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VOLUNTARY PEER-REVIEW PROCESS FOR THE NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS: PROGRESS REPORT AND UPDATED METHODOLOGY

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. At its ninth and eleventh meetings, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate, inter alia, voluntary review processes for implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs). At its twelfth meeting, the Conference of the Parties, in paragraph 3 of its decision XII/29, took note of the documents prepared by the Executive Secretary on a proposed pilot voluntary peer-review process for the national biodiversity strategies and action plans,¹ and requested the Executive Secretary, subject to the availability of resources, to develop a methodology for a voluntary peer-review process and to report to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), for its consideration.
2. The Governments of Japan, Norway and Switzerland committed funds and resources to the further development of the voluntary peer review process. Subsequently, the Secretariat issued a notification to establish an informal working group to continue to develop and test the proposed methodology. A total of 17 Parties nominated experts and Georgia offered to host a first meeting of the group. The inception meeting of the Working Group for the Development of a Methodology for Voluntary Peer-Review of the Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity was held in Tbilisi, Georgia, from 11 to 13 February 2015. During the meeting, the methodology presented to the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting was discussed by the 17 participating experts and a revised methodology and work plan of the working group were developed.
3. At the meeting, it was agreed that the revised methodology should be tested in at least two countries. From the informal working group, a total of seven² offered to join the test process and India and Ethiopia were selected as test countries providing a good geographical and socioeconomic range. In addition, both countries had recently revised their NBSAPs.
4. The review for Ethiopia was conducted from June 2015 and the peer review team comprised expert group members from India, Norway and Switzerland. The test for India was conducted by another review team consisting of China, Norway and Viet Nam from November 2015.³ Secretariat staff provided support for both reviews, both for the desk study, the in-country visit and the report preparation. Selection of the review teams was done using the criteria in the draft methodology, but

¹ UNEP/CBD/COP/12/25/Add.3 and UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/24.

² Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Nigeria, Norway, Switzerland and Viet Nam.

³ The Chinese could not travel to India for the in-country visit due to last minute complications with travel.

this was constrained by the relatively small number of Parties able to provide reviewers during the test period.

5. A second meeting of the informal working group was convened in Bern from 16 to 18 March 2016 to review the two test experiences and to further develop the methodology. The revised methodology arising from the meeting was presented to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/10/Add.1).

6. In its recommendation 1/9, the Subsidiary Body took note of the draft methodology for the voluntary peer-review mechanism for national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and of the progress made, and requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate further work. The Secretariat has further revised the methodology, paying special attention to the procedures for approval of the final report. The methodology, without its appendices, is attached as annex I to the present document. The same methodology, with the four appendices, is contained in information document UNEP/CBD/COP/13/INF/2.

*Annex***A METHODOLOGY FOR VOLUNTARY PEER REVIEW OF THE REVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS****I. OBJECTIVES**

1. The overall objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) voluntary peer review process is to help Parties to improve their individual and collective capacities to more effectively implement the Convention.
2. The specific objectives are as follows:
 - (a) To assess the development and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) in the context of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and produce specific recommendations for the Parties under review;
 - (b) To provide opportunities for peer learning for Parties directly involved and other Parties;
 - (c) To create greater transparency and accountability for NBSAP development and implementation to the public and other Parties.
3. The framework of the peer-review process is the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, NBSAPs, and other domestic instruments and national priorities related to the implementation of the Convention, its Protocols and other biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements.
4. The review should have two main focuses. The first addresses the overall biodiversity policy process, in particular as laid down in the NBSAP. The second consists of an in-depth analysis of a limited number of key policy areas and issues.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

5. NBSAPs or equivalent instruments are the primary national mechanisms for implementing the Convention, and the peer reviews are intended to provide participating Parties with observations and recommendations which they might use either when developing/updating their NBSAPs, or to improve the implementation of their NBSAPs and other relevant instruments, including through integration of biodiversity into broader policy frameworks. This will stimulate mutual experience-sharing, learning and capacity-building with potential benefits for all Parties to the Convention.
6. The following additional guiding principles also underpin the peer review:
 - (a) Open to all Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity;
 - (b) “Peer” means Party to the Convention;
 - (c) Based on an agreed common methodological framework;
 - (d) Flexible so as to allow a focus on some key issues of the Party under review;
 - (e) Allows the country under review to be responsible for considering how it responds to any recommendations made and how it will use the review report;
 - (f) Aims for broad participation of relevant Government institutions and stakeholders in the review process;
 - (g) The review is undertaken on the basis of mutual trust between the review team and the Party under review;
 - (h) Used by the Secretariat to highlight common lessons about what works well (leading to progress) and what works less well (leading to little or no progress, and presenting a continuing challenge) and to share this more broadly among the Parties to the Convention and beyond.

III. INITIATION OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

7. In response to a notification on the subject, any Party wishing to be reviewed indicates this in writing to secretariat@cbd.int. The request must be endorsed by the CBD National Focal Point (NFP), or higher authority. The application should be accompanied by a completed Appendix 1 (see below).

