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Reports on other activities

Annual report on the technical review of information reported under the Convention by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention in their biennial reports and national communications

Technical review of information reported under the Convention by Annex I Parties in their biennial reports and national communications

Report by the secretariat

Summary

This report describes the composition of the expert review teams participating in, and the activities relating to the preparations for, the technical review of information to be reported under the Convention in the third biennial reports and seventh national communications of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, which were due by 1 January 2018. The activities include the fifth meeting of lead reviewers and the training of reviewers for the review of biennial reports and national communications. Information on the status of submissions and reviews of the third biennial reports and seventh national communications is contained in document FCCC/SBI/2018/INF.14.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. The Conference of the Parties, by decision 13/CP.20, requested the secretariat to prepare an annual report to the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) on the composition of expert review teams (ERTs) performing the review of national communications (NCs) and biennial reports (BRs), including on the selection of experts for the review teams and the lead reviewers (LRs) and on the action taken to ensure the application of the selection criteria¹ defined in the “Guidelines for the technical review of information reported under the Convention related to greenhouse gas inventories, biennial reports and national communications by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention”² (hereinafter referred to as the UNFCCC review guidelines).

2. The UNFCCC review guidelines stipulate that the LRs shall collectively prepare an annual report to the SBSTA as part of the report referred to in paragraph 1 above, containing suggestions on how to improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of the reviews of greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories, BRs and NCs.³

B. Scope of the report

3. This is a report on activities relating to the preparations for the technical review of information to be reported under the Convention in the third BRs (BR3s) and seventh NCs (NC7s) of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention (Annex I Parties), including the fifth meeting of LRs and the training of reviewers of BRs and NCs. BR3s and NC7s were due by 1 January 2018.

4. In total 32 Party reviews of NC7s and BR3s (22 in-country reviews and 2 centralized reviews) were conducted in 2018. The status of submission and review of NC7s and BR3s can be found in document FCCC/SBI/2018/INF.14.

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

5. The SBSTA will be invited to take note of the information contained in this report.

II. Composition of the expert review teams

6. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines,⁴ the ERTs shall be composed of experts selected on an ad hoc basis from the UNFCCC roster of experts, nominated by Parties and, as appropriate, by intergovernmental organizations. Participating experts shall have recognized competence in the area to be reviewed and shall neither be nationals of the Party under review nor be nominated or funded by that Party.

7. The ERTs may vary in size and composition, taking into account the national circumstances of the Party under review,⁵ and the review experts shall be selected in such a way that the collective skills and competences of the ERTs address all areas under review. For the review of BRs, competence in reviewing policies and measures (PaMs), GHG emission trends and projections, and the provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support, as well as an understanding of the quantitative economy-wide emission reduction target and the progress made towards achieving it, are required.

¹ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraphs 36 and 37.

² Decision 13/CP.20, annex.

³ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 44.

⁴ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraphs 26 and 28–30.

⁵ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 26.

8. An ERT composed of 12–18 experts reviewed the NC7/BR3 submissions in centralized reviews, while each in-country review was conducted by 4–5 experts. Typically, with regard to the division of tasks within an ERT, one expert was assigned to review the information provided in each of the following parts of the BR and NC: (1) generalist/cross-cutting matters; (2) mitigation actions, PaMs, the economy-wide target and the progress made towards achieving it; (3) projections; (4) the provision of support to developing country Parties; (5) vulnerability and adaptation, and research and systematic observation (see table 1 for a further breakdown of the competences of experts and the associated review areas).

