

Dist.
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/IC/2/19
20 May 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE
ON THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Second session
Nairobi, 20 June-1 July 1994

SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL
AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE

Note by the Interim Secretariat

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Article 25 of the Convention on Biological Diversity establishes a Subsidiary Body for the provision of scientific, technical and technological advice to provide the Conference of the Parties, upon its request, with timely advice relating to the implementation of the Convention. The functions of this Subsidiary Body are outlined in the same Article, which also provides that its functions, terms of reference, organization and operation may be further elaborated by the Conference of the Parties.

2. The Conference of the Parties will need to put this Subsidiary Body into operation. Therefore, although the Convention does not stipulate that the Conference of the Parties must address this matter at its first meeting, it has been suggested that its importance for the operation of the Convention merits its inclusion in the agenda for that meeting.

3. Furthermore, Article 25, paragraph 2, provides that the Subsidiary Body shall carry out its functions under the authority of and in accordance with guidelines laid down by the Conference of the Parties. For this purpose, the Conference of the Parties may wish to examine the provisions set forth in Article 25 and provide further guidelines for the Subsidiary Body to carry out its tasks.

4. Accordingly, the present note has been prepared to assist the Committee to elaborate the functions of the Subsidiary Body in order to prepare further guidelines for its operation for recommendation to the Conference of the Parties. The Committee is also invited to consider the organization and operation of the Subsidiary Body in order to make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties.

5. In considering these matters, the Committee may wish to draw upon the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting of Scientific Experts on Biological Diversity held in Mexico City from 11 to 15 April 1994 (UNEP/CBD/IC/2/11).

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE

2.1. Scientific and technical assessments of the status of biological diversity

6. Article 25, paragraph 2 (a), of the Convention requires the Subsidiary Body to provide scientific and technical assessments, of the status of biological diversity. In order to provide such assessments, the Subsidiary Body would need to review information on the impact of general measures undertaken for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. This would involve reviewing national and international scientific, economic and technical literature to identify policy-relevant information, compiling and synthesizing such information in relation to the issues for the attention of the Conference of the Parties, and formulating requests for specific information or activities to appropriate entities. Of particular importance for carrying out this function would be the assessment and synthesis of information from national-level programmes and activities, as the Convention leaves it to individual Parties to determine how its general provisions are to be implemented.

7. In making its assessment of the status of biological diversity, the Subsidiary Body could note how measures taken relate to specific provisions of the Convention and to its general objectives, and identify any issues raised by its findings that it believes the Conference of the Parties should consider.

8. In carrying out its advisory role, the Subsidiary Body would need to anticipate the needs of the Conference of the Parties for information, analysis and policy options and to formulate requests to competent entities and evaluate their contributions. These might include requests for clarification or additional information on ongoing work and current results, requests for new work, or specific technical questions on which advice is sought.

2.2. Scientific and technical assessments of the effects of types of measures undertaken

9. Under Article 25, paragraph 2 (b), of the Convention, the Subsidiary Body is to prepare scientific and technical assessments of the types of measures taken in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. At the Committee's first session, Working Group I examined a wide range of issues relating to national activities for reducing the loss of biological diversity and stated that all Parties should develop national strategies, plans and programmes or adapt existing ones, with the provision of technical, scientific and financial support, and that all existing identified conservation aspects falling under the scope of other conventions should be taken into account (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/2, annex II, para. 4). In order to provide the required assessments of the effects of types of measures undertaken, and to provide timely advice relating to implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article 25, paragraph 1, the Subsidiary Body would need to undertake the following:

(a) Analysis of national reports - including verification of methodologies used; noting the inclusion or absence of information and data, as well as their quality; evaluating the comprehensiveness and the effectiveness of the measures taken for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity; requesting inputs from bodies established under other relevant conventions;

(b) Compilation and synthesis of the information provided by the Parties, including consideration of the overall effects of policies and measures;

(c) Assessment of programmes in the areas of capacity-building, technology development and transfer, and scientific research.

10. Based on its assessments referred to in paragraphs 6-9 above, the Subsidiary Body might identify the extent to which the provisions of the Convention and the measures undertaken by Parties contribute to the objectives of the Convention, and identify and propose additional or modified measures for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties. The Subsidiary Body might then be requested to assist the Conference of the Parties in further developing those amendments to the Convention.