8. Eligibility of Parties to undergo a review is guided by the following criteria:

- (a) Evidence of high-level government support for the voluntary peer-review process;
- (b) Latest national report submitted;
- (c) Latest NBSAP adopted as a policy document; or advanced draft of an NBSAP, or policy equivalents, under revision;
- (d) Willingness to contribute to in-country costs of the review.

9. The Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, will select the Parties to be reviewed, taking into account regional balance.⁴

10. The Secretariat will, through a Notification, invite all Parties to nominate candidates for the review teams. Candidates are CBD NFP, NBSAP Coordinators, or suitable experts nominated by the review Parties. Selected candidates will serve in their individual expert capacity.

IV. SELECTION OF REVIEW TEAMS

11. The Secretariat will form balanced review teams, taking into consideration experience with peer review and expertise related to the characteristics of the Party under review, with respect to biodiversity, governance system and language. The review team comprises four to six reviewers, plus Secretariat support.

12. Once the review team has been established, a virtual meeting of the team is organized by SCBD to identify a team leader and agree on responsibilities for the review.

V. REVIEW RESPONSIBILITIES

13. The team leader is expected to:

- (a) Be able to set aside adequate time to fully participate in the review;
- (b) Provide overall coordination of the review, in conjunction with Secretariat;
- (c) Liaise between Secretariat and review team members;
- (d) Facilitate the allocation of team tasks and ensure collective ownership of the results;
- (e) Introduce the team in the in-country visits meetings;
- (f) Coordinate the preparation and completion of the final report;
- (g) To liaise with the Party under review on the finalization of the report and the submission of the final report to the Secretariat.

14. The peer reviewers are expected to:

- (a) Be able to set aside adequate time to fully participate in the review;
- (b) Develop and agreed work plan and timetable;
- (c) Conduct the desk-study and actively contribute to a preparatory note for the in-country visit, including potential interview questions and a preliminary structure for the final report;
- (d) Participate in the in-country visit;
- (e) Contribute actively to the preparation and finalization of the report.

⁴ Additional criteria may be relevant in the future.

15. The Secretariat is expected to:
- (a) Provide the necessary logistic support to the review team;
 - (b) Prepare materials for the desk study;
 - (c) Provide coordination and support for the in-country visit;
 - (d) Assist with the preparation and development of the review report as appropriate and agreed;
 - (e) Use the results of the reviews for broader capacity-building and learning among Parties more generally.
16. The Party under review is expected to:
- (a) Make available relevant documents and information;
 - (b) Collaborate with Secretariat and review team on the development of the programme for the in-country visit;
 - (c) Facilitate the in-country meetings and logistics;
 - (d) Provide factual corrections and clarifications on the draft report;
 - (e) Provide a written response to the final report;
 - (f) Provide post-review feedback on the value of the review process.

VI. DESK STUDY

17. The desk study should build on the scoping exercise (Appendix 1), also using Appendix 2, and focus on good examples as well as on barriers to implementation identified from the national reports and other sources, based on the indicative list in Appendix 3. The main output of the desk study should be a draft report which can be further developed during and after the in-country visit.

18. The desk study should identify the main review outputs. An important output of the desk study is the identification of issues that need further clarification/verification/explanation during an in-country visit. While finalizing the desk study, the review team drafts a work programme for such an in-country visit. This is sent to the Party under review for comment and dialogue in order to finalize the in-country work programme. The desk study is to be completed sufficiently in advance of the in-country visit to allow the necessary logistic arrangements.

VII. IN-COUNTRY VISIT

19. The precise programme for each in-country visit is to be developed and agreed by the review team in collaboration with the NFP, taking into consideration the roles determined above, the guidance document at Appendix 4 and the outputs of the desk study.

VIII. REPORT

20. Within two weeks of the end of the in-country visit, each review team member submits a “zero” draft of their agreed contribution to the report to the review team leader and the Secretariat, based on the structure developed in the desk study. The team leader continues to liaise with the review team members and Secretariat to produce a final report.

21. The final draft report will be sent to the Party under review within three months of the in-country visit with a request to check the review for any factual errors. The review team will subsequently finalize the report. The Party under review may provide a written response to the recommendations of the review and this can be included as an annex to the review.

22. The Secretariat of the Convention sends the report to the Party under review for posting on the national CHM website and also posts the report on the relevant CBD Country Profile pages⁵ and agrees with the Party under review on the formal delivery of the report to SBI.

IX. EVALUATION AND PROGRESS REPORT TO SBI

23. The Secretariat will make an evaluation of any additional reviews undertaken and provide a synthesis report of the VPR process for each meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation.

Appendices to the review methodology

Appendix 1: Preliminary Scoping Checklist for a Party Volunteering for Peer Review

Appendix 2: NBSAP Review Template for use in Desk Study

Appendix 3: Indicative list of documents to be used for desk assessment

Appendix 4: Indicative checklist of steps for in-county visit

⁵ <https://www.cbd.int/countries/>