REPORT OF THE CBD-UNCCD JOINT WORKSHOP ON THE ROLE OF BIODIVERSITY IN NATIONAL DROUGHT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

1 March 2013, Geneva

INTRODUCTION

1. On 10 March 2013, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, with financial support from the Government of Japan, and in collaboration with the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), convened a half-day workshop on the role of biodiversity in national drought management policies in the margins of the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP), in Geneva, Switzerland. The workshop was attended by 12 participants and experts representing government agencies and inter-governmental organizations.

2. The workshop was convened in the framework of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, with a specific focus on the aspect of enhancing ecosystem resilience in Target 15 and the restoration and safeguarding of ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, in Target 14. The workshop was intended, in particular, to support the integration of ecosystem-based approaches for adaptation into, among others, disaster-risk reduction strategies and sustainable land management strategies.

3. The workshop addressed the following questions in a series of presentations and discussions in an integrated manner:

(a) What are the impacts of droughts on livelihoods and biodiversity?

(b) What are the conventional responses to droughts and their impacts on biodiversity?

(c) Which other solutions are available that minimize impact of droughts on biodiversity and enable countries to realize benefits provided by biodiversity?

IMPACTS OF DROUGHTS ON LIVELIHOODS AND BIODIVERSITY AND MEASURES TO REALIZE BENEFITS PROVIDED BY BIODIVERSITY FOR DROUGHT RESILIENCE TO EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

4. Participants agreed that while droughts are a recurring phenomenon in many ecosystems, more frequent and intense droughts can lead to negative impacts on biodiversity and on the crucial ecosystem services it underpins, ultimately threatening human wellbeing. In some cases, droughts are also caused, or their severity is increased, by the loss of biodiversity, degraded ecosystem functions and in particular the loss of water-related ecosystem services such as water retention by soils.

5. The workshop highlighted the role that biodiversity plays in relation to droughts. Participants shared their experience with ecosystem-based measures and the opportunities they provide for national drought management activities and developed key messages that bring the biodiversity perspective to disaster reduction and risk management plans and strategies.

6. In his opening presentation, Dr. Mannava V.K. Sivakumar, World Meteorological Organization, explained potential impacts of droughts on biodiversity, including the increased probability of extinction of rare species, the increased vulnerability of aquatic species, forests, shifts in the distribution of species, changes in habitat composition and structure, including the expected increase in invasive species and diseases, decreased soil fertility, and the impact of changing land use as agriculture, water, forestry and other countryside industries and interests react to water stress. As an example for the positive role biodiversity can play in mitigating the impacts of droughts, he explained how biodiversity could limit the negative impacts of drought on forest carbon storage.

7. Ms. Simone Schiele, CBD Secretariat, provided participants with an overview of the CBD and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, highlighting the role of the Aichi Targets for increasing the resilience of ecosystem to extreme weather events and for restoring and safeguarding ecosystems that provide services essential for human well-being.

8. Mr. John Harding, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), presented the work of UNISDR under the Hyogo Framework for action. He highlighted the growing recognition among countries for the role of ecosystems in drought management frameworks. He noted a need for more rigorous accounting of the impacts and risks of droughts on biodiversity in order to trigger necessary investments.

9. Focusing on the role that wetlands play in mitigating the impacts of droughts, Dr. Paul Ouedraogo, Ramsar Convention Secretariat, presented a number of elements for a drought management framework, including the integration of the values of water-related ecosystem services and wetlands into decision-making, investments in ecological restoration, the incorporation of traditional knowledge and leveraging the synergies between restoration and poverty alleviation.

10. Participants from China, Cuba and Peru presented their national experiences, highlighting the impacts of droughts on the biodiversity of their countries. They emphasized the role of monitoring drought impacts. A more active approach to drought and desertification management, the development of comprehensive impact indicators and the shift to a bottom-up approach for managing droughts were suggested as a way forward.

OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP

11. In sum, workshop participants concluded that well-functioning ecosystems, with natural levels of biodiversity were more likely to continue to provide ecosystem services and resist and recover more readily from extreme weather events than degraded, impoverished ecosystems and that the conservation of biological diversity and the ecological restoration of ecosystems should therefore be reflected in national drought management policies. Based on the presentations and discussions, the participants developed a set of key messages (annex I) as background for the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy, which took place during the week following the workshop.

12. Participants agreed that the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity would conduct a webinar to allow for an exchange of views after the HMNDP, building on the workshop.

Annex I

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE WORKSHOP ON THE ROLE OF BIODIVERSITY IN NATIONAL DROUGHT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Geneva, 10 March 2013

1. The conservation of biological diversity and the ecological restoration of ecosystems are crucial to coping with drought and therefore should be reflected in the national drought management policies fostered by the HMNDP.

2. There is an urgent need for action across a range of government sectors and to increase awareness of the need for action and build or reinforce capacity among the general public. Therefore, the process of integrating the role of biodiversity in national drought management policies should start immediately.

3. The policy frameworks provided by the World Meteorological Organization, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Ramsar Convention and other international conventions, programmes and strategies should accommodate, in coordinated manner, the role of biodiversity within drought policies and strategies.

4. A framework for promoting institutional synergies, at various scales, within the thematic approaches of the different United Nations agencies should be included in national drought management policies by developing tools for indicators linking drought and biodiversity, for example indicators on the impacts of droughts on biodiversity.

5. Policies and national accounting systems should reflect the value of ecosystem services in relation to drought management; Methodologies are needed to better estimate and calculate these values.

6. The risk of loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services from drought disasters should be accounted for in the development of national drought management policies, with a view to promoting sustainable investments.

7. Policymakers should play an active role and develop baselines and indicators for on-the-ground implementation of economic/ecological value assessment, including de-centralized action (from top-down to bottom-up) to move from government-only investments to business-enterprise cooperation.

8. The hydrological, agricultural and economic aspects of droughts should be accounted for in policy-relevant assessments related to vulnerability of populations, ecosystem resilience and biodiversity conservation.

9. A three-step approach for the enhanced integration of biodiversity and drought in policies could be considered:

(a) The recognition of the anthropogenic and weather-related drivers to droughts in the development of sustainable development policies;

(b) The greater acknowledgment of the key role that governments (local, national and subregional) play in fostering research and information availability on nature-based aspects of drought management policies and their implementation;

(c) The design of options for integrating activities on drought-related issues by UNCCD, CBD, Ramsar and other multilateral environmental agreements and United Nations programmes in order to facilitate access to improved information by governments and the general public for on-the-ground implementation.

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Mr. Chencho Norbu, Bhutan

Mr. Haihua Qu, China

Mr. Ms Sheila Chang Fente, Cuba

Dr. Kamayé Maazou, Niger

Mr. Joel Rojas Acuña, Peru

Mr. John Harding, UNISDR

Dr. Mannava V.K. Sivakumar, WMO

Mr. Jose Camacho, WMO

Dr. Paul Ouedraogo, Ramsar Convention Secretariat

Mr. Sergio Zelaya, UNCCD Secretariat

Mr. Emmanuel Chinyamakobvu , UNCCD Secretariat

Ms. Simone Schiele, CBD Secretariat
