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SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE

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WAYS AND MEANS TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present note has been prepared on the basis of the report of the meeting of the Bureau of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) held in Trondheim, Norway, on 5–6 February 2010. At that meeting, the Bureau members examined the functioning of SBSTTA and discussed ways and means to improve its effectiveness. Their conclusions were made bearing in mind the updated and revised Strategic Plan of the Convention currently under preparation, the mandate of other bodies, such as the Group on Earth Observations - Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON)¹ and the Conservation Commons,² and the discussions for the establishment of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES).³ These bodies have an important contribution to make in assisting SBSTTA to fulfil its mandate, in particular on issues related to keeping the status of biodiversity under constant review and the monitoring and implementation of the scientific and technical issues arising from the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention for the period 2011–2020.

2. The Bureau members noted that the ways and means of improving the quality of the scientific, technical and technological advice of the Subsidiary Body recommended by the Conference of the Parties in annex III to decision VIII/10 were applied in preparation for and during the twelfth and thirteenth meetings of SBSTTA (see the annex to the present note) but that it was too early to assess their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the Bureau felt that additional measures could be considered in order to further improve the effectiveness of the Subsidiary Body. They decided to formulate their recommendations around the following points:

- (a) Number of substantive items on the meeting agendas;

* UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/14/1.

¹ <http://www.earthobservations.org/geobon.shtml>

² <http://conservationcommons.net/>

³ <http://ipbes.net/en/index.asp>

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- (b) Nature and content of meeting documents prepared by the Secretariat;
- (c) Identification of more efficient ways of addressing in-depth reviews;
- (d) Clarification of the mandate of SBSTTA *vis-à-vis* the Working Group on Review of Implementation with regard to the advice on implementation of the Convention;
- (e) Inter-sessional role of the SBSTTA Bureau;
- (f) Clarification of the role and responsibility of SBSTTA focal points;
- (g) Relation between SBSTTA and the suggested IPBES and other bodies; and
- (h) Functioning of the clearing-house mechanism.

II. ELEMENTS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SBSTTA

A. Number of substantive items on the meeting agendas

3. The agendas of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth meetings of SBSTTA had, respectively, eight, seven and 18 substantive⁴ items. These are distinct items and thus cannot be addressed collectively. Such overloaded agendas barely provide time for each Party to make one intervention and do not allow enough time for a thorough scientific, technical and technological consideration of the items. The twelfth and thirteenth meetings were held for five days each, and the fourteenth meeting is planned for ten days.

4. In order to keep manageable the number of items on the agenda for SBSTTA, the Conference of the Parties may wish to identify few selected items to be considered by SBSTTA during the period 2011-2020 focusing on the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention, while keeping the status of biodiversity under constant review. In 2011-2012, SBSTTA may focus on the implementation of the Strategic Plan and to submit to the Conference of the Parties, at its eleventh meeting, the draft multi-year plan of action including its financial implications. In doing so, SBSTTA may pay particular attention to the impact of climate change on marine and terrestrial biological diversity.

B. Nature and content of meeting documents prepared by the Secretariat

5. The discussions at SBSTTA meetings depend greatly on the quality of the documentation prepared by the Secretariat. In paragraphs 12 and 14 of annex III to decision VIII/10, the Conference of the Parties recommends that the documentation prepared for SBSTTA meetings be concrete and focused, include proposed conclusions and recommendations for consideration by SBSTTA, and be peer-reviewed, as appropriate.

6. Often, discussions during SBSTTA meetings are limited to the consideration of the recommendations suggested in the notes by the Executive Secretary. For the twelfth meeting of SBSTTA, some documents (e.g., Improving the scientific, technical and technological debate during SBSTTA meetings (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/1/Add.2), the in-depth review of the implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/3), and new and emerging issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity - biodiversity and liquid biofuel production (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/9)), in addition to suggesting some recommendations, drew a number of conclusions that could be translated into key messages to the Conference of the Parties and the world at large. Such messages can also be found in decision IX/7, on the ecosystem approach, and decision IX/2, on biofuels and biodiversity. To enhance the scientific underpinning of the documentation before SBSTTA, the Conference of the Parties may wish to include in the budget necessary financial resources to allow SBSTTA to convene inter-sessional meetings of small groups of experts selected on the basis of their personal capacity, taking fully into account geographical and gender balance. For issues of strategic importance, the reports of such experts groups will be submitted to an ad hoc technical expert group (AHTEG).

