**VOLUNTARY PEER REVIEW OF NBSAP REVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

**~ Issue Brief ~**

**Background**

In 2015, further to decision [XII/29](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-29-en.pdf), the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) established an Informal Working Group comprised of 17 experts nominated by Parties from different regions to develop a methodology for a Voluntary Peer Review (VPR) process under the Convention. Several meetings were organized, and the resulting methodology was tested by Parties in two countries (Ethiopia and India) in 2015 and 2016, before being piloted in November 2017. The VPR methodology was recognized as part of the multidimensional review approach under the Convention during COP 14. To date, three countries have been reviewed under the pilot phase (Montenegro, Sri Lanka, Uganda). Financial support to date has been provided by the Governments of Japan, Norway and Switzerland.

To conduct a review, a team is established by the Secretariat comprised of experts nominated by their respective governments. Facilitated and coordinated by the CBD Secretariat, the review team first conducts a desk study during which the NBSAP, national reports and policy documents of the country under review are carefully examined. An in-country visit is then planned in close cooperation with the country under review, which includes scheduling interviews with ministries and a wide range of stakeholders for the purpose of clarifying and verifying issues that have arisen from the desk study. Especially during the in-country visits, peer to peer learning and exchange takes place as, in their home countries, review team members often face similar challenges as the country under review.

Following the in-country visit, the review team prepares a review report. This process includes fact-checking and preparation of a policy response to the recommendations in the report, by the country under review, and documentation of information on the peer-to-peer learning aspect of the VPR exercise.

As the VPR is implemented by peers, there is mutual respect and understanding. This creates an environment of trust which is conducive to learning and meaningfully assessing implementation for the benefit of the country under review. The VPR process does not compare or “grade” implementation among participating countries.

**Main issues for discussion**

Review Function of VPR: While VPR has been accepted as part of the multidimensional review approach under the Convention, it has yet to have widespread uptake. The VPR is well integrated with NBSAPs and NRs in the countries where it is implemented, however at the global level the interlinkages are less visible. The response to the VPRs conducted to date has been very positive, however this has not resulted in a significant increase in the number of Parties volunteering to be reviewed and/or nominating national experts as reviewers.

* How can the number of Parties willing to be reviewed, or to nominate reviewers be increased given the voluntary nature of the VPR?
* How could awareness about VPR and the numerous benefits that can be derived from it be increased?
* How can the lessons from VPR experiences be fed back into the global review processes taking place at SBI, SBSTTA and COP?

Capacity development and Peer Learning Function of VPR: The VPR exercise assesses capacity-building needs and therefore can contribute significantly to the long-term strategic framework for capacity-building beyond 2020 (including activities related to Technical and Scientific, and South-South Cooperation) and to implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions. The process has the potential to be effective in improving collective and individual capacities for implementation at all levels of governance and within all sectors and stakeholder groups. Particular emphasis is placed on raising awareness among authorities in the finance and planning ministries of the role biodiversity conservation can play in achieving sustainable development. Significantly, the VPR is the only peer-to-peer review that currently takes place under the Convention.

* How can the capacity-building potential of the VPR be effectively mainstreamed in CBD work programmes?
* How can capacity-building needs identified through the VPR be addressed through capacity-building activities undertaken by the Secretariat and its partners?
* How can awareness be raised of the peer-to-peer learning component embedded in the VPR exercise? How can platforms, such as the CBD clearing-house mechanism, be used to showcase the activities and outcomes of VPR exercises?

VPR methodology in the post-2020 period: As the VPR methodology utilizes the NBSAP as the primary information source for assessing implementation, it may be necessary to align the methodology in the event of changes in this planning instrument stemming from the adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Parties may also wish to consider adding to the methodology a requirement for Parties that have been reviewed to be revisited and/or report back after a period of time on the policy measures they have taken to implement VPR recommendations and the impacts thereof.

* Would it be useful to include a modality in the VPR methodology requiring Parties that have been reviewed to be revisited and/or to report back after a period of time on the policy measures they have taken to implement VPR recommendations and the impacts thereof?
* How could the VPR mechanism be more effectively interlinked with the other elements of the multidimensional review approach under the Convention?
* What elements of other processes, such as the UNFCCC In-Depth Reviews of National Communications and specific national review processes, might be considered in tweaking the VPR methodology?

Resources (funding and institutional): Implementation of VPR is currently dependent on voluntary funding. Moreover, the current level of staffing at the CBD Secretariat is insufficient to properly implement, let alone upscale, VPR. The capacity-building strength of the VPR is practically unknown outside of the VPR community, limiting receipt of funding from capacity-building budgets.

* What can be done to increase the level of financial commitment of donor countries and organizations for VPR activities? How can a sustainable financing and institutional plan be established for the VPR so that its implementation is not dependent on voluntary funding?
* What useful lessons in mobilizing financial and human resources can be provided by other peer-review processes, such as the OECD environmental performance reviews, UNECE environmental performance reviews, the United Nations Human Rights Council universal periodic review or others?

**Key Mandates**

COP decisions: [IX/8](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-09/cop-09-dec-08-en.pdf), [XI/2](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-11/cop-11-dec-02-en.pdf), [XII/29](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-29-en.pdf), [XIII/25](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-13/cop-13-dec-25-en.pdf), [14/29](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-29-en.pdf)

Decision 14/29: Decision to include the voluntary peer review as an element of the multidimensional review approach under the Convention.

**Some useful resources and documents for further background**

[VPR Methodology](https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-13/information/cop-13-inf-02-en.pdf)

[VPR homepage](https://www.cbd.int/nbsap/vpr/) on the CBD website

[UNEP/CBD/COP/14/INF/19](https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/bb97/7160/f56f31220ff16c1001feae34/cop-14-inf-19-en.pdf) (Report of VPR Montenegro)

[UNEP/CBD/COP/13/19](https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-13/official/cop-13-19-en.pdf)

[UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/10/Add.1](https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/sbi/sbi-01/official/sbi-01-10-add1-en.pdf)

[UNEP/CBD/COP/12/25/Add.3](https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-12/official/cop-12-25-add3-en.pdf)

[UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/24](https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-12/information/cop-12-inf-24-en.pdf)

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