Convention on Biological Diversity

SUBSIDIARY BODY ON IMPLEMENTATION
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Item 9 of the provisional agenda[*]

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY TO EVALUATE THE USE BY PARTIES OF THE ONLINE REPORTING TOOL FOR THE SIXTH NATIONAL REPORT
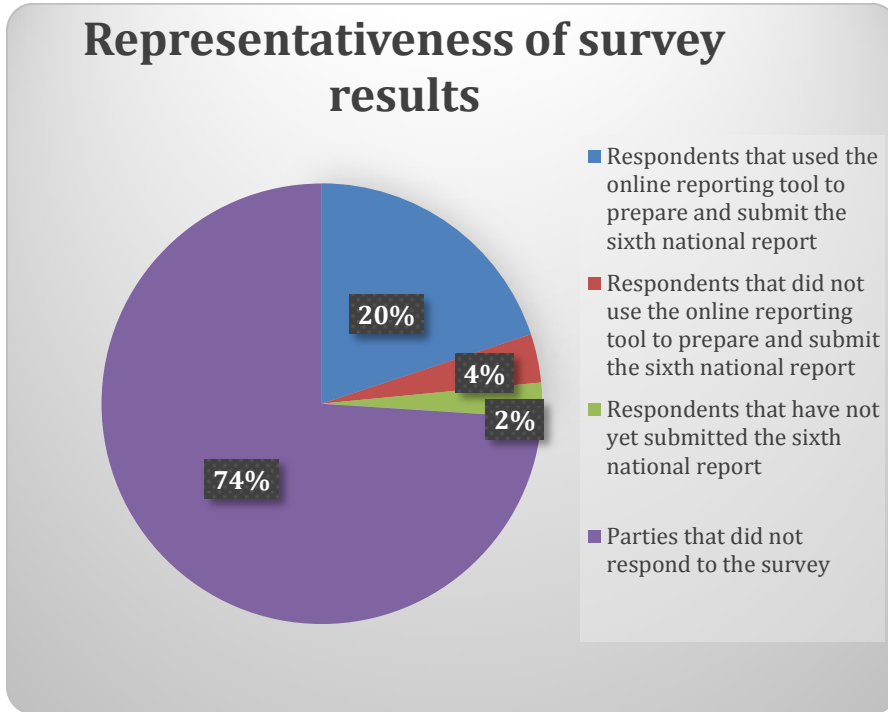
Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1.   In accordance with paragraph 3 (h) of decision 14/27, the Secretariat prepared a survey to evaluate the use by Parties of the online reporting tool for the sixth national report available on the clearing-house mechanism. The survey was disseminated through notification 2019-093 on 22 October 2019 and Parties were requested to complete the survey by 30 November 2019. A reminder was sent to Parties on 3 December 2019 and the deadline extended to 10 December 2019. The survey questionnaire is reproduced in annex I.

2.   The results of the survey are summarized in the present document for the information of the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-3).
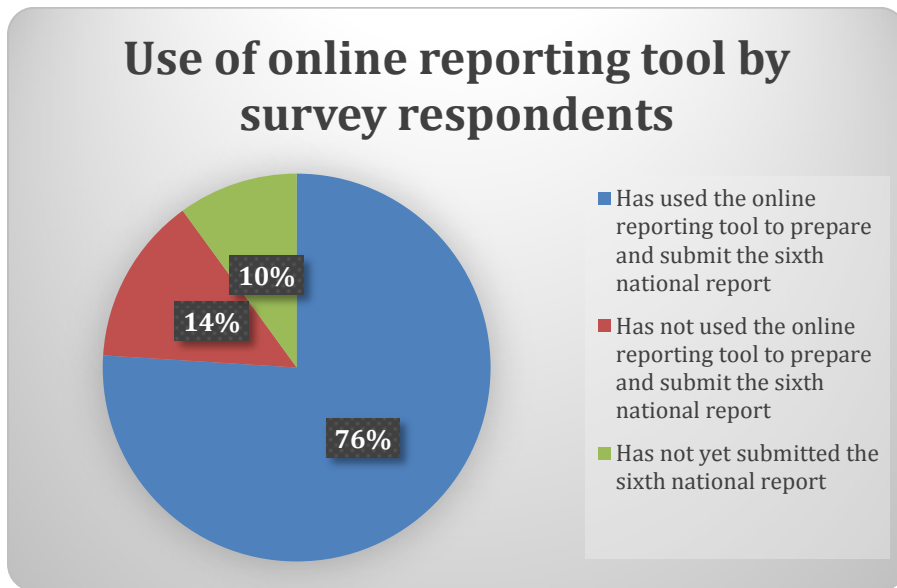
II. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

3.   In total, 59 responses were received (58 online and 1 offline) which comprised 51 (26%) Parties (2 responses were received from 8 Parties) that are listed in annex II. The survey was designed to solicit responses from three respective groups: (a) Parties that had used the online reporting tool to prepare and submit the sixth national report; (b) Parties that had not used the online reporting tool to prepare and submit the sixth national report; and (c) Parties that had not yet submitted the sixth national report. It should be noted that, as more than two-thirds of Parties did not respond to the survey, the results presented in this document are far from being representative of the complete picture.