⁴ .Excluding opening ceremony, organization of work, dates and venue of the next meeting, and closure of the meeting.

7. Another option for encouraging scientific and technical discussions at SBSTTA would be that SBSTTA provides the technical and scientific rationales behind alternative recommendations that it suggests to the Conference of the Parties when a consensus cannot be reached. Such technical and scientific rationales should include a summary of the background, the expected outcomes of the suggested actions and, as appropriate, their implications in space and time for biodiversity and human well-being, bearing in mind the ecosystem approach.

8. The Conference of the Parties will need to close the gap between SBSTTA work plan and availability of financial resources. Any request addressed to SBSTTA will need to be associated with the provisions of necessary financial resources.

C. Identification of more efficient ways of addressing in-depth reviews

9. Major difficulties in carrying out in-depth reviews have been (i) the limited number of national reports and voluntary thematic reports submitted in time; (ii) in the case of the fourth national reports, differences/disparity in the metrics and nature of the data provided, which did not allow comparison and extrapolation at the global level; and (iii) the fact that most of the data and information come from organizations, rather than Parties. The scope of national reports is very wide (including all plants, animals and microorganisms, and biomes/ecosystems, species and genetic resources) and their production requires significant resources, which are not always available.

10. In paragraph 10 of decision IX/21, the Conference of the Parties requested SBSTTA to undertake an in-depth review of the programme of work on island biodiversity at one of its meetings after the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to be sent for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh meeting. Voluntary thematic reports should be requested from all categories of stakeholders with some guidance on the types of data needed (e.g. on given sets of indicators). The SBSTTA Bureau as well as SBSTTA Focal Points should play a role in encouraging and/or channelling the submission of voluntary reports (see role of SBSTTA Bureau and SBSTTA Focal Points below). In addition, regional workshops (in line with those organized to collect data/information on the programme of work on protected areas) should be organized, where participants would contribute information on island biodiversity following a reporting framework. Information from regional workshops needs to be validated through national Focal Points of other acceptable mechanisms.

11. If the Conference of the Parties decides to carry out in-depth reviews of other programmes of work in the future, a similar approach to the collection of data/information can be used. The clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, organizations such as, *inter alia*, the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA) and UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, members of the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, Global Biodiversity Information Facility, the Conservation Commons and other relevant biodiversity-related information sources/services, should be involved.

12. It is suggested that the in-depth review in the future should be linked to the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention to be adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting. More specifically, SBSTTA will be mandated to keep under constant review the drivers of biodiversity loss and action targeting the safeguard and restoration of biodiversity across biomes. They could be limited to one or a set of targets with clear reference to the agreed indicators for use. At its eleventh meeting, the Conference of the Parties may consider based on SBSTTA recommendation a multi years plan of action which will allow enough time for the preparation of inputs by Parties to ensure that data, including time-series data, can be made available to SBSTTA sufficiently in advance. SBSTTA could evaluate progress towards the achievement of the selected targets across all programmes of work, i.e., across all biomes, and propose both specific recommendations unique to a biome or to a programme of work, and general recommendations for implementation at the national level or by the Secretariat. This approach would contribute to the promotion of the ecosystem approach in the implementation of the strategic plan of the Convention and facilitate the mainstreaming of biodiversity in broader national, regional and global mandates and across sectors.

