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Item 13 of the provisional agenda*

STATUS OF THE FUNCTIONAL REVIEW OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Revised note by the Executive Secretary

1. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith the progress report of the functional review of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity for the information of the fifth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention.
2. The functional review of the Secretariat was launched in response to paragraph 25 of decision XI/31 of the Conference of Parties, which requested the Executive Secretary to undertake an in-depth functional review of the Secretariat, with a view to updating the structure of the Secretariat and the grading of posts to the Strategic Plan's focus on implementation by Parties and report to the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting.
3. Thanks to the generous funding by the Government of Switzerland, the progress report was prepared by the Universalia Management Group of Montreal, Canada, the consultants who carried out the functional review.
4. The document is presented in the form and language in which it was provided to the Secretariat.

* UNEP/CBD/WGRI/5/1.

Functional Review of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Progress Report June 5, 2014



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Acronyms

CONABIO	Comisión Nacional para el conocimiento y uso de la biodiversidad
COP	Conference of the Parties
HoU	Head of Unit
IT	Information Technology
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KM	Knowledge Management
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
SCBD	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
TOR	Terms of Reference
UMG	Universal Management Group
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNON	United Nations Office in Nairobi

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1 Purpose of the Progress Report

This is the Progress Report for the Functional Review of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Secretariat or SCBD) which is being conducted by Universal Management Group (UMG or Universal) of Montreal, Canada. This Progress Report has been developed for submission to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention (WGRI).

As will be outlined below, the assignment to conduct a functional review of the Secretariat somewhat changed in direction due to initial diagnostic activities which led to a consensus to undertake a more strategic review so as to position the Secretariat to better fulfil its functions.

2 The Origins of the Functional Review

The Functional Review of the Secretariat was launched in response to paragraph 25 of decision XI/31 of the Conference of Parties which requested the Executive Secretary to undertake an in-depth functional review of the Secretariat with a view to updating the structure of the Secretariat and the grading of posts to the Strategic Plan's focus on implementation by Parties and report to the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting. The purpose of this review, as set out in its Terms of Reference, is to:

- Collate priority activities for the Secretariat based on the Strategic Plans of both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, their Programmes of Work, and the Decisions of the Parties.
- Consider the linkages between the Convention and its Protocols from an administrative as well as substantive perspective
- Identify functions required for providing support to Parties in the implementation of their priorities as well as providing the core function of the Secretariat as envisaged in Article 24 of the Convention
- Keeping in view the needs envisaged for the near future, in particular the need for strategic partnerships that provide the needed synergistic support to Parties; and determine the skill sets and experience of staff required to perform these functions.
- Identify duplications or overlaps and potential synergies between different activities or programmes: either within or between core activities
- Assess achievements against planned results or best practice for activities since the last five meetings of the Parties, including relevant examples from other convention secretariats and organizations as appropriate
- Assess the financial and administrative processes undertaken to date and suggest additional changes, as need be, with a view to streamline and strengthen decision making and accountability with the aim of delivering high-quality support to Parties
- Assist the Convention and its Protocols in the preparation of an organizational structure based on the functional groupings and priorities and best practices

- Assess the financial sustainability of the costs and the appropriate allocation of the available resources to ensure the full and timely support that the Secretariat can provide to Parties in the implementation of both the Convention and its Protocols
- Recognize the fact that expectation from the secretariat has grown over the years in the scope and quantity of functions to be performed enabling the need to expand and manage partnerships to deliver the support required by Parties.

The above specifications tend to imply a mix of a fairly traditional functional review of the status quo of the Secretariat, combined with a more forward looking analysis of the roles for the Secretariat during the balance of the Decade. This balance led Universalia to undertake initial research that tended to point toward the centrality of a more strategic approach.

In discussions with key senior partners, a significant part of the data collection, it became apparent that there was a general anticipation that the Functional Review would go beyond a position-by-position analysis based on the status quo that was anticipated by some. Rather, these key senior partners explicitly stated that they were seeking a more strategic exercise designed to position the Secretariat to meet new challenges, and specifically to address what these senior stakeholders saw as limitations in the way the Secretariat plans, works and is organized.

