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CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
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ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
First meeting
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NOTE ON REGIONAL WORKSHOPS ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Note by the Interim Secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the first session of the Intergovernmental Committee on the Convention on Biological Diversity, it was agreed that regional approaches to address shared concerns should be organized for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, for example through workshops and seminars. The Interim Secretariat was requested to mobilize funds for these workshops (UNEP/CBD/COP/1/3, annex II, para. 4).

2. A list of the workshops convened was included in the documentation for the second session of the Intergovernmental Committee on the Convention on Biological Diversity. Since then, additional workshops have been held. The purpose of this note is to share information about these workshops in order to facilitate an exchange amongst countries on the major issues of concern and directions for future action highlighted at the workshops.

3. During the preparatory process, the Interim Secretariat engaged in dialogue on the approach, orientation and context for the workshops with governments through their missions in Geneva, with ministries in their capitals and during intergovernmental meetings. Regional intergovernmental agencies were also consulted. On this basis, the Interim Secretariat prepared a project document which was presented to donor agencies on behalf of the countries and with their concurrence. Given the limited time before the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties, a pragmatic approach was taken to organize the workshops on a regional or subregional basis depending on feasibility and to make use of and build upon, where appropriate, existing opportunities and initiatives being undertaken by governments and regional agencies.

4. The preparation of the workshops was initiated and coordinated by lead governments and/or regional agencies (the UNEP Regional Offices, in several instances), in consultation with the governments of the region or sub-region. The Interim Secretariat's contribution varied considerably depending on the specific needs and included participating in fundraising, conceptualization and provision of technical inputs, when requested. Governments used the workshops as an opportunity to:

(a) Enhance their understanding of the implications and benefits of the Convention;

(b) Obtain advice on steps required for ratification;

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(c) Begin discussion of priorities for implementing the Convention including national policies and strategies and regional approaches to address shared concerns;

(d) Prepare for participation in the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

II. WORKSHOPS CONVENED

5. The action taken by governments and agencies is summarized as follows (regions and subregions are given in alphabetical order):

Africa

Forum on Biological Diversity and Plant Genetic Resources in Francophone Africa

6. The Forum on Biological Diversity and Plant Resources in Francophone Africa was organized by the Ministry of the Environment of Canada, the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT) and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire in Abidjan from 30 May to 4 June 1994. Funding was provided by the organizing agencies. The forum was attended by representatives of 22 countries and nine international organizations.

7. The aims were to stimulate country study and national strategy preparation and to encourage cooperation among relevant national and international organizations. Points highlighted were the need to promote:

(a) Cooperation in developing guidelines for country studies and national strategies;

(b) The ratification of the Convention and to encourage the legislative, administrative and policy changes required by the Convention;

(c) Training and review of relevant national publications;

(d) Coordination of activities of various United Nations agencies and international organizations involved in implementing Agenda 21 in Africa.

Regional African Ministerial Conference on the Convention on Biological Diversity within the Framework of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN)

8. The Regional African Ministerial Conference on the Convention on Biological Diversity within the Framework of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) was convened by the UNEP Regional Office for Africa (ROA), the Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity in Nairobi from 24 to 26 October 1994. Funding was provided by UNEP, UNEP/ROA and the Government of Japan through the Interim Secretariat. Delegates including 13 Ministers from 41 countries and 31 international, regional and non-governmental organizations attended the meeting.

9. The objectives were to examine key Convention issues requiring an African common position, to promote Convention ratification and develop strategies for effective participation by the countries of Africa in the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and to discuss implementation. A two-day Ministerial meeting was preceded by a one-day African Experts Group meeting. Discussions were focused on a position paper on issues of relevance to Africa and on African common perspectives and positions on the Convention, which had been previously prepared by a small group of African experts in order to facilitate the process. The major

ighlights were:

(a) The preparation of a statement on Africa's overall approaches and guiding principles for the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components. The continent's present and planned undertakings geared towards implementation of the Convention (management-related, capacity development, information and enabling measures) and vision for future international cooperation and commitments (development of protocols regulating access to genetic resources, technology transfer and safety in biotechnology, fair and equitable sharing of benefits resulting from the utilization of genetic resources) were also included;

(b) Preparation for effective African participation in consideration of the issues on the agenda of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Asia

Regional Conference on Biological Diversity Conservation for the Asia and Pacific Region

10. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) organized the Biological Diversity Conservation for the Asia and Pacific Region meeting in the meeting in Manila from 6 to 8 June 1994. Funds were provided by the ADB and IUCN. Representatives from 15 countries and a number of observers from intergovernmental, academic, research and non-governmental institutions attended the meeting.

11. The conference aimed at identifying socio-economic incentives for investment in biological diversity and priorities for this investment, providing information on alternative financial and technical assistance options and integrating conservation with economic development. Major points highlighted were:

(a) The social, financial, legal and institutional dimensions of biological diversity conservation as well as overall conservation approaches;

(b) Recommendations to the Asian Development Bank with respect to its future investments in biological diversity conservation. These include building on existing priorities, providing small grant support, capacity building, awareness raising and the periodic convening of regional workshops on Convention themes.

International Consultation on Biological Diversity, Ministry of Environment and Forestry

12. The International consultation on Biological Diversity, Ministry of Environment and Forestry was organized by the Government of India, Bangalore from India, 22 to 23 August 1994. Funding was provided by the Government of India and UNEP. The meeting was attended by representatives from 11 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Association of South East Asian Nations and other countries in the Asian regions, as well as a number of international organizations.