D. Clarification of the mandate of SBSTTA vis-à-vis the Working Group on Review of Implementation with regard to the advice on implementation of the Convention

13. In paragraph 1 of its mandate, in Article 25 of the Convention, the Subsidiary Body is expected “to provide the Conference of the Parties and, as appropriate, its other subsidiary bodies with timely advice relating to the implementation of this Convention.” In order to fulfill this mandate, SBSTTA carries out the tasks listed in paragraph 2 of the same Article and, in accordance with the multi-year programme of work (MYPOW), regularly reviews in depth the implementation of the programmes of work and work on cross-cutting issues, on the basis of which it formulates its recommendations to the Conference of the Parties on how to address the obstacles to the implementation of the Convention, the drivers of biodiversity loss and how to promote the safeguard and restoration of biodiversity.

14. The handling of the updating and revision of the Strategic Plan of the Convention raised the need to clarify the mandates of SBSTTA and the Working Group on the Review of Implementation (WGRI). In decision IX/9, the Conference of the Parties requested:

(a) WGRI to prepare, for consideration and adoption by the Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting, a revised and updated Strategic Plan, including a revised biodiversity target, as well as a multi-year programme of work for the period 2011–2022 (consistent with the updated and revised Strategic Plan, and periodicity of meetings after 2010), and proposals for the periodicity of meetings after 2010 (paragraph 1);

(b) SBSTTA to examine, prior to the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the outcome-oriented goals and targets, and associated indicators contained in the annex to decision VIII/15, with a view to recommending adjustments, if and where necessary, taking into account the third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, the analysis/synthesis prepared by the Secretariat and further work by the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership and the scientific community.

15. In the same decision, the Conference of the Parties requested that the short-term targets or milestones and the long-term target or vision to be included in the updated and revised Strategic Plan be based on robust scientific evidence. This request was understood to be addressed to SBSTTA.

16. The Bureau therefore concluded that SBSTTA should continue to advise the Conference of the Parties on scientific, technical and technological dimensions of the implementation of the Convention, while WGRI would deal with the other dimensions. More specifically, with regards to the updating and revision of the Strategic Plan, the SBSTTA Bureau concluded that SBSTTA would consider the scientific, technical and technological dimensions of the vision (or long-term target), the short-term targets (milestones) and associated indicators and baselines needed to assess progress in implementing the targets.

E. Inter-sessional role of the SBSTTA Bureau

17. SBSTTA Bureau members can steer work relating to scientific requests from SBSTTA or the Conference of the Parties in their respective regions and liaise with SBSTTA and other focal points on relevant matters. They can encourage the participation of their regional experts in peer-reviews and submissions of reports when requested. They can participate in, or contribute to, the organization of regional workshops.

18. SBSTTA Bureau members can represent their respective regions in workshops and meetings organized within the Convention on Biological Diversity or by relevant organizations. They can also establish links with related bodies and initiatives.

19. Meetings of joint bureaus of the Conference of the Parties and SBSTTA should be convened on a regular basis and financial resources should be provided by the core budget.

20. The role of the Chair of SBSTTA in linking with other scientific bodies of biodiversity-related conventions in particular the Biodiversity Liaison Group has already been stressed in the *modus operandi* of SBSTTA (decision VIII/10, annex III, paragraph 20).

F. Clarification of the role and responsibility of the SBSTTA Focal Points

21. The eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties adopted the terms of reference of SBSTTA focal points in paragraph 21 of decision VIII/10. These focal points are the national points of contact for the Conference of the Parties on matters relating to SBSTTA. They are also the links to the SBSTTA Bureau and the corresponding agencies or departments/divisions in countries or relevant regional, subregional and inter-governmental organizations. SBSTTA focal points receive technical information from SBSTTA and pass it on to relevant bodies within their country, and act as a conduit for technical comments to the preparatory processes for SBSTTA. They may also be asked to help locate technical expertise for work such as peer-reviews. Communication with SBSTTA focal points is usually copied to or summarized for the national focal points for the Convention. However the terms of reference of SBSTTA focal points have yet to be implemented. The review undertaken in 2006 by the Secretariat demonstrates that 60 SBSTTA focal points act also as focal points for the Convention on Biological Diversity. Only one Party has designated a university as a focal point. While Parties are sovereign in designating their focal points, the need to designate their representatives to SBSTTA with sound scientific expertise is essential for the successful implementation of the mandate of SBSTTA

22. SBSTTA focal points are also essential for the nomination of experts for participation in ad hoc technical expert groups, and in ensuring that scientific evidence is taken into account in national reports, the development of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) and programmes.

