

REPORT OF SBSTTA-7 MEETING, MONTREAL, 12-16 November 2001.

Subject: Update from SBSTTA-7 meeting – impressions and implications

To: Members of the INRM and ICWG-GR listservers

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Dear Colleagues

The seventh SBSTTA meeting of the Secretariat of the CBD, held in Montreal on 12-16 November 2001, focused on forest biological diversity and agricultural biodiversity. The issue of the ecosystem approach appeared significantly throughout the discussions of that week.

- Aspects of the ecosystem approach pervades most discussions.
- The ecosystem approach is thought of as a generally good idea by most country-representatives. But many express reservations when it comes to actual implementation and calls for examples for practical implementation.
- Biodiversity conservation in areas outside protected areas is receiving increasing attention. The CGIAR's focus on productive landscapes therefore puts us in a critical position.
- The Secretariat of the CBD itself calls for the need to look for synergies among various UN conventions, which ultimately might result in merging several conventions, such as CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD.
- In this context, the ecosystem approach is a cross-cutting issue, not only relevant in the CBD context, but is increasingly also thought relevant in the context of UNCCD and UNFCCC. The CGIAR's efforts on and involvement with all of these conventions/issues therefore puts the CGIAR in a critical cross-cutting role, and the INRM concepts and frameworks could prove very valuable in developing more integrated views.

We had discussions with the Secretariat of the CBD about a possible joint programme of work between SCBD and the CGIAR through the INRM Taskforce. During a meeting with the SCBD, FAO, UNESCO and the Ramsar Convention, it was proposed to work together on documentation of case studies of practical implementation of the ecosystem approach. A key component of this joint multi-agency effort is going to be synthesis and analyses of case studies. John Poulsen offered to take the lead to organize this. More on this will follow in subsequent messages.

The following extract of the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (www.iisd.ca/biodiv) describes the meeting, its results for the work programme on forest biodiversity and on agricultural biodiversity, and the atmosphere at SBSTTA7:

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SBSTTA-7

“At the beginning of SBSTTA-7, delegates faced significant pressure to develop an action-oriented, comprehensive work programme on forest biodiversity, while addressing other substantive issues, ranging from agricultural biodiversity to indicators and incentives. After marathon sessions on forest biodiversity and steady progress on other issues, most delegates were pleased with progress made. While early SBSTTAs have been criticized for serving as mini-COPs, pre-negotiating political issues, the last two SBSTTA agendas have been so overwhelming as to sideline many of the more political issues. SBSTTA-7 was no exception, as the sheer amount of work, specifically with regard to the forest work programme, helped to avoid extended and unfruitful debates that have long paralyzed progress in the international forest arena. While many participants also noted that SBSTTA has generally proved effective in its *modus operandi* of gathering, filtering and synthesizing information from a wide range of inputs for COP consideration, several noted that this function was put to the test in the consideration of the arguably most important thematic area of forest biodiversity. In this regard, while SBSTTA stumbled procedurally, it made significant progress substantially, and assuredly provided some lessons learned for future meetings.

FOREST BIODIVERSITY

Perhaps the largest obstacles to the discussions on forest biodiversity were not political, but procedural. The mandate given SBSTTA on forests was huge, and on the first day some expressed doubts that they would even get through the work programme's three elements, their respective actors, timeframes, process targets and prioritization, as well as issues of forest fires, bushmeat and climate change. One of the results was an overcompensation of efforts to streamline discussions. With four background papers and the results of an early contact group all with slightly different approaches, most thought the aphorism of too many cooks spoiling the broth as quite *à propos*. The problem of an unmanageable workload was further compounded by missing and/or incorrect drafts, computer crashes, and alleged communication breakdown among the Chairs, Secretariat and Bureau. Increasing fatigue after three days of late night sessions did not help. Pondering the meaning of text debated three and four times over (e.g., "harmonize the diversity of forest genetic resources"), some delegates highlighted the need for distance to get a sense of the forest for the trees.

Procedural issues aside, most were pleasantly surprised at the depth of the discussion and the ease with which delegates were able to address potentially controversial issues relating to trade, illegal harvesting, indigenous rights and underlying causes of forest biodiversity loss. Reflecting on the meager results of past CBD discussions, most especially COP-4's research-oriented programme of work, participants noted that the floodgates on substantive matters had opened. Some suggested that this reflected a shift in the CBD's status among intergovernmental forest processes, with many acknowledging the ineffectiveness of the IPF/IFF/UNFF (Intergovernmental Panel and Forum on Forests; UN Forum on Forests) in addressing forest biodiversity issues. This

was underscored by requests that the CBD assume the lead role on forest biodiversity within the CPF (Collaborative Partnership on Forests). Even Greenpeace International refrained from delivering its golden chainsaw award, stating that if delegates could implement their 100+ activities, then the pressures on forest biodiversity would be greatly alleviated.

This remark reflected a significant underlying concern, as delegates questioned whether the amount of substance within the draft work programme would be its greatest weakness. Most agreed that the difficult task would now be prioritization and beyond that, establishing meaningful targets to ensure that what's on paper becomes a reality on the ground. Use of the Secretariat and the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group on Forest Biodiversity hopefully will provide guidance in this task, although many governments maintained that the tough political questions are the sovereign domain of Parties. Most assume that COP-6 will prune back the work programme, with differing levels of concern as to how far.

Regarding substance, several delegates viewed the language on conservation and restoration within the context of the ecosystem approach as some of the strongest yet, while also highlighting specific recognition of the importance of primary forests. Also of significance were activities relating to illegal harvesting, socioeconomic causes of biodiversity loss, third-party independent certification and sustainable forest management. However, some lamented that important issues had fallen through the cracks. While bushmeat entailed a high level of debate during three working group sessions, discussions on climate change were relegated to the late hours of a Thursday evening contact group. Such criticisms aside, SBSTTA-7 was a remarkable first step in moving towards an action-oriented work programme, and it is now the COP's even greater task to put that programme into motion.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

In contrast, discussions on other substantive issues proceeded fairly smoothly, producing an extraordinary amount of outputs, with which delegates were generally pleased. Participants also commended the well-structured discussions and the constructive atmosphere, where compromise was reached without major difficulties. However, given the number and importance of the substantive matters, and bearing in mind that a number of initiatives, proposals, case studies and reports should have been produced and implemented before COP-6, some delegates could not help but worry about the workload ahead for both the Secretariat and the Parties.

Detailed guidelines should help countries to draft and implement EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) legislation and incorporate biodiversity concerns into existing legislation.

Discussion on agricultural biodiversity benefited from the previous week's international symposium on agricultural biodiversity, which had significant inputs on issues such as pollinators, animal genetic resources and soil biodiversity (organized by the UNU, CBD

and IPGRI). The new International Treaty on PGRFA (Plant Genetic resources for Food & Agriculture) got its deserved attention, as delegates already started requesting collaboration with its Interim Committee. Many delegates considered the specific targets of the Plant Conservation Strategy as one of the most important achievements of the meeting, highlighting a turn towards practical action. However, others expressed concern about overburdening developing country Parties rich in biodiversity, and stressed the need for streamlining the process, especially since the anticipated capacity-building activities have been subsumed within a plethora of other priorities.

On Incentive Measures, contention did arise when participants debated their design and implementation, with some saying national legislation and conditions were a major concern and others calling for globally accepted, standard measures. Some warned that failing to fully consider discrepancies in countries' social and economic situations could transform incentives into disincentives.”

With kind regards
Coosje Hoogendoorn and John Poulsen