13. The objectives were to discuss matters of common interest to the region, foster mutual cooperation and, where possible, articulate common positions on the Convention issues. National presentations highlighted the present status of biological diversity management in countries. Working groups examined:

(a) Scientific and technical cooperation - stress was laid on the importance of exchange of information at the regional level, maximizing the use of regional expertise, inventories of the components of biological diversity and regional repositories of genetic material;

(b) Regional cooperation - a Bangalore declaration was prepared which calls upon governments to undertake activities for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in consonance with the provisions of the Convention. Areas identified for regional cooperation included access to genetic resources, sharing of traditional knowledge and strengthening communication networks.

Caribbean Island States

Regional Workshop on the Practical Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Insular Caribbean

14. The UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Government of the Bahamas convened a regional workshop on the Practical Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Insular Caribbean in Nassau from 24 to 25 November 1994). UNEP provided financial assistance. The workshop's major aims were to promote the ratification of the Convention and establish a regional strategy on various aspects of conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity within the framework of the Convention. As this workshop had not been convened prior to the finalization of this note, additional information could not be available.

Central and Eastern Europe

Workshop on the Practical Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Baltic Subregion (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)

15. The UNEP Regional Office for Europe and the Government of Estonia prepared the workshop on the Practical Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Baltic Subregion which was held in Tallinn from 16 to 18 October 1994. Financial support was provided by UNEP. In addition to the workshop sessions, briefings on the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties were also held by the Interim Secretariat. Thirty-two representatives from the three Baltic countries and 16 observers from other European governments and non-governmental and international organizations attended the workshop.

16. The aims were to initiate the formulation of mechanisms for implementing the Convention including national policies and plans and sub-regional approaches as well as to prepare for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Key points highlighted were:

(a) Recommendations for national and subregional strategies for implementing the Convention in the Baltic countries;

(b) In view of their unique situations, the Baltic countries should promote, as a group, their common interests in implementing the Convention;

(c) Biodiversity country studies, which could be assisted by UNEP, should be simultaneously undertaken in each of the Baltic countries. Subregional aspects should be considered in the studies;

(d) The implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity at the national level should be integrated with that of the other major conservation conventions.

Latin America

Regional Workshop on the Practical Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Latin America

17. The UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Government of Peru planned a Regional workshop, on the Practical Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Latin America in Lima from 7 to 8 November 1994. Funding was provided by UNEP. Fourteen government representatives and observers from non-governmental and international organizations attended the workshop.

18. The objectives of the workshop were to promote the ratification of the Convention and to consider a regional approach to ensure the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components within the framework of the Convention. The workshop also focused on items on the agenda of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties as well as the relationship between the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international instruments related to biodiversity.

The Middle East

Workshop on Biological Diversity in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Countries

19. The Environmental Protection Council of Kuwait, the GCC Secretariat and IUCN organized a workshop on Biological Diversity in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries in Kuwait from 24 to 26 September 1994. Funding was given by the GCC. Representatives from six GCC member states, specialist institutions and international and regional organizations participated.

20. The workshop's objectives were to review the status of biological diversity in GCC countries; specify the requirements for implementation of the Convention; identify elements for national and regional biological diversity strategies and identify action priorities for the region. Major points stressed included:

(a) GCC countries should strive to ratify the Convention and to develop and implement national biological diversity strategies as well as a regional strategy;

(b) Public awareness, capacity building for taxonomic research, utilization of available expertise, mobilization of financial resources and non-governmental organizations are important aspects of such a strategy.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

SIDS Biodiversity and Climate Change Forum

21. The Interim Secretariat and the Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development convened the SIDS Biodiversity and Climate Change Forum in Barbados from 26 April to 3 May, 1994. The Forum which consisted of eight workshops (three on the Convention on Biological Diversity, three on the Framework Convention on Climate Change and two on the financial opportunities and mechanisms relevant to both Conventions) held parallel with the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (GCSIDS). Approximately 25-30 delegates participated in each workshop, with some being attended by up to 80 participants. The Governments of Australia and Denmark gave financial

support. In addition to the organizing institutions, the Interim Secretariat for the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, other agencies and governments provided resource persons for the workshops.

22. The workshops were not intended to reach conclusions or consensus, although suggested courses of actions and recommendations were made. Feedback from participants indicated that:

(a) The forum had provided an important opportunity for SIDS delegates to share trans-regional experience and to increase their understanding of the two Conventions;

(b) Subregional workshops for island states on the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and preparation for the meetings of the Conference of Parties should be held.

III. FUTURE PLANS

23. Efforts are continuing by the Interim Secretariat to facilitate funding for additional workshops for other regions and subregions. These could focus on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and decisions from the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Discussions are being advanced for Asian subregions, Central and Eastern Europe (with the Government of Bulgaria leading) and the South Pacific (with the South Pacific Environment Programme coordinating).

IV. CONCLUSION

24. In addition to increasing understanding of the steps to be taken to ratify the Convention, the regional workshops can be seen as an initial stage of a process of building long term:

(a) Enhanced participation in the meetings of the Conference of the Parties;

(b) National preparation and regional collaboration for implementing the Convention;

(c) Capacity building for national implementation of the Convention by facilitating the identification of problems facing countries in implementing the Convention;

(d) Networks to facilitate sharing of experiences and approaches to implementation.