Table 1

Competences of experts participating in the reviews of the seventh national communications and third biennial reports in 2018

Competences/ experience	Number of experts	Review area
General	1	National circumstances; Supplementary information under the Kyoto Protocol; Other reporting requirements; Education, training and public awareness
Mitigation actions, policies and measures	1–2	Policies and measures; Quantified economy-wide emission reduction target and progress in the achievement of the target
Projections	1	Greenhouse gas inventories and emission trends; Greenhouse gas emission projections and the total effects of policies and measures
Support	1	Provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support
Adaptation	1	Vulnerability assessment, impacts and adaptation measures; Research and systematic observation

9. Pursuant to the UNFCCC review guidelines, the secretariat shall select the members of an ERT with a view to achieving a balance between experts from Annex I Parties and Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties) in the overall composition, and will make every effort to ensure geographical balance among the experts selected from non-Annex I Parties and among those selected from Annex I Parties.⁶

10. To this end the composition of the expert review teams in 2018 was broadly balanced, taking into account the limitations with regard to the required areas of expertise, experience in reviews, language and availability of experts. A total of 134 individuals from 65 Parties were involved in the 32 Party reviews (22 in-country reviews and two centralized reviews of NC7s and BR3s) conducted in 2018 (see table 2). The ERTs were composed of 73 male and 61 female reviewers; 71 (52 per cent) were from Annex I Parties and 65 (48 per cent) were from non-Annex I Parties. The number of reviews conducted by experts from the different regional groups is as follows: African States, 13; Asia-Pacific States,⁷ 26; Eastern European States,⁸ 26; Latin American and Caribbean States, 22; and Western European and other States,⁹ 49. The secretariat will seek to improve the balance in the reviews of the remaining submitted BR3s/NC7s in 2019.

⁶ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 37.

⁷ Asia-Pacific States include Bhutan, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia and Thailand.

⁸ Eastern European States include Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

⁹ Western European and other States include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

11. To sustain the pool of experienced reviewers and to provide opportunities for a larger number of experts to build their capacity in monitoring, reporting and verification systems through sharing practices with other countries, a number of experts without experience in reviews have been involved in the reviews. Out of the 134 experts involved in the reviews, 51 experts, of which 20 were from non-Annex I Parties and 31 from Annex I Parties, were participating for the first time in a review.

12. The number of reviews in which experts nominated by a Party participated varies. Experts from Thailand participated in six reviews. Brazil, Japan and Turkey contributed by supporting the participation of five reviews. Austria, Belgium, China, Ireland and the United States of America supported their experts' participation in four reviews. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the participation of experts in the reviews in 2018, by nominating Party.

Table 2

Number of experts participating in the technical reviews of the seventh national communications and third biennial reports for 2018, by nominating Party

Albania – 1	Egypt – 1	Netherlands – 1
Algeria – 2	Estonia – 1	New Zealand – 1
Argentina – 3	European Union – 2	Nigeria – 1
Australia – 2	Fiji – 1	Poland – 1
Austria – 4	Finland – 2	Republic of Moldova – 3
Bahamas – 1	France – 3	Romania – 3
Belgium – 4	Georgia – 3	San Marino – 1
Belize – 1	Germany – 2	Slovakia – 1
Benin – 1	Greece – 2	Slovenia – 2
Bhutan – 1	Hungary – 1	South Africa – 1
Brazil – 5	India – 2	Spain – 2
Bulgaria – 3	Ireland – 4	Sudan – 3
Cabo Verde – 1	Italy – 1	Sweden – 1
Canada – 2	Japan – 5	Thailand – 6
Chile – 2	Kazakhstan – 1	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – 1
China – 4	Lithuania – 2	Turkey – 5
Colombia – 3	Malawi – 1	Turkmenistan – 1
Croatia – 2	Malaysia – 2	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – 3
Cuba – 2	Malta – 1	United States of America – 4
Czechia – 2	Mexico – 3	Zimbabwe – 2
Denmark – 2	Mongolia – 1	
Ecuador – 1	Morocco – 1	

13. At the time of the preparation of this report, 932 experts had been nominated by the respective national focal point as potential reviewers of the BR/NC of developed country Parties. Following the provisions of the “Training programme for review experts for the technical review of biennial reports and national communications of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention” (hereinafter referred to as the training programme)¹⁰, experts who have experience in the reviews already or those experts who have undertaken relevant training courses and passed relevant examinations are eligible for serving as reviewers in BR/NC reviews. At the time of the preparation of this report, 227 experts had successfully completed the training programme by passing examinations for the first course (on general and cross-cutting aspects) and at least one other course.