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[*] CBD/SBI/3/1.
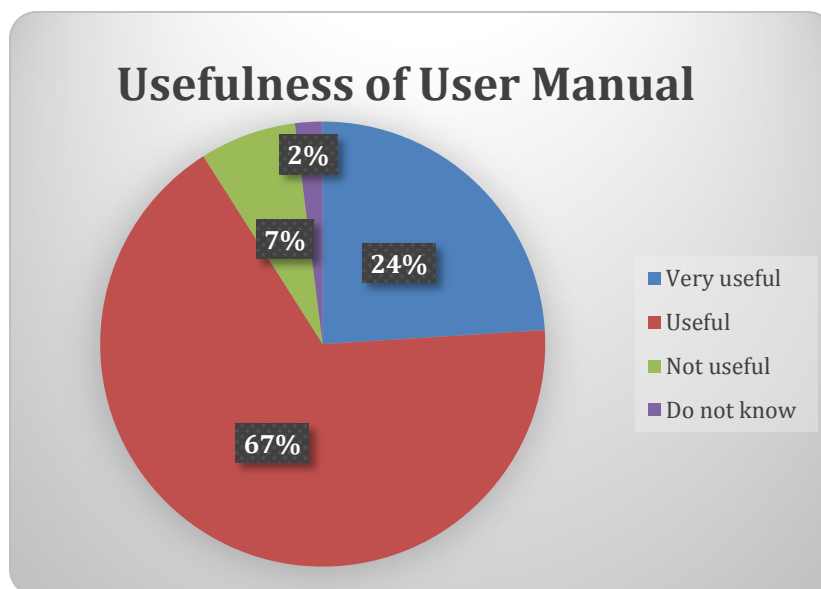
Representativeness of survey results

4.   Of the total number of survey respondents, 76 per cent had prepared and submitted the sixth national report using the online reporting tool.

Use of online reporting tool by survey respondents

User manual

5.   The survey results indicated that the user manual for the online reporting tool prepared by the Secretariat had been useful to a large majority (91%) of respondents in preparing and submitting the sixth national report online.

Usefulness of User Manual

- Very useful
- Useful
- Not useful
- Do not know

2%
7%
24%
67%

Problems or challenges encountered

6.   Of the survey respondents, 10 per cent indicated that they had not experienced any problems or challenges in submitting their sixth national reports online. The large majority of respondents identified various problems or challenges in completing the sixth national reports and submitting them through the online reporting tool. These challenges generally fell into two categories, those related to constraints posed by the reporting template, adopted by the Conference of the Parties in decision XIII/27, and subsequently adapted for online reporting, and technical glitches with the online reporting tool. These challenges are further summarized below.

7.   In relation to the reporting template, respondents commented that the choice of options in section I (information on the targets being pursued at the national level) was confusing. In particular, respondents found the third option in this section (My country has adopted national biodiversity targets but chooses to report progress using the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for reference) confusing. Several also commented on the considerable amount of duplication and overlap in the information requested within sections. Moreover, some respondents noted that it was difficult to distinguish between what to report in section II regarding NBSAP implementation (measures taken, assessment of their effectiveness, and associated obstacles and scientific and technical needs to achieve national targets) versus section IV (description of the national contribution to the achievement of each global Aichi Biodiversity Target). Similarly, respondents noted difficulties in distinguishing between the information requested in section III (assessment of progress towards each national target) and section IV.

