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SUBSIDIARY BODY ON IMPLEMENTATION

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Item 12 of the provisional agenda\*

### **REPORT OF THE INFORMAL WORKING GROUP ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A METHODOLOGY FOR VOLUNTARY PEER-REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

1. National biodiversity strategies, or their equivalents, and national reports are obligations arising from the Convention, through Articles 6 and 26 respectively. There is, however, no formal mechanism to encourage either inter-Party assistance (scientific and technical support) or a review mechanism to help ensure that the national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAP) are adequately suited to meet both national and global biodiversity threats and the objectives of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. The establishment of such a mechanism, that could commence on a pilot basis, involving interested countries, could be one measure to improve efficiency of structures and processes under the Convention and its Protocols.

2. The Conference of the Parties, at its ninth and eleventh meetings, requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate, inter alia, voluntary review processes for implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans. 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 (WGRI) 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”.

3. Based on WGRI 5 recommendation, the Secretariat, with financial support from Japan, Norway, and Switzerland organized an informal expert meeting that was hosted in Geneva by the Swiss Government.

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4. The objective of the informal meeting was to further develop the proposal for voluntary peer review of the preparation and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans as laid out in draft document UNEP/CBD/COP/12/25/Add.3. The informal meeting was attended by experts from Belarus, Brazil, Malaysia, Norway, Republic of Korea, South Africa and Switzerland, in their personal capacities. Presentations were made by OECD and UNECE Environmental Performance Review Units to share experiences. The output of the Geneva meeting was a proposed voluntary peer review (VPR) methodology submitted as UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/24 to the twelfth Conference of the Parties in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea.

5. At COP 12, the Parties “Took note of the documents prepared by the Executive Secretary on a proposed pilot voluntary peer-review process for the national biodiversity strategies and action plans, 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, for its consideration”.

6. A Notification (2014-135) requesting nominations of experts to form an informal working group was posted on 27 November 2014 to which 17 Parties responded by the deadline and all were accepted into the group. The list of experts can be found in the annex.

## II. THE FIRST MEETING OF THE INFORMAL WORKING GROUP

7. The first meeting of the informal working group took place in Tbilisi, Georgia from 11 to 13 February 2015. Experts from the following Parties participated in the meeting: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Ethiopia, European Union, Georgia, India, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Switzerland, and Viet Nam. Three SCBD staff served the meeting. The objectives of the informal working group meeting were: (a) to revise the proposed methodology for voluntary peer review of NBSAP revision and implementation (UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/24); and (b) to create a work plan for continuation of the development of the methodology.

8. On behalf of the Georgian Government, Mr. Ioseb Kartsivadze welcomed the meeting participants. Georgia had kindly offered to host the meeting and organized the meeting room and logistics for the participants. Subsequently, a statement from the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity was read out by Mr. David Duthie. The official part of the opening was followed by brief self-introductions of all the participants and adoption of the provisional agenda.

9. National experiences with reviews in three different countries were presented. Japan explained in detail how their earlier NBSAPs were reviewed in order to help improve the process and content of their revised NBSAP after COP 10. Switzerland explained how the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) reviews were implemented in the Swiss context where there is a canton structure under the federal government. A link was made to the possible similarities with India, a country that has state governments under the federal one. Georgia described their recent NBSAP revision process, undertaken in collaboration with GIZ, and which included an internal review of the implementation of the previous strategy and action plan.

10. No OECD representative could attend the meeting but a presentation prepared by the OECD on their environmental performance review (EPR) programme was adapted for the meeting and presented by the Secretariat. The objectives of the OECD peer review exercise are (a) to provide countries with an independent assessment of progress in achieving national and international objectives and targeted recommendations; (b) to promote continuous policy dialogue among countries to spread good practices, i.e. peer learning; and (c) to stimulate greater accountability to other countries and to the public. OECD peer reviews are evidence-based, independent assessments of policies. Most OECD member countries had

been reviewed once or twice, and a third cycle was underway for Israel, Japan, Norway, Portugal and Slovakia. Two in-depth issues may be selected by the country under review, which could include biodiversity. The OECD peer reviews comprise the following steps: (a) an initial mission by the OECD/ECE EPR Secretariat to the country under review to define the scope of the review; (b) information is provided by the country under review (questionnaire) and collected by the EPR Secretariat; (c) a review mission involving the Secretariat and experts from 2/3 reviewing countries, and involving broad consultation with stakeholders; (d) preparation of a report; (e) peer review; (f) a discussion of the report in the OECD Working Party on Environmental Performance; (g) publication and launch of the EPR report (approximately 200 pages); and (h) a mid-term progress report to monitor progress made with response to the EPR.

