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REPORT ON THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP ON ECOSYSTEM-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (DECISION XI/23, PARAGRAPH 4)

Note by the Executive Secretary

INTRODUCTION

1. In paragraph 4 of decision XI/23 the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary, and invited the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, under the Joint Work Plan between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention, and in consultation with relevant organizations and initiatives, to develop a cooperative partnership to promote awareness of, and capacity-building for, ecosystem-based solutions for water resources management as a means to enhance the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 by the broadest range of stakeholders, as a contribution to sustainable development and to the United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation (2013), and to make a progress report available to Parties prior to, and for the consideration of, the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.
2. The Executive Secretary has prepared the present report which supports consideration of this topic under agenda item 29 of the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, as summarized in section III of document UNEP/CBD/COP/12/24.

CONSULTATIONS HELD

3. Because water is so central to the environment, human development and economic interests, everybody is a stakeholder in sustainable water. There is, therefore, a high number of potential partners in ecosystem-based solutions for water resources management. The Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, has consulted widely. This has included: all 31 Members (United Nations Organizations) and 34 Partners of UN-Water, both on an individual basis and collectively at a briefing at the eighteenth meeting of UN-Water in Washington, USA, in February 2013; Conservation International; The Nature Conservancy; Catholic Relief Services; The RAIN Foundation; Wetlands International; World Vision; and, the UNEP-Delft Hydrological Institute (UNEP-DHI) Centre on Water and Environment. Consensus strongly supports a “partnership” that will improve awareness of ecosystems as solutions, add value to existing activities and lead to concrete action on the ground.

* UNEP/CBD/COP/12/1/Rev.1.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE POST-2015 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND INTERNATIONAL FORUMS

4. There has been progress in recognition of the importance of ecosystem services in solving water-related problems. There is also evidence that decision X/28 and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, and notably Aichi Biodiversity Target 14, has contributed to this significant progress.

5. Stakeholders around the world participating in the Rio+20 Sustainable Development Dialogues voted as the top-ranked recommendation for water that we should ‘*secure water by protecting biodiversity, ecosystems and water sources*’. Paragraph 122 of the conference outcome document¹ refers to this topic: “We recognize the key role that ecosystems play in maintaining water quantity and quality and support actions within respective national boundaries to protect and sustainably manage these ecosystems”.

6. The current status of a water goal, and targets, being considered for the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the sustainable development goals² includes under Goal 6 (“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”) Target 6.6 (“By 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes”). This target is derived, with some modifications, directly from Aichi Biodiversity Target 14.

7. The 21st meeting of UN-Water, 28-30 August 2014, decided that the theme of the 2018 World Water Day campaign will be about ‘nature-based solutions for water’, with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity nominated as coordinator. It is estimated that posts on social media for the 2014 World Water Day campaign (on Water and Energy) reached 700 million people.³ The theme is also adopted as the theme for the World Water Development Report in the same year, as well as being influential in setting themes for high profile conferences on water.

TERMINOLOGY

8. Consultations have debated terminology at considerable length. Different stakeholder groups use different terminology for the way ecosystems and their services influence the availability and quality of water and how this can be managed to achieve water-related goals. There is also widespread terminology in use across the multi-lateral environment agreements. Among stakeholders, there is emerging consensus that ecosystems should be referred to as water-related “infrastructure” to signal their utility and particularly to improve communications with the water sector which is highly focussed on water infrastructure. There is no consensus on how to label the infrastructure. “Ecosystem” infrastructure is technically correct but not necessarily audience friendly. “Natural” infrastructure terminology is widely supported but has the draw-back that many ecosystems that deliver benefits for water are not natural (for example, constructed wetlands). “Green” infrastructure is also widely favoured but has the drawback that the term is often applied to hard (physical) infrastructure that is considered green because it has low greenhouse gas emissions (such as dams) which differs from the use of the term in the current context.

9. To a large extent existing terminology is not a constraint and terminology should, in any event, be flexible and tailored to the target audience. Consultations have concluded that it would not be useful, at this stage, to attempt to harmonize terminology across user groups.

