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WORKSHOP ON THE SIXTH NATIONAL
REPORT TO THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Montreal, Canada, 9 December 2017

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON THE PREPARATION OF THE SIXTH NATIONAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

1. Through its decision XIII/27, the Conference of the Parties adopted guidelines, including reporting templates, for the sixth national report and encouraged Parties to submit their sixth national report by 31 December 2018. In the same decision the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary, subject to the availability of resources, and, where possible and appropriate, in collaboration with relevant partners and related processes, to organize capacity-building activities, such as regional workshops, to support developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and small island developing States as well as Parties with economies in transition, in the preparation of their sixth national reports, including the use of the voluntary online reporting tool. In light of this request, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and with the generous financial support of the European Union, organized a capacity building workshop on the preparation of the sixth national report. The workshop was held in Montreal, Canada, on 9 December 2017. The workshop was attended by over 100 participants with representatives from all United Nations regions (see list of participants in the annex).

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

2. The workshop was opened by Mr. David Cooper, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In his remarks he welcomed participants and thanked the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the European Union for their support in organizing the workshop. He noted the importance of the national reports to various processes between now and 2020, including the preparation of the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, and the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and reminded participants that national reporting will be an important agenda item during the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation with a focus on aligning reporting processes between the Convention and its Protocols as well as consideration of synergies in reporting with other biodiversity-related conventions. He also observed that while the overall level and rate of submission of the national reports has been improving there is still progress to be made and he encouraged participants to submit their national reports by the 31 December 2018 deadline.

ITEM 2. OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

3. The workshop agreed to address most issues on the workshop agenda in roundtable discussions following introductory plenary presentations in order to facilitate contributions of the engagement of all workshop participants. It was also agreed that Ms. Prudence Tangham Galega from Cameroon, in her capacity as member of the Bureau of Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), would provide a brief verbal report to the twenty-first meeting of the SBSTTA on the outcomes of the workshop.

ITEM 3. STATUS OF PREPARATION OF THE SIXTH NATIONAL REPORT

4. Mr. Robert Höft from the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD) provided a brief overview on the relevance of the sixth national reports and presented the results of a participant survey carried out prior to the workshop on the preparation of the sixth national reports. He observed that most countries appeared to be in the early stages of preparing their national reports. Following his remarks Ms. Sujata Arora from India shared a video on the steps her country is taking to prepare its sixth national report and the progress it has made so far. Following these presentations, workshop participants discussed and shared their national experiences in preparing the sixth national reports.

5. Most Parties are in the early stages of preparing their national reports. Many Parties noted that they will be applying the lessons learned from preparing the fifth national report to the preparation of the sixth national report. While few Parties have started drafting their reports many have begun collecting information and case studies, identifying relevant sources of information and identifying relevant stakeholders. Many countries have established steering committees for the preparation of their national reports or have put in place teams to work on the report. In some countries NBSAP steering committees are being used to help guide the preparation of the sixth national reports. Some Parties have also started using the online reporting tool.

6. Many Parties noted that the process for accessing funds from the Global Environment Facility required time and was complicated. Some felt that additional information on the process for accessing funds would be helpful.

7. It was observed that preparing the national reports is a lengthy process and that regular communication with UNDP and UNEP would be helpful in addressing challenges that may be encountered, including challenges related to fundraising. Further, identifying and accessing relevant information can be challenging.

8. Most Parties expressed a desire to undertake consultations in preparing their national reports. This included consultations with indigenous peoples and local communities, relevant sectors, different national focal points, and the private sector among others. However it was also noted that involving stakeholders can also create logistical challenges and that sometimes relevant stakeholders do not wish to engage in the national reporting process. Some Parties have established multi-stakeholder committees to try and address these challenges.

ITEM 4. SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES IN PREPARING THEIR SIXTH NATIONAL REPORTS

9. Mr. Julian Blanc from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provided an overview of how UNEP was supporting countries in preparing their sixth national reports. He emphasized that while the sixth national reports should support the Convention on Biological Diversity processes, it is also important that they are nationally relevant and benefit the countries preparing them. He further noted that UNEP was ready to support countries on a technical basis.

