

SBSTTA 25 Highlights: Sunday, 15 October 2023

The twenty-fifth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 25) opened on Sunday, in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates addressed organizational matters and opened discussions on the implementation and monitoring of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Opening

Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico), SBSTTA Chair, opened the meeting, noting that this was the first meeting since the adoption of the GBF, stressed the importance of SBSTTA 25 for GBF implementation and urged moving from words to action.

Susan Garner, Ecosystem Division, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), emphasized that to deliver on the GBF, we need a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, adequate financing, and positive yet disruptive practices underpinned by knowledge and science.

Underlining the scope and challenges of GBF implementation by 2030, David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), drew attention to the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund by the Global Environment Facility, and the work of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures.

Organizational matters

Adoption of agenda and organization of work: Delegates adopted the provisional agenda and organization of work (CBD/SBSTTA/25/1/Rev.1 and CBD/SBSTTA/25/1/Add.1/Rev.3).

Election of officers: The Secretariat reminded delegates of the election of five new members to the Bureau to serve a term commencing at the end SBSTTA 25 up to the close of SBSTTA 27. The new members will replace outgoing members. She also noted that a new SBSTTA Chair would be elected at the resumed session of the CBD fifteenth Conference of the Parties (CBD COP 15). Delegates elected Kibagu Kenneth Heinrich Uiseb (Namibia) for the AFRICAN GROUP, Taulant Bino (Albania) for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, Jahigul Kabir (Bangladesh) for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, Scott Wilson (Canada) for WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS GROUP, with Niklaus Wagner (Switzerland) serving as an alternate for matters relating to CBD Protocols, and Aria St. Louis (Grenada) for GRULAC. Saint Lucia noted that the group will consult further on an alternative since Grenada is not a party to the Nagoya Protocol. Bilal Qteshat (Jordan) was elected rapporteur.

Facilitating the Implementation of the GBF and the Monitoring of its Progress

Monitoring framework for the GBF: James Williams (UK), Co-Chair of the *Ad-hoc* Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on GBF Indicators, presented an update on their work, including the annexed proposed list of binary indicator questions (CBD/SBSTTA/25/2). The Secretariat introduced the document.

Egypt, on behalf of AFRICA, BELGIUM, SAUDI ARABIA and YEMEN called for including “not applicable” in the responses to questions proposed. REPUBLIC OF KOREA welcomed the use of binary indicators in cases where there is no data. CHINA stressed the need to take into consideration different circumstances of countries in developing the indicators. Underlining varying capacities to address headline indicators, INDONESIA called for clarification on the multiple-choice questions, and, with FRANCE, the use of subjective words.

Saint Lucia, for GRULAC, also noted imbalance in headline indicators, particularly those related to sustainable use, benefit-sharing, and means of implementation. He proposed synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and, with International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), WOMEN MAJOR GROUP and GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (GYBN), the inclusivity of all stakeholders including Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), women and youth.

JAPAN, with COSTA RICA, urged simple but effective binary indicators that correspond to the targets. Several others supported simplification, including the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, UK, SOUTH AFRICA, AUSTRIA, the EU, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS, NORWAY, PERU, and THE NATURE CONSERVANCY. NORWAY proposed that the indicator on fair and equitable sharing of benefits be aligned to the COP 15 decision on digital sequence information (DSI).

GERMANY and SPAIN highlighted the need to define the methodology and to ensure the coherence between the monitoring framework and the reporting template. UGANDA, with MALAWI, KENYA, and ZIMBABWE, called for capacity building for data collection and analysis.

SWEDEN said any additions to the list of binary questions should be circulated for comments before SBSTTA 26 and underlined that the AHTEG should review the entire monitoring framework. FINLAND and NETHERLANDS supported dividing the binary questions into sub-questions, with the former calling for a peer review of the binary indicators during the intersessional period.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, with VENEZUELA, expressed concern regarding the lack of clarity on aggregated data collected through binary questions and responses. UK urged parties not to expand the AHTEG’s mandate. SWITZERLAND called for synergies with biodiversity-related conventions including the Bern process on cooperation among the biodiversity-related conventions for the implementation of the GBF. COSTA RICA called for headline indicators for each of the GBF targets.

NEW ZEALAND recalled the COP15 decision to keep the monitoring framework under review, and called for revising the AHTEG’s terms of reference (TOR) to ensure the group can complete its mandate.

SUB-NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS MAJOR GROUP reiterated strong commitment to implementing the GBF through a whole-of-society approach.

Many others including NIGERIA, SPAIN, BELGIUM, MEXICO, AUSTRALIA, called on the AHTEG to address critical gaps.

Chair Benítez Díaz then established a contact group on the binary indicators, co-chaired by Jan Plesnik (Czechia), and Adams Toussaint (Saint Lucia).

Mechanisms for Planning, Monitoring, Reporting and Review: Chair Benítez Díaz reminded delegates of COP decision 15/6 to conduct a global review of collective progress in the implementation of the GBF, and the request to SBSTTA 25 to provide relevant scientific, technical and technological inputs to inform the review. The Secretariat presented the document (CBD/SBSTTA/25/3).

NORWAY supported the inclusion of high-level summary on the state and trends of biodiversity and, with SWITZERLAND and SOUTH AFRICA, noted the need to distinguish the global review report from the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO). JAPAN urged learning from the GBO experiences since this is the first time the CBD is conducting a global review. SWITZERLAND said the review should contain: biodiversity trends following the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) global assessments; collective progress from national reports; contributions from other biodiversity-related agreements; and implementation gaps. The EU, with SWEDEN and GERMANY, highlighted the importance of the Bern process towards this review.