14. Out of the experts eligible for BR/NC reviews, only 218 have notified the secretariat of their willingness and availability to participate in the BR3/NC7 review cycle. Although

¹⁰ Decision 15/CP.20, annex.

this number slightly exceeds the demand (190), the number of experts in the pool should be increased to sustain the quality and effectiveness of future reviews. The secretariat is organizing online training sessions and examinations with a view to increasing the number of eligible experts each year (see para. 34 below).

III. Fifth meeting of lead reviewers for the review of biennial reports and national communications

15. The fifth meeting of LRs for the review of BRs and NCs of developed country Parties was held in Bonn from 28 February to 1 March 2018. A total of 97 experts were invited to the meeting. Of the 64 experts who attended the meeting, 33 were from non-Annex I Parties and 31 were from Annex I Parties.

16. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines and taking into account decision 22/CMP.1 in conjunction with decisions 4/CMP.11 and 23/CMP.1, as appropriate, the meeting addressed both procedural and technical issues relating to the review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties with a view to facilitating the work of the LRs in fulfilling their task of ensuring consistency of reviews across Parties. In addition, information was presented at the meeting on the implementation of the international consultation and analysis process and the training for technical teams of experts undertaking the technical analysis of biennial update reports (BURs).

A. Approach to the review of third biennial reports and seventh national communications

17. The LRs noted the action taken by the secretariat to prepare for the review of BR3s and NC7s. The submissions from 26 developed country Parties were scheduled to be reviewed in the periods March to June 2018 and September to November 2018. This schedule will allow the technical reports on the reviews (TRRs) of the BR3s and the reports on the in-depth reviews (IDRs) of the NC7s of up to 15 Parties reviewed in March and April to be published in time for those Parties to undergo multilateral assessment at the forty-ninth session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI).

18. The LRs also noted the proposal by the secretariat to coordinate 44 reviews in 2018 and 2019 and to organize a multilateral assessment session at SBI 49, 50 and 51. The LRs noted the information provided by the secretariat on the need for Parties to support the supplementary funding for activities related to the reviews of the BRs and NCs by 2 April 2018 in order to enable the secretariat to organize the reviews of 44 submissions during the BR3/NC7 review cycle. The LRs requested the secretariat to remind Parties of the need to increase contributions to the Trust Fund for Supplementary Activities to ensure the timely organization of reviews.

19. The LRs further noted that as at 1 January 2018, 28 Parties out of 44 had submitted their BR3s and NC7s. Delay in submission hampers the preparation for reviews, especially the organization of centralized reviews. The LRs noted that as at 1 March 2018, submissions of BR3s and/or NC7s of eight Parties were still missing, a delay that may prevent the review cycle being completed within two years. The LRs encouraged Parties that have not yet provided their submissions to do so as soon as possible. At the time of the preparation of this note, three Parties had not yet submitted their BR3s and four Parties had not yet submitted their NC7s.

20. The LRs encouraged the national focal points of the Parties to nominate new experts to the roster, in particular experts who are involved in the national institutional arrangements for measurement, reporting and verification, so that the respective governments could benefit from the expertise these individuals would gain during the BR/NC reviews. The LRs also encouraged the national focal points to update regularly the roster to reflect changes in the experts' engagement at the national level and to leave in the roster only those experts who are willing to participate in the reviews. The LRs requested the secretariat to continue reaching out to the national focal points of all countries and the experts nominated by them to the roster by informing them about the relevant training and review activities.

21. The LRs welcomed the information on updated and enhanced review tools, including the virtual team room, an integrated IDR/TRR template, a review checklist and newly developed calculators for the analysis of GHG projections and financial support provided. The use of these tools will further increase the effectiveness, consistency and efficiency of the reviews. To facilitate the effectiveness of the BR3/NC7 reviews, the LRs encouraged ERTs to allocate sufficient time for their involvement in the reviews and, to the extent possible, make use of the tools so they could benefit from them.