3 Specific Analytical Instruments

The following constitutes a description of the specific tools Universalia has used to implement this Functional Review:

Outcome Mapping-based managerial workshops designed to identify themes, clarify directions and map partnership relationships so as to better conceptualize the roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat in support of achieving the objectives of the Convention, its Protocols as well as the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the achievement of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Gap Analysis-based staff workshops at the unit/sub-unit level with the purpose of helping them articulate how they see the strengths and weaknesses of their own unit.

For greater clarity, these workshops focused on how each unit/sub unit works, with whom it works, the adequacy of the resources allocated to it to versus the nature of the demands placed on it.

In terms of the forward-looking and problem solving nature of this assignment, these workshops engaged staff in the identification of “better ways of working”.

Institutional and Organizational Assessment-based review of the operational functions of the Secretariat how tasks are undertaken, how resources are allocated, the nature of reporting and internal performance assessment (organizational performance and NOT individual performance).

Partner Survey was circulated among the National Focal Points of the Convention.

For greater clarity, this external survey did not address issues of organizational structure, beyond inquiry related to views about the adequacy of the current structure in the most general terms.

Some 160 National Focal Points responded, a very high rate of participation for an unsolicited survey, thus demonstrating a very high degree of commitment to the process of renewing the Secretariat. Extensive written comments were provided.

Employee Survey in addition to problem solving and gap analysis workshops, a confidential internal survey was conducted.

A near full participation rate ensued, with extensive write-in comments further illuminating responses.

External senior partner interviews of approximately 40 key external partners

Some 23 high level interviews were conducted, the shortfall being due to the inability to schedule sessions with some external partners.

A very high degree of congruity of views was observed.

Comparative Analysis with other Secretariats of approximately the same size and specifically those that serve multilateral agreements (not necessarily environmental) will be undertaken during final data collection so as to provide contextual analysis.

4 Progress to Date

This section of the Progress Report lays out the process of the assignment to date.

The functional review was launched in late December, 2013, with a contract being awarded to Universalia Management Group and the circulation to Universalia of background documentation.

A series of meetings began on Thursday, January 16, 2014, with an initial overview session. It was followed by two days of meetings the next week, including a session with representatives of the staff association. At the initial meeting on January 16, the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat expressed strong intent to focus the functional review assignment on issues related to how to strengthen the ability of the Secretariat to assist Parties in the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols and by extension, support the attainment of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

At that time, the Executive Secretary made it clear that the Secretariat as a whole required more than simply a re-structuring of its organogram. Rather, more existential concepts such as the nature of its work, the nature of its partnership relationships and the fundamental need to better understand in the context of the UN Decade on Biodiversity, notions such as: “implement”, “capacity building” and, among others “knowledge sharing”.

Throughout January, 2014, the Universalia team gathered and analysed primary background documentation. A meeting conducted on January 27 further explored directions for the functional review and began to lay out an initial timetable. At that time, it was agreed that an internal Inception Report would be submitted on or by February 11, 2014.

A draft of the internal Inception Report was submitted on February 11, 2014, and was subsequently slightly revised.

Two electronic surveys (one for employees and one for external stakeholders) were launched in early March, 2014. External senior partner interviews were conducted throughout March and April, 2014. Desk top analyses of the work procedures and systems of the Secretariat occurred during March, 2014. Internal workshops at the unit level and in-depth interviews of senior managers were conducted in March and April, 2014.

A two-day management visioning workshop was conducted in late April, 2014.

An internal Interim Report was submitted on May 9, 2014.

Originally, the assignment was to have been completed in June, 2014. However, as part of the redirection of the Functional Review to a more strategic level, it was agreed that the assignment would be elongated for an additional three months.

It was agreed that the Final Report would need to be in circulation-ready format so as to be presented, along with the Secretariat's management response, at the upcoming COP which is scheduled for October, 2014.