23. The Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting may wish to request Parties to designate SBSTTA focal points based on the revised terms of reference of SBSTTA and the need to designate scientists for the implementation of the new multi-year programme of work. In addition there is a need to increase the capacity of SBSTTA focal points, where needed, so that they can play their role efficiently for the benefit of SBSTTA and its advice to the Conference of the Parties. Regional workshops, such as those carried out for the programme of work on protected areas, can be used as platforms for gathering scientific, technical and technological data, information exchange and knowledge-sharing.

G. Relation between SBSTTA and the suggested IPBES and other bodies

24. SBSTTA should cooperate with relevant international, regional and national organizations, under the guidance of the Conference of the Parties, thus building upon the vast experience and knowledge available. The establishment of the meetings of chairs of the scientific bodies of biodiversity-related conventions in 2007, serviced by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, was welcomed by all partners. To date, five meetings have been convened. However the lack of financial resources has not allowed this innovative mechanism to fulfil its potential. At its tenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties may wish to provide adequate financial resources to convene such a mechanism on a regular basis and at least once a year in conjunction with SBSTTA meetings. In addition, the Chair of the Subsidiary Body, or other members of the Bureau authorized by the Chair, may represent the Subsidiary Body at meetings of the scientific bodies of such groups. More specifically, SBSTTA and its secretariat should establish a *modus operandi* with IPBES when established to as to ensure complementarity and avoid overlap.

H. The functioning of the clearing-house mechanism

25. The Bureau noted that the role of the clearing-house mechanism, established to promote technical and scientific cooperation, should be further enhanced, in line with decision IX/30, *inter alia*, by becoming more and more interactive. E-forums are efficient platforms for information exchange in preparation for SBSTTA. The clearing-house mechanism can be organized to promote joint research programmes and joint ventures. Online tools for use at the national level should be developed.

26. Since many of the applications of the clearing-house mechanism are relevant across conventions, further support for the ongoing interoperability mechanism among the Rio conventions should be encouraged. It would increase the extent to which the clearing-house mechanism is used by broadening the categories of providers and users of information, share the burden for management and upkeep among the secretariats of the three Rio conventions, and promote synergies at the national level by presenting a common tool to be used by Focal Points and implementers across conventions. Possibilities of increasing interoperability with biodiversity-related conventions and various other organizations working on biodiversity should also be sought.

27. Bureau members noted, however, that the informal advisory committee of the clearing-house mechanism needed additional resources to work on effecting such developments.

III. SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS

28. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice may wish to recommend that the Conference of the Parties adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Conference of the Parties

Recalling the “consolidated *modus operandi* of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice” contained in annex III to decision VIII/10 and, in particular, paragraph 4, which states that the Subsidiary Body shall endeavour to constantly improve the quality of its scientific, technical and technological advice by improving scientific, technical and technological input into, debate at, and work of, meetings of the Subsidiary Body,

1. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to encourage Parties to designate focal points for the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, taking into account the need to enhance the role of such focal points during the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention;

2. *Requests* the Subsidiary Body to keep the status of biodiversity under constant review and to focus its work on the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the period 2011-2020, including the drivers of loss of biodiversity and, in particular, climate change;

3. *Encourages* the Subsidiary Body to submit, for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties, key messages on the status and trends of, and threats to biodiversity and its services, and in cases where different options are recommended for measures to be taken, provide the technical and scientific rationale behind the options, including a summary of the background and the expected outcomes and implications of the suggested actions in the wider land and seascapes and sectors, and *further requests* the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the Bureau of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, to include such information in documents prepared for meetings of the Subsidiary Body;