11. The majority of the time during the meeting was spent identifying components of the draft methodology that required further discussion/work, and revising the methodology. For this purpose, the document containing the methodology was projected in the meeting room while being revised based on the ongoing discussions. As a result, an updated version of the methodology was prepared and it was agreed that the next step should be a real testing of the methodology in a small number of countries. Additionally, a discussion was held on the level of “governance” most appropriate for VPR.

12. Taking into account the tasks ahead and the remaining budget, a VPR work plan including activities, responsibilities, and a timeline was prepared for the period through to SBI in May 2016. Budget and financial issues were also briefly dealt with during the meeting.

### **III. TESTING OF THE REVISED METHODOLOGY**

13. Between March 2015 and the end of the year the main activities undertaken with respect to VPR were the two test reviews. Volunteers to be reviewed and reviewers had been selected by nomination on 24 April 2015. Eight members of the expert group had volunteered (Belarus, China, Georgia, India, Nigeria, Norway, Switzerland and Viet Nam), and Ethiopia and India were selected as providing a geographical socioeconomic spread. The review team for Ethiopia was then formed comprising of reviewers from India, Nigeria, Norway, and Switzerland but Nigeria had to withdraw due to a change in responsibilities. The Swiss reviewer acted as the leader of the review team. Reviewers from China, Norway, and Viet Nam formed the review team for India, with the Norwegian reviewer being the team leader. The Chinese team member could not manage to participate in the country-visit.

14. The review of Ethiopia started in June 2015 and that for India started in November 2015. The implementation of the reviews followed the methodology resulting from the first informal working group meeting. Significant preparatory work was undertaken by the Secretariat and the host country, and the Secretariat facilitated the necessary documents and communication. The programme for the in-country visit was also drafted by the Secretariat in cooperation with the host country, and the final agenda agreed upon by the review team members. The final report of the Ethiopia and India tests are available as documents UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/INF/31 and UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/INF/48, respectively.

15. An informal meeting of the group members present at SBSTTA-19 provided an opportunity for the country review teams to update other in the group and it was decided to convene a second meeting to further develop the methodology in the light of the country reviews.

### **IV. THE SECOND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP**

16. The second meeting of the informal working group was held in Bern, Switzerland from 16 to 18 March 2016. On behalf of the Swiss government, Mr Andreas Obrecht welcomed the meeting participants. Switzerland had kindly offered to host the meeting and organized the meeting room and logistics for the participants. On behalf of the Secretariat, David Duthie also welcomed the participants. A

draft agenda for the meeting was prepared by the SCBD in coordination with the host country and was briefly discussed during the meeting. A final agenda was adopted by the participants. The participants agreed for the meeting to be co-chaired by Nepal and Norway.

17. Representatives from Belarus, European Union, India, Kiribati, Nepal, Norway, Switzerland, and Viet Nam participated in the meeting. For a variety of reasons, other members of the working group could not participate. A representative from the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) was also invited. The meeting was serviced by two SCBD staff.

18. The Secretariat presented a brief history of the VPR process and briefed the participants on activities which had taken place since the first informal working group meeting.

19. The team leaders of the two review teams briefed the participants on their experiences with testing the methodology. This was followed by comments from the other review team members and a discussion. It was concluded that field-testing of the methodology had contributed much to providing input for further improving it, as was done later on during the meeting.