2.3. Identification, promotion and advice on transfer of technologies

11. Article 25, paragraph 2 (c), of the Convention requires the Subsidiary Body to identify innovative, efficient, and state-of-the-art technologies and know-how relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and advise on the ways and means of promoting development and/or transferring such technologies. The Committee at its first session had requested that this matter be considered by the Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting of Scientific Experts (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/2, annex I, para. 16.). The Meeting made recommendations on the following (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/11, annexes II to IX):

(a) Indicative lists of technologies for:

- (i) Identification, characterization and monitoring of ecosystems, species and genetic resources;
- (ii) In situ conservation of components of biological diversity;
- (iii) Ex situ conservation of components of biological diversity;
- (iv) Sustainable use of biological diversity and its components; and
- (v) Data collection, management, and transfer;

(b) Ways to integrate, in modern management practices, knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles;

(c) Indicative list of scientific and technical programmes for training in conservation of biological diversity and sustainable use of its components (at regional, national and local levels);

(d) Ways and means of promoting development and/or transferring innovative, efficient and state-of-the-art technologies relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

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12. The Committee may wish to consider these recommendations in advising the Conference of the Parties on how the Subsidiary Body might discharge this function.

2.4. Advice on scientific programmes and international cooperation in research and development related to conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity

13. Under Article 25, paragraph 2 (d), of the Convention, the Subsidiary Body is to provide advice on scientific programmes and international cooperation in research and development related to conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The Committee should note that, in accordance with the terms of reference given to it at the Committee's first session, the Intergovernmental Meeting of Scientific Experts on Biological Diversity considered elements for an agenda for scientific and technological research relevant to conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/11, paras. 37-46). Subsequent to the Scientific Meeting and in keeping with its decision, a paper reflecting these elements has been prepared for the information of the Committee (see UNEP/CBD/2/2/Inf. 2).

14. The Committee may wish to consider whether these elements provide a basis for assisting the Subsidiary Body to carry out its function of providing advice on relevant scientific programmes and international cooperation in research and development.

15. Discharge of this function would require the Subsidiary Body to draw upon a comprehensive survey of scientific programmes and international cooperation in research and development. However, the Committee should note the advice of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Scientific Experts that such a survey will require substantial time to complete. The Scientific Meeting therefore suggested that, in the short term, information on illustrative models, case-studies, and examples of successful international cooperation should be gathered (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/11, para. 34). The Committee should consider whether this might be one of the initial tasks to be undertaken under the aegis of the Subsidiary Body in order for it to carry out this function.

2.5. Responding to scientific, technical, and methodological questions

16. Under Article 25, paragraph 2 (e), of the Convention the Subsidiary Body is to respond to scientific, technical, technological and methodological questions that the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies may put to it. In order to carry out this and other functions, the Subsidiary Body would need to draw upon a range of expertise.

17. Methodologies, once developed, would need to be periodically assessed and reviewed, with particular attention to consistency and comparability. They would need to be improved and refined on the basis of the latest scientific and technical knowledge and data resulting from initial use. In addition, Parties may require guidance and advice in using the methodologies agreed upon by the Conference of the Parties. Such assessment and review could be carried out in collaboration with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, with which the Subsidiary Body may need to enter into arrangements for this purpose.

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3. GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBSIDIARY BODY

18. The Committee may wish to recommend to the Conference of the Parties guidelines for the Subsidiary Body to give effect to its functions. The foregoing discussion of its functions implies the following:

(a) The Subsidiary Body would not itself be able to undertake the compilation of primary data for the purpose of carrying out its functions. Its work would be concerned mainly with the review of materials and assessment of data and analyses from competent national and international bodies;

(b) In anticipating the needs of the Conference of the Parties, the Subsidiary Body may make specific requests for studies or other activities to be carried out by those bodies. In this context the Subsidiary Body is expected to develop and maintain a collaborative network involving relevant national and international organizations, and to serve as the point of contact between the Convention structures and such organizations;

(c) The expected products from the Subsidiary Body might be:

- (i) A compilation and synthesis of information on the conservation and sustainable use of the components of biological diversity, in a form useful to the Conference of the Parties and containing recommendations within its mandate. This report would reflect the assessments undertaken in carrying out the functions discussed in sections 2.1 and 2.2 above;
- (ii) A report on the methodologies in use in relation to the objectives of conservation and sustainable use, and an assessment of their effectiveness, highlighting scientific and technical areas for attention by the Conference of the Parties, and providing recommendations on specific methodological questions that may arise;
- (iii) A report on scientific programmes and international cooperation in research and development related to the objectives of conservation and sustainable use, including identification of unmet needs, of gaps in such programmes, of new activities required in support of the Convention, and of issues relating to transfer of technology;
- (iv) A report on technologies for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, including information on their development and transfer;
- (v) A report conveying its advice on implementation of the Convention;
- (vi) Other products as may be deemed necessary or required by the Conference of the Parties.

19. In considering such guidelines, the Committee may wish to refer to questions raised about other possible functions for the Subsidiary Body raised in the notes by the Interim Secretariat dealing with policy, strategy, programme priorities and eligibility criteria regarding access to and utilization of financial resources (UNEP/CBD/IC/2/8, paras. 15 and 17), and with the institutional structure to operate the financial mechanism under the Convention (UNEP/CBD/IC/2/9, para. 18).

4. ORGANIZATION OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY

20. The Convention provides that the Subsidiary Body shall be multidisciplinary, but does not identify the disciplines that would be vital for the discharge of its functions. Given the scope of the functions outlined in the Convention, and in the context of the discussion under section 2 above, the Committee may wish to advise the Conference of the Parties on the range of disciplines that ought to be represented in the Subsidiary Body, as well as on ways to ensure its multidisciplinary character.

5. OPERATION OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY

5.1. Rules of procedure for the Subsidiary Body

21. Article 23, paragraph 3, of the Convention provides that the Conference of the Parties shall determine the rules of procedure for any subsidiary body it may establish. The revised draft rules of procedure for meetings of the Conference of the Parties which will be before the second session of the Committee for its consideration provides that unless the Conference of the Parties decides otherwise, its rules of procedure shall apply mutatis mutandis to subsidiary bodies (UNEP/CBD/IC/2/3, rule 26, para. 6). If the Committee recommends these rules of procedure to the Conference of the Parties, it will thereby also recommend rules of procedure for the operation of this Subsidiary Body. However, the Committee may wish to consider whether there are any specificities of this Subsidiary Body which may require addition or modification to those rules of procedure.

5.2. Frequency and timing of meetings of the Subsidiary Body

22. The Committee may wish to advise whether the Subsidiary Body should follow the frequency of meetings of the Conference of the Parties; whether its meetings should immediately precede meetings of the Conference of the Parties; or whether its meetings should be held between ordinary meetings of the Conference of the Parties. In this regard, the Committee may wish to bear in mind rule 26, paragraphs 1 and 2, of the revised draft rules of procedure for meetings of the Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/IC/2/3).

23. In considering frequency and timing of meetings of the Subsidiary Body, the Committee may wish to be guided by:

- (a) Consistency with the rules of procedure;
- (b) The need for cost-effectiveness of its operations;
- (c) The implications of the option chosen on the capacity required to service its meetings;
- (d) The time required for submission of the report of the Subsidiary Body to the Conference of the Parties.

5.3. Structure of the Subsidiary Body

24. The Committee may wish to consider and recommend how the Subsidiary Body might be structured in order to facilitate the discharge of its functions. For example, should the Subsidiary Body establish subcommittees or panels through which to conduct its work? Should these be established on the basis of different functions with which it is charged, on the basis of different themes, or on the basis of the broad objectives of the Convention?

5.4. Technical support and financing for the Subsidiary Body

25. The Subsidiary Body would need to be extensively supported with technical and secretariat capacity in order to discharge its functions. Funds will be required for the operation, servicing and meetings of the Subsidiary Body and for the functioning of its subcommittees or panels, if created. The Committee should consider and advise how the financial requirements for these needs should be reflected in the financial rules governing the funding of the Secretariat (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/5).
