development - the contribution of the Ramsar Convention;
- agriculture, wetlands and water resources; and
- communication, education and public awareness.

In addition, a roundtable discussion was held on "Wetlands, People and Climate: Preparing for Change."

Note: This issue of *Sustainable Developments* reports only on GBF17's closing plenary, held on Sunday morning, 17 November 2002. During this plenary, participants heard reports on the discussions and conclusions from the four workshops and the roundtable held during the previous days. The closing plenary also included a summary by GBF17's Chief Rapporteur outlining all the key issues and recommendations raised during the meeting.

REPORT OF THE SESSION

GBF17 Chair Jamie Skinner, IUCN Malaga, invited the workshops' and roundtable's facilitators to outline the key themes and conclusions of the previous two days, and indicated that these would also be presented during the opening session of COP8.

WETLANDS RESTORATION AND MITIGATION

Workshop facilitator Bill Streever, BP Exploration (Alaska), identified three interrelated themes addressed by participants: how Ramsar principles and guidelines for restoration can be improved; how mitigation can be implemented as part of national wetland strategies; and whether restoration and mitigation can help alleviate poverty.

On the Ramsar principles and guidelines for restoration, he noted that the process to develop these had been instigated by the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) three years ago, and that a document containing draft principles and guidelines had been approved by the Ramsar Standing Committee. He indicated that,

while the workshop had resulted in suggestions for minor improvements, overall the document was considered acceptable to workshop participants, who urged COP8 to approve it.

On implementing mitigation as part of national wetland strategies, Streever said the workshop had concluded that COP8 should encourage progress by establishing a working group and developing a document addressing this matter.

Finally, he noted participants' recommendation that COP8 should be encouraged to support further links with the private sector, especially by opening discussions with selected industries and corporations regarding the application of principles and guidelines for wetland restoration and possible future mitigation guidelines. He indicated that these messages would be transmitted to COP8 on its opening day, and also through Ramsar focal points.

ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

Hillary Masundire, IUCN Commission on Ecosystems Management, explained that the workshop on environmental governance and sustainable development had focused on two questions: whether Ramsar sites contribute to conservation of biodiversity and sustaining human livelihoods; and whether the ecosystem approach contributes to maintaining or restoring the ecological character of Ramsar sites and improvement of livelihoods. He indicated that discussions on these matters were based on 12 prepared Ramsar site case studies.

He noted consensus on the significant contribution of Ramsar sites to biodiversity conservation and human livelihoods, and agreement that the ecosystem approach is a valuable tool for planning and implementation of wetland management.

He drew attention to participants' recommendation for further elaboration of the ecosystem approach in a "non-technical manner," and for practical guidance on implementing the approach. Further elaboration of the approach would address issues of scale, policy and communication needs.

AGRICULTURE, WETLANDS AND WATER RESOURCES

Douglas Taylor, Wetlands International, reported on the workshop on agriculture, wetlands and water resources, noting that, although this was considered a controversial issue, the interests of those who work on conservation and those who subsist from agriculture or work on food security issues could be integrated harmoniously. Highlighting the importance of this workshop, he observed that 70% of freshwater is used for agriculture, and that 50% of Ramsar sites are used for agricultural purposes.

He noted agreement that sustainable agriculture is an essential management tool for maintaining conservation values of wetlands in bio-cultural landscapes. The workshop also recognized that wetlands are under increasing pressure from agriculture to be modified for food production. In this context, Taylor noted participants' comments that the importance of wetlands for the rural poor's food security through

small-scale agriculture, as well as other uses, should be considered. He also highlighted the workshop's conclusion that, in order to arrive at an optimal multi-sectoral use of wetlands, there is a need to balance agricultural development with the full range of economic, social, and cultural values and the maintenance of their ecological functions. He drew attention to support for the draft resolution on agriculture on COP8's agenda, which he said was designed to reconcile agricultural use in and around wetlands with the protection of the "key values" of wetlands.

Following Taylor's presentation, a number of participants commented on the workshop, with several highlighting the impacts of intensive shrimp farming, and a relevant COP7 resolution.

COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Jane Claricoates, Consultant, presented the report of the workshop on communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) for sustainable development, stressing the importance of linking CEPA discussions to outcomes from the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). She noted the lack of private sector participation in the workshop and recommended involving new partners in CEPA. The workshop recommended building capacities of Ramsar CEPA focal points, providing international and national support and financial resources for CEPA activities of focal points and the Ramsar Bureau; concluded that cooperation between NGO and government focal points is critical for implementing the Convention; and stressed that CEPA for sustainable development is "a natural vehicle" for harmonization amongst multilateral environmental agreements.