10. This topic was discussed at the fifth meeting of the Ad-hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation, with regards to urban and peri-urban planning, resulting in the use of “green infrastructure” in recommendation 5/5, paragraph 3. For this reason the terminology is adopted below in this note.

¹ “The future we want”, General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex.

² As approved by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, 19 July 2014.

³ <http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday>

EXISTING ACTIVITIES OF SOME KEY PARTNERS

11. A growing number of organizations or initiatives have, or are developing, relevant partnerships. Examples include:

a) The “Water Nexus Solutions”⁴ of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Water Association (a global network of water professionals). This is a call for action leading transformations in water infrastructure planning, financing and operation. The Nexus Dialogue on Water Infrastructure Solutions will provide a forum for sharing experiences, lessons, tools and guidelines on how water infrastructure and technologies can address nexus challenges. It is designed to build a common understanding of innovative planning, management and operational approaches that provide shared benefits across sectors. Innovative professionals in farming, energy-production, natural resource management, and engineering have the experience and hold practical knowledge to address the nexus challenge. Working across sectors, the Nexus Dialogue provides a unique opportunity to share these experiences and the solutions emerging around the world. It has provided a renewed focus on major infrastructure development for water, energy, food security and climate change resilience. Beijing will host an International Conference on Solutions for the Nexus: Building Partnerships to Optimise Infrastructure and Technology for Water, Energy and Food Security on 11-13 November 2014. The Conference will produce a set of recommendations, which will establish policy principles for sustainable water infrastructure operation, management and optimization in the nexus;

b) The Global Water Partnership (GWP) is a global action network of institutional, country and regional partners actively involved in water. Its chief focus is to support social change processes that further the sustainable management and development of water resources. To do this, the network invites like-minded organizations to join this global movement. The GWP has recently adopted a new Strategy 2014 – 2020. “Ecosystems” is now adopted as a core theme, noting that they play an essential role in sustaining the global water cycle, the carbon cycle, and nutrient cycles and conserving these ecosystems must be at the heart of an integrated approach to water management and sustainable development. The partnership notes that a better understanding of the role that ecosystem services play in supporting sustainable economic growth and development is required taking into account their real value when assessing trade-offs between food, energy, cities and industry, and nature, especially when water is scarce and the climate is changing. In partnership with key agencies, the GWP will continue to advocate at all levels that natural ecosystems are a vital and integral part of sustainable economic growth and development. The GWP will support countries to identify and evaluate policy and management options for sustaining ecosystem services (harmonising them with human needs), and help build capacity to sustainably manage these invaluable resources. The GWP Secretariat is keenly interested in the development of supporting mechanisms for green infrastructure solutions for water resources management (in response to decision XI/28, paragraph 4) and notes in particular the need for improved access to information regarding solutions that green infrastructure can deliver at country and local level;

c) The IUCN, UNEP-DHI and UNEP recently co-produced a useful report detailing the varied benefits that green infrastructure can provide to water resources management⁵; and

d) The Ramsar Convention is currently developing a strategy to engage with the water resources sector which will be based on partnership arrangements.

12. In view of the existence of these, and many other, partnerships the requirement is less for another “partnership” (as requested in the terminology of decision XI/23, paragraph 4) but more for a mechanism

⁴ <http://www.waternexussolutions.org/1x8/home.html>

⁵ Green Guide for Water Management: Ecosystem-based management approaches for water-related infrastructure projects. http://www.unepdhi.org/-/media/microsite_unepdhi/publications/documents/unep/web-unep-dhigroup-green-infrastructure-guide-en-20140814.pdf

to support existing partnerships and foster new partnership arrangements to further, in Convention language, the contribution of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020 and notably Aichi Biodiversity Target 14 to sustainable water. Therefore, decision XI/23 paragraph 4 is best reframed as a “Platform for Green Infrastructure Solutions for Water” as detailed further below.