22. The LRs also welcomed the implementation of the updated training programme in 2017 prior to the start of the BR3/NC7 review cycle (see para. 33 below). In order to expand the pool of qualified reviewers available for the BR3/NC7 and future review cycles, the LRs reiterated their encouragement to experts who are nominated to the UNFCCC roster of experts for the BR/NC reviews to take the relevant courses and examinations of the online training programme and update their existing information in the roster.

B. Improvements in the consistency of reviews

23. The LRs welcomed the further analysis, presented by the secretariat, of the use in the TRRs of the latest available GHG inventory submissions and GHG inventory data reported by Parties in their BRs and common tabular format tables. The LRs invited ERTs to include in the section of the TRR titled “Information on GHG arrangements, emissions, removals and trends” the historical GHG emission data from the latest available (at the time of the review week) official GHG inventory submission. ERTs should note the status of that submission and indicate if it is a different version from that of the GHG inventory used for the BR as well as note whether or not it has been reviewed. ERTs should also note (in the TRR) any substantive differences between the trends presented in the latest version of the GHG inventory and those reported in the BR, because substantive differences may have an impact on the projected estimates and assessment of the progress made in achieving the quantitative economy-wide emission reduction target. In the projection section of the TRR, ERTs should include historical emission trends as reported by the Party in its BR and NC.

24. The LRs also welcomed the further analysis, presented by the secretariat, of the existing review approaches to assessing the completeness and transparency of the information reported in the BRs only on the new PaMs implemented or planned since the previous NC/BR. The LRs agreed that if the BR reports only new PaMs and lacks a reference to the previous NC/BR, ERTs should make a recommendation to the Party to improve the completeness of its reporting by providing complete and consistent information on all PaMs that were put in place to achieve the quantitative economy-wide emission reduction target, by either referencing transparently the complementary list of PaMs in previous NCs/BRs or providing a complete set of PaMs in the next BR.

25. The LRs further welcomed the background paper “Multiple mandatory reporting requirements contained in the same paragraph of the ‘UNFCCC biennial reporting guidelines for developed country Parties’: Analysis of the experience from the technical reviews of the first and second biennial reports”¹¹ prepared by the secretariat. The LRs recommended that in cases where Parties do not provide complete and transparent information on more than one of the mandatory reporting requirements contained in the same paragraph of the “UNFCCC biennial reporting guidelines for developed country Parties” (namely, paras. 6, 14, 15, 17 and 22), ERTs should make one recommendation that covers all reporting requirements. The recommendation should identify and clearly describe the missing mandatory reporting parameters or information. ERTs should avoid making a single recommendation that addresses mandatory reporting requirements from different paragraphs.

26. Regarding the overall assessment of completeness and transparency of individual sections of the BR, ERTs should continue to use the completeness and transparency assessment scoreboard from the 2018 review practice guidance.¹² However, in addition to using this scoreboard, ERTs should apply expert judgment to make a final decision on the

¹¹ Available at <https://unfccc.int/event/fifth-meeting-of-lead-reviewers-for-the-review-of-biennial-reports-and-national-communications-28>.

¹² Available at <https://unfccc.int/node/64687>.

level of completeness and transparency, considering the scope of missing, incomplete or not transparent mandatory requirements, including reporting parameters pertaining to paragraphs 6, 14, 15, 17 and 22 of the “UNFCCC biennial reporting guidelines for developed country Parties”.

27. The LRs welcomed the analysis, prepared by the secretariat, of the assessment of completeness and transparency of the NC6s and the ERT recommendations included in the IDR/NC6s. Two completeness and transparency scoreboards for the review of NCs and supplementary information under the Kyoto Protocol were prepared by the secretariat using the approach for the preparation of the scoreboard for the BR assessment, agreed at the fourth meeting of the LRs and included in the 2017 review practice guidance. The LRs invited ERTs to use these scoreboards for the review of NCs and supplementary information under the Kyoto Protocol, noting that ERTs should continue applying a qualitative assessment and their expert judgment in order to make a final determination of the level of completeness and transparency.