8.   Respondents also noted that the reporting template is not flexible enough to allow for variations in reporting. For example, in section II, the tool does not allow the user to group actions and measures by target. In addition, a category of progress does not exist in section III for targets that have been partially achieved. Parties are also asked to input the exact date (day-month-year) that the assessment was done which is not practical as this level of detail is not readily available. Further, with regard to the date of the assessment, the format does not allow for additional information to be added. For example, it is not possible to indicate the date an assessment was initially done and the date it was updated. A respondent

also commented that the reporting template does not present the results of NBSAP implementation in a way that is useful for extracting conclusions. Another comment was that the request for information in section IV on the extent to which national contributions support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals is very broad and open-ended. The preparation of the updated biodiversity profile in section VII was also challenging as other sections were developed through contributions from multiple partners and ensuring that all sections remained aligned was time-consuming (and the purpose of having section VII in the first place was also put into question). Also noted was that the lack of standard baselines had the result of producing assessments that were very subjective.
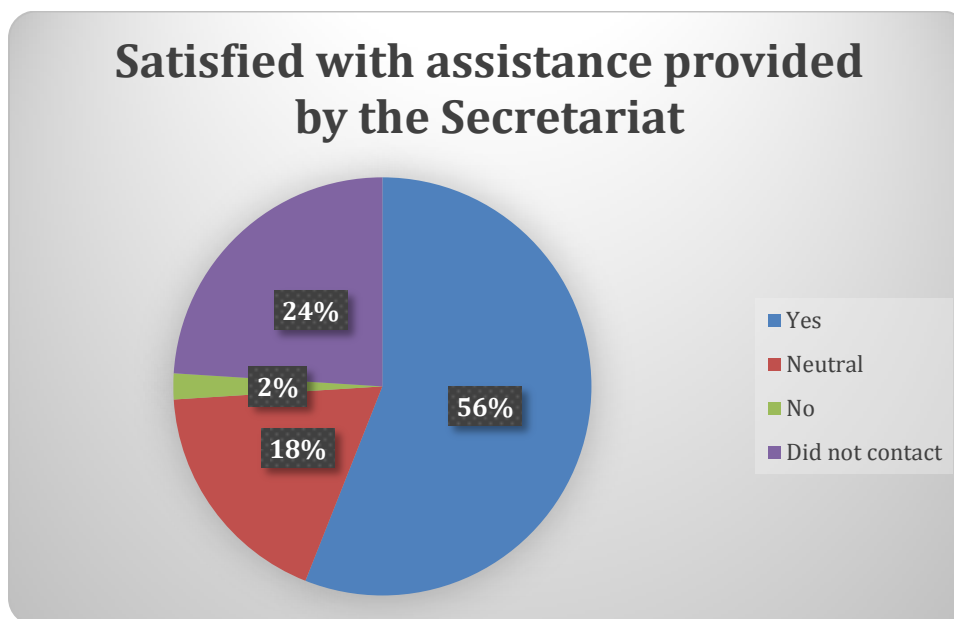
9.   Regarding the online reporting tool itself, respondents reported on various technical glitches and functionality issues. Many of these have now been resolved. The challenges identified by respondents included:

(a)   The inability to upload text, images, maps, charts, figures, tables and footnotes;

(b)   The inability to open attachments that were shown to have been successfully submitted;

(c)   Problematic layout of windows;

(d)   The main navigation menu is not fixed in place;

(e)   The inability to track changes made by various users;

(f)   The inability to maintain the format of a Word document once copied into the online tool;

(g)   Sections awaiting approval could not be edited further;

(h)   The inability for more than one person to work on the report simultaneously without the risk of losing data;

(i)   The absence of warning to advise users to save work;

(j)   Submitting data for section III with the rest of the report was not always possible;

(k)   Not all sections were displayed as completed although answers were provided as required;

(l)   The validation process was unclear and cumbersome;

(m)   The inability to create a Word version of the report;

(n)   The layout of tables and graphs were cut when the report was converted to PDF;

(o)   Limited text editing options;

(p)   Parts of the tool still require translation or have been incorrectly translated;

(q)   Updates to the reporting tool by the Secretariat necessitated having to change fonts and styles several times during the course of preparing the report;

(r)   The national assessments of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, as presented in the Aichi Assessments maps on the CBD website, were not accurate;

(s)   The absence of a reliable Internet connection also presented challenges to some countries, as did the need for higher broadband.

Assistance provided by the Secretariat

10.   During the reporting process, many Parties contacted the Secretariat for assistance with the online reporting tool. The majority of the respondents (56%) indicated that they had been either satisfied or neutral (18%) with the assistance provided by the Secretariat. Almost a quarter (24%) of respondents had

not contacted the Secretariat for assistance and only 2 per cent indicated that they had not been satisfied with the assistance provided.

Satisfied with assistance provided by the Secretariat

- Yes
- Neutral
- No
- Did not contact

24%
2%
56%
18%

Suggestions for improvement

11.   Survey respondents were also requested to provide suggestions for improving the online reporting tool. Suggestions were provided on both the functionality of the online reporting tool as well as on aspects of the reporting template adopted by the Conference of the Parties.

