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UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PILOT PHASE FOR THE VOLUNTARY PEER REVIEW OF THE REVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

I. BACKGROUND

1. At its ninth and eleventh meetings, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate, among other things, voluntary review processes for the implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs). At its twelfth meeting, the Conference of the Parties, in decision XII/29, paragraph 3, took note of the documents¹ prepared by the Executive Secretary on a proposed pilot voluntary peer review process for NBSAPs, 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.² The further development of the voluntary peer review process was made possible by funds and resources committed by the Governments of Japan, Norway and Switzerland.

2. An informal working group was established to continue developing and testing the proposed methodology. A total of 17 Parties nominated experts to participate in the working group, which held an inception meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia, from 11 to 13 February 2015. The working group discussed the methodology presented to the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting and developed a revised methodology and work plan. It also decided that the revised methodology should be tested in at least two countries. Ethiopia and India were selected as test countries which provided a good range in terms of geographical and socioeconomic factors. In addition, both countries had recently revised their NBSAPs. A second meeting of the working group was convened in Bern, Switzerland, from 16 to 18 March 2016, to review the two test experiences and further develop the methodology.

3. At its thirteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties, in decision [XIII/25](#), took note of the progress made in the development of a voluntary peer review mechanism, particularly with respect to the development of the draft methodology, and requested the Executive Secretary, subject to the availability of resources, to facilitate the further testing and development of the methodology, including its application through a pilot phase, and to report on progress, including information on the cost of the pilot phase, to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation at its second meeting. Summary information is contained in a note on mechanisms to facilitate review of implementation.³

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

² See UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/10/Add.1.

³ CBD/SBI/2/11.

II. OBJECTIVES

4. The overall objective of the voluntary peer review (VPR) process is to help Parties improve their individual and collective capacities to more effectively implement the Convention. The specific objectives of the process are as follows:

- (a) To assess the development and implementation of 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.

III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

5. Peer reviews are intended to provide participating Parties with observations and recommendations which they might use either when developing or 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 the mutual sharing of experiences, learning and capacity-building, with potential benefits for all Parties to the Convention.

IV. INITIATION OF THE PILOT PROCESS

6. In accordance with decision XIII/25, a notification from the Executive Secretary was issued on 16 February 2017, inviting Parties to contribute to the pilot process by volunteering to be reviewed, nominating reviewers and/or providing financial support for the implementation of the pilot phase. Due to limited response, a follow-up notification was issued on 18 April 2017. Ultimately, a total of 6 Parties expressed an interest in being reviewed,⁴ 11 Parties nominated reviewers,⁵ and none expressed a willingness to provide additional resources for the pilot phase. A second follow-up notification was issued on 3 May 2018 which, at the time of preparation of the present document, resulted in two Parties⁶ volunteering to be reviewed.

7. The countries that expressed an interest in being reviewed were endorsed by the national focal point for the Convention, or a higher authority, and have submitted a “preliminary scoping checklist for a Party volunteering for peer review”.⁷ All nominated reviewers were either national focal points for the Convention, NBSAP coordinators, or other suitable experts.

8. The conduct of the pilot phase is being made possible by funds initially provided by Switzerland and Norway for the testing phase, as well as by Japan, through the Japan Biodiversity Fund, and the Secretariat in the form of staff time allotted for this purpose.

9. Following exchanges with potential reviewers and reviewees, Montenegro and Sri Lanka were selected as the first two countries to be reviewed during the pilot phase (the selection of other Parties will be considered later). This selection was guided by the following criteria, as well as practical implications, language requirements and geographical range:

- (a) Evidence of high-level government support for the voluntary peer review process;
- (b) Submission of the fifth national report;
- (c) Adoption of the post-2010 NBSAP as a policy document; or preparation of an advanced draft post-2010 NBSAP (or equivalent instrument);

⁴ Iraq, Mali, Montenegro, Sri Lanka, Togo, Uganda. An incomplete expression of interest was received from Guyana.

⁵ Antigua and Barbuda, European Union, Finland, Japan, Madagascar, Norway, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

⁶ Somalia, Kiribati.