28. The LRs recommended that the secretariat revise the 2017 review practice guidance by incorporating the approaches agreed at the fifth meeting of LRs (see paras. 23–26 above). The LRs agreed that the review approaches presented in the 2018 review practice guidance will be applied by ERTs in the BR3/NC7 reviews.

29. The LRs requested the secretariat to further facilitate the consistency and effectiveness of the BR/NC reviews by analysing the approaches and expert judgments applied in the TRR/BR3s and IDR/NC7s and assessing how review practice in the assessment of completeness and transparency is evolving over time. ERTs also requested the secretariat to present the results of the analysis at the next meeting of LRs in the context of the update of the review practice guidance.

C. Organization of the meetings of lead reviewers

30. The LRs acknowledged the usefulness of the refresher seminar organized by the secretariat on the challenging reporting and review issues, including the hands-on practice and the opportunity to exchange knowledge and share review skills among their peers. The LRs requested the secretariat to continue organizing interactive and practical refresher seminars on relevant topics based on the suggestions of the LRs during their fifth meeting, as appropriate. The LRs also requested the secretariat to take into account the outcome of the latest refresher seminar when updating the review tools.

IV. Training of reviewers of biennial reports and national communications

31. Training materials for the review of the BR1s/NC6s were originally developed in 2014, and the implementation of the online courses of the training programme referred to in paragraph 13 above was initiated by the secretariat in 2015.

32. Since the launch of the online training programme, the secretariat has received positive feedback from Parties and experts on the scope and focus of the courses that comprise the training programme and on the final examinations required to be passed in order to take part in the reviews of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties. Parties, LRs and review experts recognize that the training materials have helped review experts to enhance their knowledge of substantive matters and the approaches to the technical review process, and facilitated common understanding of the review steps.

33. SBSTA 46 and consequently COP 23¹³ requested the secretariat to enhance the materials of the training programme on the basis of mandates arising from decisions 24/CP.19 and 9/CP.21 and taking into account the experience gained from conducting BR/NC reviews since 2014. The revision was stipulated to be completed before the BR3/NC7 review cycle

¹³ Decision 19/CP.23.

commenced in 2018. COP 23 also requested the secretariat to enhance the user interface of the training courses with the aim of making it more user-friendly.

34. The work on updating the training materials and on-line training courses were initiated immediately after SBSTA 46 in order to fulfil the requirement of their deployment in good time before the start of the BR3/NC7 review cycle. Revisions comprised: including review practice identified during the BR1/NC6 and BR2 reviews; improving user-friendliness through increased interactivity and visualization of information; enhancing accessibility through the development of a single landing page for all training programmes for experts (i.e. for reviews of GHG inventories under the Convention, reviews under Article 8 of the Kyoto Protocol, reviews of BRs and NCs, and technical analyses of BURs); and enhancing sustainability by hosting the training programme on the secretariat's Learning Management System. The updated online training courses present review issues through examples of best practices, based on the reviews of BR1/NC6 and BR2 submissions, to be used as benchmarks for future reporting and reviews. The courses are interactive and include enhanced features that facilitate learners' understanding of complex issues step-by-step. In this way, the training programme not only helps experts to prepare for the reviews, but also facilitates their understanding of reporting requirements and approaches. The updated training courses were launched in September 2017 in the Learning Management System prior to members of ERTs for the BR3/NC7 review cycle being selected.

35. In preparation for the technical review of BR3s and NC7s, to date, the secretariat had invited 932 experts nominated to the UNFCCC roster of experts for the technical review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties to participate in the updated training programme. Of the 932 invited experts, 109 had registered to take part in the training cycle (61 from non-Annex I Parties and 48 from Annex I Parties) and were given access to one or more courses of the training programme. The examinations will be held online by the secretariat from 18 to 21 November 2018.