12.   It was suggested that the reporting framework should be simplified, with careful consideration given to the particular types of information that will be required to effectively review progress towards the post-2020 targets. Proceeding in this manner should have the effect of reducing the duplication of information requests within sections and the reporting burden on Parties, as well as restrict the volume of information received by the Secretariat. In this context, questions raised by respondents were:

        (a)   Is it necessary to obtain information on all of the targets from all Parties?

        (b)   Would it be more helpful to ask for case studies instead of asking Parties to assess progress towards each target?

13.   Respondents also commented that the possibility to provide subjective assessments should be avoided as much as possible and that measurable targets and baselines are essential. The process of linking progress towards national targets to the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and their components also needs to be refined. This will also serve to improve the accuracy of information presented in the Aichi Assessments maps on the CBD website where, at the moment, when a country has more than one national target associated with an Aichi Biodiversity Target, the average of these assessments is used to generate the overall level of progress achieved towards the global target (significantly, this average value considers mapping to the *main* related Aichi Biodiversity Target only). It is also recommended that data be further processed for creating maps to highlight progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets between geographical regions and economic groups, which has obvious implications for the further development of the tool as well.

14.   The information provided in the online tool for the sixth national report should be available for the preparation of future national reports so that Parties will only need to update information. It was also pointed out that the reporting framework should address synergies with the biodiversity-related conventions, the Rio Conventions and the other multilateral environmental agreements, and that questions

on national contributions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals need to be better structured and focused. The template should also be designed so that the national report can serve as a useful tool for raising awareness among decision makers and stakeholders and for facilitating mainstreaming actions, as well as be flexible enough to accommodate variations in reporting. The constraints posed by the latter necessitated one Party having to prepare an executive summary of the report to submit to authorities in order to obtain approval on the report.

15.   Respondents also indicated that the reporting tool should be more flexible (e.g. compatible with Microsoft Windows 10) and allow for efficient uploading of images, maps, footnotes, photographs, charts, figures, graphs and tables (including those produced in Word and Excel). The user should also be able to insert cross-references (hyperlinks) to other sections of the report, insert full text into a section rather than have to enter information field by field, download sections of the report as opposed to the entire report, and produce a text (Word) version of the report in addition to a PDF version. It was also suggested that the design of the templates be improved in terms of use of colour and fonts and how multiple-choice questions are displayed. Moreover, text editing options (formatting, numbering, fonts, etc.) should be similar to those available in Microsoft Word, and images (including audio) and maps should be easily downloadable. It was also important that the navigation menu be fixed into place. A respondent indicated that it would be good to have quicker access to the tool. It was also recommended that translation of the tool be completed or corrected, as necessary.

16.   It was pointed out that the process of saving and validating information, particularly in section III (assessment of progress towards each national target), needed to be improved and clarified. With reference to section II (Implementation), a respondent indicated that the creation of a system to inform the indicators selected for assessing progress would be helpful. Another respondent commented that, once the report is published, it would be helpful if infographics (graphics that visually represent information) could be created to facilitate quick access to sections of the report, as opposed to having to scroll through the entire document. It was also stated that it would be useful to have a repository for storing data from national reports for use by Parties for creating maps to spatially visualize trends and the impacts of implementation.

17.   The need to provide training to national focal points and other stakeholder groups in the use of the tool was highlighted by a few respondents. It was also noted that such training had the potential to increase the level of ownership of the report by respective stakeholder groups, information-sharing and monitoring. Moreover, Parties should be automatically notified by email that the online report has been successfully submitted and received by the Secretariat. Feedback on the report and clarification on what the information in the report will be used for should also be provided to Parties by the Secretariat. A respondent indicated that the launch of the tool should have been preceded by rigorous testing of all features of the tool, and that the offer of the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism to test the tool should have been taken up by the Secretariat.

Comments from Parties who had not used the online reporting tool to prepare and submit the sixth national report

18.   In question 8 of the survey, Parties that had not used the online reporting tool to prepare and submit the sixth national report were asked to indicate what changes could be made to the tool to allow its use in their country. One respondent commented that, due to the time-consuming process of having to copy and paste information from the offline version into the online template, efforts to use the tool were put on hold to take care of other more pressing matters. Training in the use of the tool and a reliable Internet connection were cited as capacity needs as well. A respondent recommended that the tool be synchronized with the UNEP-WCMC platform and the reporting frameworks of the biodiversity-related conventions, the Rio conventions and the other multilateral environmental agreements. The tool should also allow for the automatic insertion of the country flag in the report. A Party that had already prepared and submitted an offline version of its sixth national report stated its intention to publish the report online as well.