NORWAY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, JAPAN, the AFRICAN GROUP, UK, NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM, ARGENTINA, COTE D'IVOIRE, AUSTRALIA, and others welcomed the establishment of a scientific and technical advisory group, calling for clarification of its membership, modalities and TOR. JAPAN, SPAIN, CANADA, SWITZERLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, IUCN, and others called for recognition of IPBES assessments as information sources in the global review and urged synergies with the IPBES second global biodiversity and ecosystem services report.

Emphasizing the importance of inclusivity, SPAIN, COLOMBIA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, IIFB, WOMEN MAJOR GROUP, GYBN called for participation of IPLCs, women, youth, civil society, academia, and others in the review. CANADA noted that observer organizations should also have the opportunity to nominate experts to the advisory group.

BRAZIL cautioned on use of information from component and complementary indicators as they are voluntary, urging transparency in the review process. He emphasized the need for peer-review of the global review prior its adoption.

Cameroon, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, welcomed the inclusion of a section on means of implementation. COLOMBIA, AFRICAN GROUP, CANADA and ARGENTINA also noted the importance of defining the mobilization of resources. TÜRKIYE highlighted the importance of a scientific analysis of emerging issues. CHINA preferred a regionally-driven process.

Chair Benítez Díaz established a contact group co-chaired by Gaute Voigt-Hanssen (Norway) and Bilal Qteshat (Jordan).

Approaches to identifying scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the Framework, including its implication for the programmes of work of the Convention: The Secretariat introduced the document (CBD/SBSTTA/25/4), noting that the rapid analysis described in this document was conducted in order to support SBSTTA deliberations in identifying overarching gaps in scientific and technical guidance for the implementation of GBF targets.

CANADA called for a gap identification and alignment of this issue with the existing documents and guidelines of the CBD including its work programmes and multi-year programme of work, among others. Aligning work programmes with the GBF was supported by others, including FINLAND, MEXICO, COSTA RICA, JAPAN, UK, BRAZIL, AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND.

Namibia, for the AFRICAN GROUP, reiterated that the rapid analysis was insufficient and, with SOUTH SUDAN, called to defer this issue to SBSTTA 26 to allow the Secretariat to revise this work. NEW ZEALAND highlighted the contribution of different knowledge systems, including traditional knowledge.

COLOMBIA acknowledged that the rapid analysis is related to the inherent issues in the work programmes and called for a clearer view on the quantitative and qualitative methods and

goals. SPAIN, with BELGIUM, suggested undertaking another rapid analysis, taking into account other cross-cutting issues. ARGENTINA called for guidance on resource mobilization for selected biomes. JAPAN noted that while the rapid analysis was not exhaustive, it is still useful to identify the inconsistencies within the current work of the CBD. SOUTH AFRICA proposed establishing a working group to compile the required guidelines for GBF implementation.

TÜRKIYE highlighted the importance of involving all stakeholders in addressing gaps by mainstreaming biodiversity considerations. KENYA noted gaps related to Target 3 (conserve 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas by 2030), underscoring that guidance on protected areas already exists but is not reflected in the rapid assessment.

Several countries, including GERMANY, UK, SPAIN and SOUTH AFRICA, highlighted the importance of other processes and reports in providing guidance in the implementation of the GBF, such as those of IPBES and IUCN. EU and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted that while guidance is one of the available tools, it is not necessarily the strongest. FAO highlighted a range of policy tools and initiatives within including biodiversity standards and guidelines. IUCN drew attention to the Global Species Action Plan (GSAP) to provide guidance on the actions required for GBF implementation.

BRAZIL expressed concern on the potential implications of introducing 11 new workstreams and suggested identifying key priorities for coherence and consistency. SWITZERLAND called for the efficient and effective implementation of the GBF and a comprehensive analysis on the potential gaps as identified.

The AFRICAN GROUP, with NAMIBIA, called for including IPLCs across all actions proposed and the WOMEN MAJOR GROUP urged innovative guidance and support for implementation of the gender action plan. The FAO highlighted a range of policy tools and initiatives including biodiversity standards and guidelines.

IIFB called for guidance on rights of IPLCs for equitable governance, and a human rights-based approach to biodiversity conservation action. RAMSAR CONVENTION mentioned the sixth joint work plan with the CBD to enhance the conservation of biodiversity in inland, coastal and marine areas. Chair Benítez Díaz requested the Secretariat to prepare a conference room paper.

Plant conservation: Maité Delmas, Co-Chair of the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation, presented on the set of complementary actions related to plant conservation to support the implementation of the GBF. The Secretariat introduced the documents (SBSTTA/25/5 and SBSTTA/25/INF/4). Discussions will continue.

In the Breezeways

Optimism and good vibes permeated the warm breezeways at the UNEP campus in Nairobi on Sunday, as delegates gathered for the first time since the adoption of the GBF in December 2022. Buoyed by the historic decision to prioritize nature in sustainable development practice, delegates got straight to work, initiating discussions on monitoring the implementation of the GBF. With only six years left, several delegates were aware of the clock ticking louder and louder. One delegate stressed, “we cannot afford to waste a single minute.”

The positive spirit was part of a wave of enthusiasm brought by delegates who had attended the pre-meeting workshop reviewing the recent assessments conducted by IPBES. Several representatives of IPLCs lauded the workshop as they finally felt “heard” and “included” in the process.

In their deliberations on the monitoring framework, many acknowledged the benefits of the binary indicator questions, which could help to collect a lot of data in a short amount of time. “These questions should be seen as canaries in the coalmine, pointing us in the right direction as we strive to implement the GBF.” However, others remained unconvinced, concerned that very little relevant information could be collected given the rigid formulation of some of the questions, opting to spend this meeting working on revisions. Delegates definitely have their work cut out for them in the coming days, as they work to transform words into action.