10. Ms. Jamison Ervin from the United Nations Development Programme, noted that the amount of biodiversity data is rapidly expanding but that many countries are finding difficulties in making the best use of this information. In particular she highlighted that few countries make use of spatial data and maps in the preparation of their national reports. She noted that UNDP could help Parties to create robust data-driven national reports, help to link biodiversity to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, facilitate drawing in additional technical expertise to the national reporting process and help to make the case that conserving and sustainably using biodiversity is a good investment.

11. Ms. Irene Hoffmann from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) noted that since the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity there has been a growing emphasis on biodiversity mainstreaming. FAO, in light of its work on agriculture, fisheries and forestry and as the host for several biodiversity-related conventions, international agreements and commissions, has large numbers of data sets, maps and tools which could be relevant to the preparation of the sixth national reports. Further it was noted that there is significant room to cooperate with the FAO and the agricultural sectors on the preparation of the sixth national reports, in particular through FAO's national offices.

12. Following these presentations the workshop participants reflected on the support that FAO could provide to the preparation of the sixth national reports. Participants generally felt that FAO could make significant technical contributions to the preparation of the sixth national reports. It was noted that FAO provides relevant data sets and expertise which could facilitate the reporting process. FAO was also recognized as a key stakeholder relating to a range of issues relevant to biodiversity including food security, climate change, forestry, and fisheries. FAO's work on assessments and capacity development were also recognized as relevant to national reporting.

13. It was observed that in some countries FAO national offices are already involved in supporting the national reporting process. Many participants noted that there was a need to better capitalize on the expertise and data that FAO has at its disposal in preparing the sixth national reports. It was noted that inviting FAO national offices to contribute to sixth national report process would be one way of making better use of FAO's expertise. In this respect some participants suggested that the Secretariat of the CBD should send a letter to FAO to highlight the relevance of the national reporting process and to encourage FAO to participate in it, if and when requested by the national government. The preparation of projects related to the sixth national report processes involving ministries of environment and agricultural sectors was discussed as another option.

ITEM 5. TOOLS AND GUIDANCE MATERIALS IN SUPPORT OF THE PREPARATION OF THE SIXTH NATIONAL REPORT

14. Mr. Robert Höft (SCBD) provided an overview of the national report guidelines and templates adopted through decision XIII/27. He also noted that various tools and guidance exist to assist Parties. Among these he noted the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, the Aichi Poster Tool, InforMEA, and the the NBSAP Forum.

15. Ms. Kata Koppel (SCBD) provided an overview of the online reporting tool for the sixth national reports and described its functionality. She noted that a range of resources were available to assist Parties in using the tool, including the user manual and the resource manual, both of which were available in all official UN languages from the CBD web page for the sixth national report. She also noted that a help desk would be available throughout the SBSTTA-21 meeting to respond to individual technical questions participants might have.

16. Ms. Christina Supples (UNDP) reviewed a range of tools and guidance which UNDP has developed in order to assist Parties in preparing the sixth national report. In particular she noted tools and guidance related to spatial planning, stakeholder engagement, means to link global and national indicators

and data sets, means to link biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and tools to promote synergies with other multilateral environmental agreement reporting processes. She also shared information on a draft sixth national report data management tool. She noted that many of these tools would be further discussed at a workshop being held on 10 December 2018¹ and encouraged participants to attend.

17. Following these presentations the workshop participants considered the guidance and tools that are currently available and if any additional guidance or tools were needed to assist Parties in preparing their sixth national reports. Participants generally felt that the range and types of tools that were available for the sixth national reports are useful. However most participants also noted that they had yet to use any of the tools. As such, many participants found it difficult to comment on their utility for specific user groups, such as technical experts, data managers or resource managers, and on any gaps which might exist. It was also noted that limited internet connectivity in some countries makes using web-based tools challenging. Similarly as some of the tools are only available in English they can be challenging to use in countries or regions where English is not widely spoken. The need to translate tools into local languages was identified as another challenge. It was suggested that the organization of regional or sub-regional workshops and webinars where these tools could be further discussed would be useful.

18. Some participants felt that the large amount of guidance made it difficult to identify the most relevant tools. Some participants indicated that having tools which make better use of national examples, case studies and best practices would be helpful. Further, some participants noted that even if the tools that are available are helpful, if the data underlying them is problematic the utility of the tool will be reduced. The need to adapt tools and materials to local contexts was identified as yet another challenge.