4. *Invites* the focal points for the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to submit reports on the scientific and technical issues arising from the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention so as to allow for a meaningful review of its implementation which will serve as solid bases for action to be taken at the national, regional and global levels and *urges* the mobilization of human and financial resources in particular in support of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and small island developing States among them, as well as countries with economies in transition;

5. *Noting* the importance of the role of the focal points for the Subsidiary Body in the integration of scientific and technical dimensions in decision-making processes and the implementation of the Convention and in line with their terms of reference described in paragraph 21 of decision VIII/10, *requests* the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with relevant partnerships, subject to availability of funds, to organize training workshops so as to promote free and open access to data and information for conservation purposes and increase the capacity of the focal points in discharging their terms of reference and in establishing and using national clearing-house mechanisms;

6. *Requests* the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to submit to the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties a multi-year plan of action of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice coinciding with the duration of the Strategic Plan of the Convention;

7. *Encourages* the Bureau of the Subsidiary Body to convene joint meetings with the bureaus of the Rio conventions as well as with relevant biodiversity related conventions meetings to promote synergies and collaboration for the implementation of its multi-year plan of action;

8. *Decides* that requests addressed to the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice will be submitted with the provision of adequate financial resources and *decides* to allocate the amount of US\$ XXXXX to the Subsidiary Body for the convening of two expert meetings during the biennium;

9. *Requests* the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the Bureau to submit to the Conference of the Parties, at its eleventh meeting, the draft *modus operandi* on the relation between the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES) when and if established.

Annex

WAYS THROUGH WHICH SBSTTA HAS IMPLEMENTED, SINCE THE EIGHTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES, THE STRATEGIC WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ITS SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES IN DECISION VIII/10, ANNEX III, APPENDIX B

<i>Element from decision VIII/10, annex III, appendix B</i>	<i>Implementation activity</i>
1. Improving the scientific, technical and technological inputs into SBSTTA meetings by, <i>inter alia</i> : (a) Strengthening relationships with the scientific and technical community through: (i) Providing material about the work of the Subsidiary Body in a format that is accessible and relevant to the scientific and technical community;	Technical Series Nos. 22 to 46, published from 2006 to 2009 and accessible at https://www.cbd.int/ts/ , and various guides and brochures, periodic newsletters such as: Ecosystem approach; REDD and Biodiversity; quick guide series on protected areas
(ii) Actively disseminating the results of the work of the Subsidiary Body through scientific literature, both as reporting items and scientific papers, as reviewed and approved by the Conference of the Parties;	No opportunity yet
(iii) Participating in, and contributing to, the scientific and technical components of other biodiversity-related processes;	Inputs to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of UNCCD Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change for meetings under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

<i>Element from decision VIII/10, annex III, appendix B</i>	<i>Implementation activity</i>
(iv) Using other bodies as a bridge between the Subsidiary Body and the scientific and technical community in relation to work programmes;	E.g., Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment of DIVERSITAS; Global Biodiversity Information Facility; Conservation Commons; Mountain Invasive Research Network; Mountain Partnership
(v) Engaging the scientific community in scientific assessments.	DIVERSITAS/UNEP-WCMC-led study on biodiversity futures for the third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook Peer-review processes for SBSTTA and related documents
2. Improving the scientific, technical and technological debate during SBSTTA meetings by, <i>inter alia</i> :	Trondheim Conferences on Biodiversity Technical Series published; poster sessions and keynote presentations at every SBSTTA meeting; technical training workshops on the margins of COP and SBSTTA meetings
(a) Raising delegates' awareness about, and encouraging informal debate on, key issues through the provision of scientific and technical publications, keynote speakers, poster sessions, round-table debates and other side events during meetings of the Subsidiary Body;	
(b) Identifying other opportunities to prepare delegates, particularly those with limited experience, for the discussions on scientific and technical matters;	Pre-meeting training sessions organized by the Consortium of Scientific Partners
(c) Dedicating sufficient time to the consideration of results of scientific and technical assessments	Still needed. Possible when the number of agenda items is reduced