⁷ The VPR methodology and related documents are accessible at: <https://www.cbd.int/nbsap/vpr/default.shtml>

- (d) Willingness to contribute to the in-country costs of the review.

V. PEER REVIEW FOR MONTENEGRO

10. A peer review team for Montenegro was established with consideration given to experience with peer review, expertise related to the characteristics of the Party under review, regional experience, specific technical experience, writing and language skills and availability. Geographical representation and gender balance were additional considerations given to the constitution of the team.

11. The peer review team for Montenegro comprised reviewers from the European Union (team leader), Finland, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

12. A desk study for Montenegro was carried out, including a review of the NBSAP (2016-2020), the fifth national report and a significant number of other documents identified by Montenegro and the Secretariat. The desk study built upon the completed scoping checklist contained in Appendix 1 of the methodology, focusing on good examples of implementation as well as obstacles to implementation identified by Montenegro. The review team decided that each team member would deal with the aspects that best matched their expertise and experience. A matrix document was prepared which captured initial findings and formed the basis of the review team's draft report. Important outputs of the desk study were the identification of issues that required further clarification and/or verification during the in-country visit, the formulation of questions for the in-country interviews, and the further identification of stakeholders with whom to meet.

13. The scoping checklist prepared by Montenegro and the desk study implemented by the review team provided the basis for the in-country visit. The agenda for the in-country visit was prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with members of the review team and in close cooperation with the Montenegrin Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism. A total of 35 stakeholders were interviewed during the in-country visit, which took place in Podgorica and Budva from 20 to 24 November 2017, to further clarify and verify issues brought to light during the preparation of the desk study. On the basis of the experience gained during the VPR testing phase, briefing and debriefing meetings were held with the Ministry at the beginning and end, respectively, of the in-country visit.

14. Experience gained during the testing phase of the VPR methodology had also revealed the practicality of preparing a preliminary draft report during the in-country visit. In doing so, the team was able to have face-to-face discussions on its findings, distribute tasks, and prepare for the debriefing meeting with the Ministry.

15. Within two weeks of the in-country visit, each review team member had submitted a contribution to the draft report, as agreed. The team leader continued to liaise with the review team members and the Secretariat regarding the preparation of the final draft report. The latter was sent to the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism with a request to check the report for factual errors. Upon receipt of this information from the Ministry, the review team finalized the report. The final report was sent to the Ministry with a request this time to provide written feedback on the observations and recommendations contained in it, as well as information on how the VPR process had contributed to peer learning. The feedback received will also be included in the final report.

16. Both the review team and representatives of Montenegro have expressed satisfaction with the VPR process and its outcomes and considered the approach and methodology effective.

VI. COST OF THE VOLUNTARY PEER REVIEW

17. As indicated in paragraph 3 above, the Conference of the Parties, in its decision XIII/25, requested the Executive Secretary to report on progress, including information on the cost of the pilot phase, to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation at its second meeting.

18. At the time of the preparation of the present document, this was the only voluntary peer review conducted under the pilot phase. The direct costs of the review conducted for Montenegro were US\$ 9,033.79. This amount may not be representative as the direct costs of the test exercises conducted

in Ethiopia and India were significantly lower; however, this amount does not include the participation of reviewers from developed countries or the costs borne by the host country in initiating and participating in the peer review and supporting the review team during the in-country visit.

19. The salary and travel costs of Secretariat staff involved in the VPR exercises are also not accounted for in the above figure. The majority of indirect costs will be covered by the Japan Biodiversity Fund.

VII. PEER REVIEW FOR SRI LANKA

20. Several potential team leaders and reviewers had to decline the invitation to participate in the VPR exercise for Sri Lanka due to other obligations, which necessitated its postponement for several months. Consequently, between the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (December 2016) and the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (July 2018), only one VPR exercise was conducted.

21. At the time of the preparation of the present document, a VPR team for Sri Lanka had been assembled, comprising reviewers from India (team leader), Finland, the Philippines and Zimbabwe. The desk study will commence shortly, and the in-country visit has been tentatively scheduled for September 2018, which may provide for the completion of this VPR exercise before the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.