Following the presentation, participants commented on the workshop, stressing the need for strategies to ensure effective community participation in sustainable management of wetlands and for sharing experiences in the field.

WETLANDS, PEOPLE AND CLIMATE: PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Elroy Bos, IUCN, presented the report of the roundtable on climate change and wetlands, which addressed interlinkages between climate change and wetlands, and adaptation and mitigation strategies. He explained that the roundtable had considered a relevant draft resolution on the COP8 agenda and recommended that the Ramsar Convention: address climate change as one of the trends impacting wetlands; be proactive in addressing knowledge gaps on climate change impacts; and prepare adaptation strategies for both gradual and rapid ecosystem changes. The roundtable also recommended further research on this issue, including carbon-emission offsetting by very large ecosystems, and prompt measures to mitigate climate change impacts, including national and regional adaptation plans and actions and creating necessary infrastructure solutions. Bos said that a number of concrete changes to the text of the resolution had been proposed.

Following the presentation, several participants highlighted the important role of peatlands and arctic wetlands in climate change, as well as the need to gather and systematize the information on interrelations of climate change and wetlands.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

During the ensuing general discussion, participants discussed linkages amongst conclusions of the different workshops. Many stressed the importance of the cross-cutting issue of local communities' participation in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. One delegate called for a funding mechanism to ensure indigenous peoples' participation in international meetings, and a GBF repre-

sentative noted a proposal for such a mechanism under the GBF. Participants also discussed: means to ensure that COP8 takes into account the GBF's recommendations; the need to monitor implementation of the Convention; the role of civil and scientific societies in implementation "on the ground"; the importance of ensuring sustainable use of all wetlands; and the need to raise awareness on the values and ecosystem functions of wetlands, including their role in water management, both in developed and developing countries.

SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tim Jones, GBF 17 Chief Rapporteur, provided overall conclusions and recommendations for the workshop. He emphasized broad support for enhancing the Ramsar Convention's role in sustainable development and poverty alleviation in response to the WSSD. He said the GBF recognized that: maintaining functions of wetland ecosystems is crucial for supporting livelihoods as well as conserving biodiversity; a paradigm shift is required in the way Ramsar deals with CEPA; wetland restoration has the potential to deliver socioeconomic benefits in all Ramsar regions; and agriculture is the major user of fresh water globally and has a critical influence on the sustainability of wetland functions and values in all Ramsar regions (with corresponding implications for biodiversity and livelihoods). He highlighted support for, and proposed amendments to, COP8 draft resolutions, particularly those dealing with agriculture, CEPA, restoration and climate change (and corresponding sections of the draft Strategic Plan).

He highlighted that GBF challenges for COP8 include radically upgrading the practical application of global Ramsar principles, guidelines and tools. This, he said, requires dealing with variability, including between regions, scales, sectors and wetland types, and adapting principles, guidelines and tools to local contexts. To this end, he emphasized the necessity for political will, transparent, equitable and participatory approaches, capacity and resources, traditional wisdom and empowering local communities, and CEPA. He further stressed strengthening monitoring and evaluation of use of existing guidelines and tools and facilitating increased dissemination of experience. He said the COP must be open to new directions, partnerships and synergies, and that the Convention has to reflect the diversity and complexity of wetlands. He stressed the importance of increased participation of the private sector, reaching out to new stakeholders, particularly in agriculture and in CEPA, and not limiting the Convention's scope or flexibility.

CLOSING REMARKS

In his closing remarks, Nick Davidson, Ramsar Convention Deputy Secretary General, highlighted linkages between the GBF and the Ramsar COP, and the importance of the GBF discussions and outcomes to the COP. He noted the significance of CEPA to the implementation of the Convention. He welcomed GBF recommendations for modifying draft resolutions, and drew attention to the challenge of achieving sustainable development in parallel with maintaining key functions and processes of wetlands for the benefits of peoples. He stressed that Ramsar is not an enforcement convention, that responsibility for implementation lies with countries, and that the Ramsar Bureau's responsibility is to assist implementation. He also emphasized the importance of working with local communities and their involvement at the local and national levels from an early stage in the management process.

Thanking all the organizers and participants for their work, GBF 17 Chair Jamie Skinner declared the meeting closed shortly after 12:00 pm.