ITEM 6. APPROACHES TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEASURES TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

19. Mr. Robert Höft noted that the issue of assessing effectiveness would be considered during the twenty-first meeting of the SBSTTA under agenda item 8. He further noted that there are a range of approaches to assessing effectiveness and that this issue represents a number of challenges to Parties.

20. Mr. Marc Riopel from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada described the approach to undertake a performance audit for biodiversity conservation focusing on assessing the effectiveness of actions taken by relevant institutions in achieving key commitments related to the achievement of national targets related to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. He identified the various steps in a performance audit as well as outlined underlying principles. In addition he identified a range of resources that Parties could use when undertaking performance audits as well as other types of auditing approaches.

21. Following these presentations the workshop participants shared experiences on what methods or tools they planned to use to assess the effectiveness of measures taken for the implementation of their NBSAPs at the national level for their national reports. Participants noted a range of existing methodologies that could be used to assess effectiveness. These included the BIOFIN methodology, and the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool for protected areas. It was also noted that many countries use process, outcome and impact indicators for assessing effectiveness. Other approaches that were noted to assess effectiveness were national forums of stakeholders, and the use of external evaluators. Many participants noted that this issue of assessing effectiveness is challenging and that further information, including particularly case studies, could be useful.

¹ <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/NRWS-2017-02>

ITEM 7. DEVELOPMENT OF TOOLS FOR REPORTING TO MULTIPLE BIODIVERSITY-RELATED PROCESSES

22. Mr. Robert Höft provided an introduction to this issue and noted that there are various international reporting processes that Parties are required to abide by and that many of these already have online reporting tools or are in the process of developing them.

23. Mr. Andreas Obrecht, from the United Nations Environment Programme, provided an overview of different reporting processes under the multilateral environmental agreements and noted that many of the reporting processes make use of similar types of information. For this reason he observed that there were opportunities to better track and make use of the information generated for these reporting processes. In this context he introduced plans related to the development of a data and reporting tool (DART) which would provide a private national space to organize information related to reporting and have it organized by different themes, and linked to relevant national and global targets.

24. Following these presentations, the workshop participants discussed how national reporting to the different biodiversity-related Conventions is organized in their countries, how information is collected and if systems are in place to organize this information. They also considered if an online knowledge management tool, such as DART, could be useful. The situation regarding the coordination of reporting process and data management varied among countries. Some participants noted that in their countries there were mechanisms in place to share information and that the focal points for different conventions and agreements coordinated on a regular basis. In other cases participants noted that there was limited coordination and that there were significant challenges in accessing information from other reporting processes. A possible solution that was identified was better coordination, at the national level, among different focal points. Some participants also noted that they would like to receive more information on InforMEA and the DART tool as this was the first time that they had heard of them.

ITEM 8. HARMONIZATION OF REPORTING PROCESSES

25. Mr. Robert Höft provided an introduction to this issue and noted that alignment of reporting processes between the Convention and its Protocols as well as synergies in reporting with other relevant conventions would be considered at the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation. Following this introduction participants were invited to reflect on the possibilities they saw to advance the alignment of national reporting under the Convention, its Protocols, the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio Conventions. Most participants noted that the different reporting cycles, formats and indicators used by different reporting processes makes reporting a challenging and time consuming process. It was generally felt that the use of similar reporting formats, indicators and reporting cycles could help to streamline reporting processes. However, some felt that this would further increase the reporting burden by requiring all reports be prepared at the same time. It was also noted that while different processes address related issues it was not easy to identify synergies in reporting processes.

26. Several countries noted that they were taking steps at the national level to harmonize their reporting processes. For example, some countries noted that they had established national biodiversity committees which have the purpose of planning reporting processes and identifying possible overlaps. Similarly in some other countries reporting is facilitated through the clustering of departments responsible for implementing the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio Conventions under the same ministry. However, one country commented that the uneven level of competencies among the various departments could be problematic. It was also noted that improving coordination among different national focal points could help to facilitate reporting and reduce duplications.

ITEM 9. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

27. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the workshop was closed at 5:45 p.m. by Mr. Robert Höft (CBD).

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