PLATFORM FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE SOLUTIONS FOR WATER

13. An informal and voluntary “Platform for Green Infrastructure Solutions for Water” is identified as the appropriate way forward. The objectives of the Platform remain consistent with decision XI/23 and centre on placing natural infrastructure at the heart of water management, through awareness raising and capacity-building. It will function as a community of practice, including among existing partnerships and initiatives, and enable new partnerships to flourish. The Platform will be open to all interested stakeholders, cover all relevant ecosystem types and address solutions to problems related to both water quantity (including scarcity and the extremes of drought and flood) and water quality. Key themes are likely to quickly develop such as disaster risk reduction, water security for agriculture, urban water solutions, etc. The mission, objectives, guiding principles, scope and desired outcome for the platform are described in the annex to the present note.

14. A key requirement is to engage with stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in, or affected by, water resources management. These stakeholders are focussed on finding solutions, often with an emphasis on using water related infrastructure. Communication is therefore improved by referring to ecosystems as “natural infrastructure” with emphasis on promoting its benefits in harmony with built (physical) infrastructure. Convincing examples of the approach include where natural infrastructure has been used to improve sustainability and economic efficiency of high capital cost built infrastructure⁶.

15. The Platform will be further developed based on the preliminary mission, objectives, guiding principles and scope as detailed further in the annex to this note. Once operational, the platform will facilitate on-the-ground capacity-building activities and projects as well as being a forum to promote consensus and action on green infrastructure approaches.

16. The current status of the platform is that voluntary resources are required to operationalize the platform based on a low-cost concept of a web-based forum facilitated by a modest level of secretariat support.

⁶ Further technical details are available in a booklet produced on this topic for the International Day for Biological Diversity 2013 <http://www.cbd.int/idb/doc/2013/booklet/idb-2013-booklet-en.pdf>

*Annex***PLATFORM FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE SOLUTIONS FOR WATER****Mission**

- Water and natural infrastructure is at the heart of green economies

Objectives

- To support awareness-raising and capacity-building for natural infrastructure solutions for water
- To support the development of an adequate knowledge base on using natural infrastructure solutions for solving water problems through collating, synthesizing and disseminating knowledge and experience, making available the relevant tools and practices that support improved use of natural infrastructure, and identifying areas where information is lacking and new knowledge is needed
- To identify ways in which natural infrastructure can contribute to addressing some of the major global water challenges faced today
- To identify key opportunities to promote natural infrastructure solutions in other forums and mobilize support and inputs (such as targeted briefs) to mainstream natural infrastructure into those forums

Guiding Principles

A set of principles will guide the Platform and ensure that it adds value to global efforts:

- Increases knowledge, understanding and capacity regarding how natural infrastructure provides solutions for water related challenges
- Recognizes that natural and build (physical) infrastructure should operate in harmony and be mutually supportive of each other
- Is of global significance through influencing policies, investment and action at regional, national and local levels
- Is open to all interested stakeholders and practitioners
- Prioritizes engagement with, or influencing, the water resources management community
- Adds value to existing partnerships and initiatives
- Is driven by needs identified by users

Scope

- Addresses all components of natural water infrastructure and their inter-linkages through the water cycle, including wetlands, land cover (forests, grasslands and crops) and soils
- Ecological infrastructures needed for essential water-related ecosystem services
- Long-term perspectives and interconnectivity in the maintenance of water related ecological infrastructures under pressure from climate change and land and water use
- Human dependencies and impacts on water related ecological infrastructures
- Accounting for services provided by intact water related ecological infrastructures *versus* benefits and costs stemming from degraded ones
- Opportunities and approaches to restoration of degraded water related ecological infrastructures
- Alignment of policies across sectors for investments in water related ecological infrastructures
- A special focus on ecosystem based adaptation to climate change, resilience and disaster risk reduction

- Integration of water related ecological infrastructures in economic and land-use planning
- Approaches, including economic incentives, for the maintenance of water related ecological infrastructures

Outcome desired

- Awareness and capacity to use water related ecosystem infrastructure solutions mainstreamed across all relevant sectors and policy areas, delivering significant and tangible improvements in the sustainability of water on the ground
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