It was decided that such a continuance would permit more complete consultations with the Secretariat so as to elaborate a Medium Term Operational Plan and accompanying Results Framework, and a set of recommendations that would present a new course for the balance of the Decade and which would more forcefully align the work of the Secretariat to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

5 Initial Diagnosis

Universalia undertook an initial assessment of the operational and strategic factors related to the Secretariat. This initial assessment identified some major considerations leading Universalia to develop an initial diagnosis of the challenges facing the Secretariat. Although this Progress Report has not been designed for the presentation of specific findings, it is important to underscore the high degree of triangulation of findings among various data sources. For example, there is near unanimity that the Secretariat needs to focus its work more specifically on key priority areas, and articulate its comparative advantage. Desktop review of current practices confirmed these external observations with respect to prioritization and comparative advantage.

Therefore, this diagnosis has focussed on issues such as the adequacy of planning systems, the strategic orientation of the Secretariat itself, and the impact of current management practices such as the nature of the assignment of functions, the relevance of some existing functions, management decision-making patterns, and the ways of engaging staff.

The diagnosis was discussed with the management team of the Secretariat with a general consensus emerging that the overall Functional Review needed to be more strategically aligned. As a result of the data collection activities, the Universalia team came to some conclusions about the challenges that face the Secretariat. The team considered that the Secretariat on Biodiversity faces a multi-dimensional set of challenges with respect to its ability to perform its work during the latter half of the Decade on Biodiversity. Some of these were considered primal in nature, the articulation of a vision to respond to the rapidly evolving roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat; while others relate to how to better plan, and best utilize resources. This is diagnosis, the subject of a general consensus among Secretariat managers, reaffirmed therefore that the Secretariat therefore requires a multi-dimensional functional review which takes into account the remarks made by the Executive Secretary about challenges that were presented on April 5, 2012.

6 Deliverables and Upcoming Actions

Given the redirection of the assignment as a result of the Universalia's overview and subsequent discussions with senior management, it was also necessary to revisit the deliverables. In addition to this Progress Report, the following deliverables now have been mandated.

6.1 Internal Inception Report

The first deliverable was the internal Inception Report which further expanded on an initial diagnostic laying out a detailed workplan and presenting for approval the various data collection

instruments described above. It was submitted on February 11, 2014, and subsequently slightly revised.

6.2 The Internal Interim Report

The Internal Interim Report was developed immediately after the conclusion of primary data collection and was submitted in early May 2014. It:

- Provided analysis based on a series of extensive staff and managerial meetings, the findings of the two electronic surveys, key stakeholder interviews and documentary review.
- Informed SCBD of emerging trends.
- Set out a preliminary draft of a proposed new Results Framework for the Secretariat.

For greater clarity, the Internal Interim Report is not designed for circulation, nor will it be revised. It has been developed to secure feedback from the management team of the Secretariat so as to guide the development of the Final Report.

6.3 Final Report

The Final Report will be multi-dimensional.

The first element, Part A, will be a narrative review of the strengths and challenges facing the Secretariat.

Part B will articulate a draft of a medium term Operational Plan that will span six years.

- It will include, among other elements, an articulation of a vision for the Secretariat in relation to its core roles in support of the Convention and its Protocols.
- It will lay out a Strategic Results Framework.
- It will present a high-level architectural design for the structure of the Secretariat, focusing on functional relationships and potentially new structures, but not drill down to an individual post analysis. It should be emphasized that this later characteristic varies somewhat from the original TOR and is the result of early needs assessment analysis conducted by Universalia that led to the recommendation to adopt a somewhat more holistic approach, given the nature of the needs and challenges that the Secretariat currently faces.

6.4 Upcoming Actions

A short Progress Report (this document) to be submitted to WGRI in early June, 2014.

Comparative analysis and final data collection will ensue in June, 2014.

A draft of the Final Report (as outlined above) will be submitted in early July, 2014.

A revised Final Report will be submitted in early August, 2014, so as to ensure its timely circulation to key external stakeholders in advance the upcoming COP scheduled for October, 2014.

A wrap-up and lessons learned workshop will be mounted in early September, 2014.