Comments from Parties who had not yet submitted the sixth national report

19.   More than half of respondents who had not yet submitted the sixth national report indicated that they intended to do so using the online reporting tool. A Party who was in the process of preparing the report stated that it had been decided that the offline electronic template (reporting guidelines annexed to decision XIII/27) would be used rather than the online reporting tool due to the need for greater flexibility to manage input from multiple stakeholders and additional information on various conservation achievements and activities. Another Party had chosen to not use the online reporting tool due to the lack of a consistent Internet connection.

III.   CONCLUSIONS

20.   While being a practical tool for online national reporting, the results of the survey highlight that improvements to the tool are needed. These improvements are related to addressing technical glitches, improving functionality and making the tool more user-friendly and interoperable. These issues need to be addressed going forward.

21.   The results of the survey also suggest that the guidelines for the seventh national report should focus on simplifying and streamlining the reporting process. It is important that the reporting guidelines avoid duplication of information requests within sections and clearly differentiate the reporting requirements from one section to another. The possibility for subjective assessments should also be avoided as much as possible (pointing to the need for further efforts in developing baselines and indicators at global and national levels). Information requested on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals needs to be more focused and incorporated into the reporting guidelines in a structured manner. The latter would also apply to reporting on synergies with the biodiversity-related conventions, the Rio conventions and the other multilateral environmental agreements. The national report should also present the results of the implementation of NBSAPs and national and global biodiversity targets in a way that is useful for extracting conclusions, as well as serve as an effective tool for awareness-raising and mainstreaming.

22.   Future reporting guidelines must be designed in a manner which supports the aggregation of data and information by the online reporting tool on national progress achieved towards the main global targets and their components. Efforts need to be carried out to make the tool more robust, user-friendly and compatible with Microsoft applications. The translation of the tool in all UN languages should be completed or corrected, as necessary. Training in the use of the tool should be provided to national focal points and stakeholder groups, as requested. Also, in view of the constraints posed by an unreliable Internet connection in some countries, the development of an offline application for the tool should be given consideration.

Annex I

SURVEY - 6NR ONLINE REPORTING TOOL

1. Country

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│   │
└─────────────┘

2. My country

○ (a) Has used the online reporting tool to prepare and submit the sixth national report

○ (b) Has not used the online reporting tool to prepare and submit the sixth national report

○ (c) Has not yet submitted its sixth national report

3. How did you find the User Manual for the online reporting tool?

○ Very useful

○ Useful

○ Not useful

○ Do not know

4. What problems or challenges did you encounter when using the online reporting tool?

┌─────────────┐
│   │
└─────────────┘

5. If you contacted the CBD Secretariat for assistance with the online reporting tool, was your issue resolved to your satisfaction?

○ Yes

○ Neutral

○ No

○ Did not contact

6. Do you have any suggestions for the CBD Secretariat to improve the online reporting tool?

○ Yes

○ No

7. If you answered "yes" in question 6, please provide your suggestions below.

┌─────────────┐
│   │
└─────────────┘

8. If you answered (b) in question 2, what changes could be made to the online reporting tool to allow your country to use it to submit its sixth national report?

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9. If you answered (c) in question 2, indicate below whether your country intends to submit its sixth national report through the online reporting tool:

○ Yes

○ No

10. Please explain below why your country has chosen not to use the online reporting tool.

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Annex II

PARTIES THAT COMPLETED THE SURVEY

1. Afghanistan
2. Andorra (2 submissions)
3. Australia
4. Belgium
5. Benin
6. Bosnia and Herzegovina
7. Burkina Faso
8. Burundi (2 submissions)
9. Cameroon
10. Central African Republic
11. China
12. Comoros
13. Croatia
14. Denmark
15. Dominican Republic
16. Ecuador (2 submissions)
17. Egypt
18. Ethiopia
19. European Union
20. Finland (2 submissions)
21. France
22. Germany
23. India
24. Indonesia
25. Japan
26. Liechtenstein
27. Luxembourg (2 submissions)
28. Madagascar
29. Malawi
30. Mali
31. Mexico
32. Myanmar
33. Nepal (2 submissions)
34. Netherlands
35. Niger
36. Peru
37. Philippines
38. Poland
39. Sao Tome and Principe
40. Saudi Arabia
41. South Africa
42. Spain
43. Sri Lanka (2 submissions)
44. State of Palestine (2 submissions)
45. Suriname
46. Sweden
47. Thailand
48. Tunisia
49. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
50. Uruguay
51. Zambia

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