20. The INTOSAI representative presented on experiences from the Working Group on Environmental Audits (WGEA) of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), and opportunities for cooperation with the BCD in general and the VPR process in particular. National audits provide objective, reasonable assurance to the stakeholders that the Government has conducted its activities to achieve the objectives according to standards, laws and regulations. The audits are independent from auditees, performed according to standards, and they promote good governance, accountability and transparency. SAIs address policy, management systems, internal control and administration in their recommendations to Governments. Their experiences include biodiversity and the SCBD is presently in communication with INTOSAI to assist with revision of their biodiversity audit guidelines.

21. Through several interactive sessions, and making use of the earlier presentations on the test cases, the VPR methodology was further revised during the meeting. The results of this process have been posted as SBI-1 working document UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/10/Add.1. The same methodology with updated appendices will be posted as document UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/INF/30.

22. The organization of a third meeting or a third country review before COP 13 in December 2016 was discussed as possible follow-up actions. The review of a developed country Party could provide additional test results for possible further refinement of the methodology. Decisions on these issues will be made following the first meeting of SBI in early May 2016.

**Informal working group for the development of a methodology for a Voluntary Peer Review of the Convention on Biological Diversity Implementation**

[Note: Institutional designation is as given in the original nomination and may have changed]

<p><b><u>Belarus</u></b> Mr. Ruslan Novitsky Head of Department Centre for Biological Resources National Academy of Sciences</p>	<p><b><u>Georgia</u></b> Mr. Ioseb Kartsivadze Head of Biodiversity Protection Service Department of Integrated Environmental Management and Biodiversity Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection</p>
<p><b><u>Bolivia</u></b> Mr. Diego Pacheco Expert, Environmental Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p>	<p><b><u>India</u></b> Mr. Rabikumar Thangapandian Secretary National Biodiversity Authority</p>
<p><b><u>Bosnia and Herzegovina</u></b> Ms. Senka Barudanovic Biodiversity Expert Ministry of Environment and Tourism</p>	<p><b><u>Japan</u></b> Mr. Kazuaki Hoshino Senior Adviser to the Minister of Environment Ministry of the Environment</p>
<p><b><u>China</u></b> Mr. Jing Xu Associated professor Innovation Base of Ecosystems Effects of Environmental Changes Chinese Research Academy of Environmental Sciences</p>	<p><b><u>Kiribati</u></b> Ms. Ratita Bebe Wildlife Officer Wildlife Conservation Unit Environment and Conservation Division</p>
<p><b><u>Ethiopia</u></b> Mr. Misikire Tessema Lemma National Coordinator for the NBSAP Project Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute</p>	<p><b><u>Mexico</u></b> Mr. Hesiquio Benitez Diaz General Director – International Cooperation and Implementation CONABIO</p>
<p><b><u>European Union</u></b> Mrs. Rania Spyropoulou EU Biodiversity Clearing House Focal Point European Environment Agency  <i>replaced in December 2015 by</i>  Mr. Anne-Theo Seinen Policy Officer Directorate-General for Environment – Unit B.2 Biodiversity European Commission</p>	<p><b><u>Nepal</u></b> Mr. Rom Raj Lanichhane Undersecretary, Environment Officer Head-Biodiversity Section Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation</p>

<p><b><u>Nigeria</u></b>  Mr. John E. Onyekuru  Deputy Director (Forestry)  Federal Ministry of Environment</p>	<p><b><u>Switzerland</u></b>  Mr. Andreas Obrecht  Senior Policy Advisor for Biodiversity  International Affairs Division  Federal Office for the Environment</p>
<p><b><u>Norway</u></b>  Ms. Tone Solhaug  Senior Adviser  Department for Biodiversity, Outdoor  Recreation and Cultural Heritage  Ministry of Climate and Environment</p> <p>Ms Maja Stade Aaroenæs  Senior Adviser, Norwegian Environment  Agency</p>	<p><b><u>Viet Nam</u></b>  Ms. Hoang Thi Thanh Nhan  Deputy Director  Biodiversity Conservation Agency  Vietnam Environment Administration  Ministry of Natural Resources and  Environment</p>
<p><b><u>Palau</u></b>  Ms. Umai Basilius  Policy and Planning Programs Manager  Palau Conservation Society</p>	

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