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**PROPOSAL FOR VOLUNTARY PEER-REVIEW OF THE PREPARATION AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES
AND ACTION PLANS**

Note by the Executive Secretary

INTRODUCTION

1. At its ninth and eleventh meetings, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate, inter alia, voluntary review processes for implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs). Specifically, in decision IX/8 (para. 16(a)), the Executive Secretary was requested, in cooperation with partner organizations, to facilitate the continued exchange of best practices and lessons learned from the preparation, updating and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans, through appropriate forums and mechanisms, such as the clearing-house mechanism and, subject to available resources, strengthened cooperation with regional processes, South-South cooperation and voluntary peer review. In decision XI/2 (para. 9), the Conference of the Parties, reiterated this request, specifying that voluntary peer-review processes would be “among interested Parties”. At its fifth meeting, the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention considered options for improving the efficiency of structures and processes under the Convention and, in recommendation 5/2, prepared a draft decision for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting, which, inter alia, would “enable a voluntary peer-review process for the national biodiversity strategies and action plans on a pilot basis by interested Parties making best use of mechanisms such as the NBSAP Forum”. The draft decision is reproduced in the compilation of draft decisions.¹

2. Further, the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a proposal for voluntary peer-review of the preparation and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans, taking into account the views expressed by Parties, designed to be implemented on a voluntary pilot basis by interested Parties, and submit this for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting (recommendation 5/2, para. 1(c)). Accordingly, the Executive Secretary has prepared this document.

¹ UNEP/CBD/COP/12/1/Add.2.

I. OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE VOLUNTARY PEER REVIEW AND RELEVANT EXPERIENCE OF OTHER PROCESSES

3. The main objective of voluntary peer review would be to help Parties to improve their individual and collective capacity to more effectively implement the Convention. Given that the current set of national biodiversity strategy and action plans (NBSAPs) are supposed to take into consideration the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the associated Aichi Biodiversity Targets adopted in decision X/2, these could provide a convenient framework for the voluntary peer-review process. National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) or equivalent documents are a primary mechanism for implementation of the Convention (decision VII/30), and the peer-reviews are intended to provide participating Parties with information and advice which they might use either when developing/updating their NBSAPs, or to improve the implementation of their NBSAPs, including integration of biodiversity into broader policy frameworks.

4. The main principles behind a voluntary peer review would be transparency, inclusiveness, comprehensiveness and mutual trust. Participating countries are expected to share these principles and the objectives behind the voluntary peer review process. The process would stimulate mutual experience-sharing, learning and capacity-building, with potential benefits for all Parties to the Convention.

5. The voluntary peer-review process would not replace or duplicate the function of the periodic reporting required under Article 26 of the Convention. National reports under the Convention and other biodiversity-related reports will, however, be important background information for the reviews.

6. The voluntary peer review process would **not** aim to compare or “grade” implementation among participating countries.

7. Other objectives of the peer-review or positive benefits could include:

(a) To contribute to enhanced communication and dialogue between Parties facing similar biodiversity challenges;

(b) To facilitate the sharing of lessons learned and exchange of information and knowledge between other biodiversity-related processes in and between participating countries;

(c) To increase the potential for other Parties, as well as interested institutions, to use the lessons learned and recommendations made available through the peer-review process and in the final peer review reports;

(d) To contribute to the knowledge management processes of the Secretariat of the Convention, thus improving its knowledge products in general;

(e) To help national biodiversity institutions, non-governmental organizations and others in increasing the focus on biodiversity challenges at the national level; and improving public awareness of government biodiversity policies and actions;

(f) To contribute to improving the credibility of processes under the Convention in the long-term and increase policy awareness on biodiversity issues across all sectors.

8. Within the international community, there are other peer-review processes which can provide useful lessons for the development of a voluntary peer review process under the Convention. Among these are:

(a) OECD environmental performance reviews;²

(b) UNECE environmental performance reviews;³

(c) United Nations Human Rights Council universal periodic review;⁴

² <http://www.oecd.org/site/peerreview/>.

³ <http://www.unece.org/env/epr/eprdefintion.html>.

(d) Elements of other processes, such as the UNFCCC In-Depth Reviews of National Communications⁵ and specific national review processes;

II. OUTLINE OF A PROPOSED VOLUNTARY PEER REVIEW PROCESS UNDER THE CONVENTION

9. In the light of the objectives and principles, and taking into account relevant experiences in other processes, the following main elements of the process are proposed. In outline, the process comprises a desk assessment and a country visit by an expert team, followed by review of a draft report by the requesting country.

10. The review team would consist of experts identified by the Secretariat and the Parties participating in the pilot phase. The requesting country may propose key areas where a review is especially relevant, and this should be considered when the review team is selected. The requesting country would collaborate with the review team in the identification of, and access to, key documents that can be used to complete a desk assessment of the status of biodiversity, biodiversity planning, biodiversity and related legislation, and implementation of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan of the requesting country.

11. Well in advance of the country visit, the requesting country would receive a document outlining the objectives, principles and scope of the review, the proposed methodology, a list of preliminary questions and a list of requests for meetings with relevant stakeholders including government institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

12. The review would include: (a) identification of progress; (b) advice and recommendations for improving NBSAP revision and implementation; and, for second or subsequent reviews, (c) improvements and measures taken with respect to the findings of any previous reviews.

13. The final draft of the report would be reviewed by the requesting country for further clarification of any open questions. The final report would be published on the CBD website under the relevant country profile pages and also on the national Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) website.

14. It is proposed that, at the pilot phase of the voluntary peer review, a minimum of five reviews, covering all major United Nations regions, be undertaken and that the experiences and results of these reviews be reported to the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting.

15. Countries participating in the pilot phase should preferably have submitted their fifth national report and developed/updated their NBSAP, as called for in decision X/2, including approval of the NBSAP by the Government.

III. FURTHER ELABORATION OF THE PROPOSAL

16. With support from the Governments of Norway and Switzerland, an expert workshop is being held in September 2014 to advise the Executive Secretary on further development of the review process for its pilot phase. This will include the following:

- (a) Responsibilities of participating countries;
- (b) Composition and responsibilities of review teams;
- (c) Documentation to be provided for desktop review prior to country visit;
- (d) Identification of guidance material to be developed for the review;
- (e) Guiding questions to be used in the review process;
- (f) Responsibilities of the Secretariat of the Convention.

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/upr/pages/uprmain.aspx>.

⁵ http://unfccc.int/national_reports/annex_i_natcom/idr_reports/items/2711.php.

17. The outcomes of the workshop and details of the review process proposed for the pilot phase will be provided in an information note.

IV. RESOURCES AND BUDGET

18. The time required for each country review is estimated at 10 working days, excluding travel time, for a team of up to six experts, depending on the size of the country, among other factors. This could comprise three days of preparation, up to five days for the in-country visit, and two days for analysis and drafting of the report with support from the Secretariat. The finalization of the report may require further consultations with the review team and the country.

19. In the initial pilot phase, all costs (for example, travel and subsistence costs for review team members, and Secretariat staff) would be covered by the participating developed country Parties.
