

Background information for local government representatives

Workshop on Biodiversity Strategy in the Mediterranean Basin: From National to Local Actions

Montpellier, France - January 17-20, 2012

Both national and local governments from the Mediterranean region will be represented at the upcoming workshop, “Biodiversity Strategy in the Mediterranean Basin: from National to Local Actions”. National delegates, and local delegates whose municipalities have been involved in ICLEI’s Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) program (www.iclei.org/lab), are familiar with CBD processes and the related topics that will be discussed in Montpellier. Others may, however, benefit from background information in order to prepare for the workshop. This document is, therefore, intended to provide basic overview of relevant items.

Biodiversity

Biological diversity - or biodiversity - is the term given to the variety of life on Earth and the natural patterns it forms (<http://www.cbd.int/convention/guide/>). At the scale of ecosystems, species or genes, biodiversity is a precious asset supporting an array of goods and services that are essential to humankind - from the provision of food and medicine to the regulation of water flow and climate change. Worldwide, biodiversity is facing an ongoing crisis in the face of human degradation of the natural environment. An assessment of this serious situation is presented in the Third Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO3) publication (<http://gbo3.cbd.int/>). The GBO3 also points out how the conservation movement is growing and adapting, but considerable effort is still required to stem the tide of biodiversity loss and safeguard this vital resource base. A key tool in this task is the adoption of an “ecosystem approach”, (www.cbd.int/ecosystem/) - is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

Biodiversity in the Mediterranean region

The Mediterranean Basin is one of 34 global “biodiversity hotspots” – areas of outstandingly high levels of biodiversity that are also under especially severe threat. The biodiversity hotspots concept was originated by environmentalist Norman Myers and has been extensively profiled by Conservation International (<http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/Pages/default.aspx>). With its wealth of species and ecosystems, on land, on the shores and in the sea itself, the Mediterranean region is a global biodiversity treasure that requires careful management. A number of initiatives (see, for example, http://www.unep.ch/regionalseas/regions/med/t_barcel.htm; <http://www.unepmap.org/>) are already in place to facilitate improved custodianship of the region but none so far focuses on, or promotes, the contribution of local government.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the three major Conventions that came into force following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (along with UNFCCC and UNCCD). Almost all of the UN countries, i.e. 193 Parties (192 countries and the EU) are signatories to the Convention, which is tasked with guiding these Parties in safeguarding the Earth’s biodiversity. The objectives of the Convention are:

1. The conservation of biological diversity
2. The sustainable use of the components of biological diversity
3. The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources

These objectives are complemented by a CBD Strategic Plan for 2011 to 2020 and 20 “Aichi Targets” (<http://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12268>). The Secretariat of the CBD is responsible for organizing regular “meetings of the Conference of the Parties” (COPs) that focus on updating its work, examining current work programs and issues (<http://www.cbd.int/programmes/>) and considering additional activities. The Convention requires countries to prepare a national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP), or equivalent instrument) and to ensure that this strategy is mainstreamed into the planning and activities of all those sectors whose activities can have an impact (positive and negative) on biodiversity. These NBSAPs are the principal instruments for implementing the Convention at the national level, and are coordinated with the international goals and targets of the CBD.

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is an association of over 1200 local governments and local government associations, from 70 countries representing more than 560,000,000 people around the world, committed to sustainable development. ICLEI has supported the SCBD’s coordination of Parties’ revision of the Convention by, for example, mobilizing local governments in support of the adoption of a “Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity”, discussed below. At COP9 and COP10 local governments gathered at large parallel meetings, and local government representatives addressed Parties and others at the final, Ministerial Segment of those COPs with statements offering and requesting mutual support in biodiversity management.

Montpellier

The French city of Montpellier (<http://www.montpellier.fr/3313-biodiversite.htm>) has recently shown itself to be a major global player in biodiversity. The city hosted the first meeting to discuss the implementation of the Plan of Action in January 2011 and now, as the first event in their new and state-of-the-art municipal buildings, will host the “Biodiversity Strategy in the Mediterranean Basin: from National to Local Actions” workshop. Montpellier is also engaged in a number of local initiatives (http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/plan_nature_ville_durable2_cle114816.pdf) and such efforts have earned them the 2011 “French Capital of Biodiversity” award (<http://www.capital-biodiversity.eu/29.html>). At the upcoming workshop, Montpellier will also sign onto ICLEI’s Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) Pioneer Program, joining more than 30 other cities worldwide at the forefront of biodiversity conservation at the local level.

The Global Partnership on Sub-national and Local Action for Biodiversity

The Global Partnership on Sub-national and Local Action for Biodiversity (<http://www.cbd.int/authorities/>) is an open collaborative platform of partners with the common interest of promoting local and sub-national governments’ contribution to the implementation of the Convention. It is chaired by the CBD and meets periodically to assist in the coordination of efforts in this field. Members include cities, sub-national governments, national governments, organizations such as ICLEI, UN agencies and others. Separate advisory committees of cities and of sub-national governments help to guide the Partnership. Members of the Global Partnership have also been responsible for developing a number of ground-breaking tools such as Singapore and the CBD’s City Biodiversity Index (<https://www.cbd.int/authorities/doc/User's%20Manual-for-the-City-Biodiversity-Index27Sept2010.pdf>), and ICLEI’s LAB Guidebook (<http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=12138>).

CBD COP decisions and their relevance to local government

Proposed new or amended text for the Convention is negotiated between Parties at CBD COPs and related events, facilitated by the Secretariat. At the most recent COP10 in 2010 in Nagoya, Japan, 47 new decisions were adopted on a variety of topics. One of these decisions, Decision X/22 (<http://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-10/cop-10-dec-22-en.doc>), endorsed a “Plan of Action on

Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity”, with a timeline matching that of the broader CBD Strategic Plan and mirroring its objectives. Like the rest of the UN, the CBD is directed and mandated to address the concerns of national governments and all COP decisions are therefore for the implementation of national governments. Although not legally binding, Decision X/22 and the “Plan of Action” provides guidelines outlining how national governments can assist local governments in implementing the Convention, and in so doing assist themselves by benefitting from the collective efforts of local governments. Decision X/22 follows on Decision IX/28 of COP9 (Bonn, Germany, 2008), which recognizes the important role played by local governments in contributing to the implementation of the Convention. Decision IX/28 was the first United Nations environmental convention to dedicate a decision to local governments.

NBSAPs and LBSAPs

Implementation of actions to halt the loss of biodiversity cannot be achieved effectively without planning, which explains the importance attached to NBSAPs by the CBD. Biodiversity planning is equally important at the local level and although many local governments are beginning to establish biodiversity teams and compile biodiversity plans, most have not yet been able to do so. Action happens primarily at the local level and therefore the collective contribution of local governments can make or break national-level implementation of biodiversity objectives. It is therefore important not only that local biodiversity strategies and action plans (LBSAPs) are compiled by all local governments worldwide but also that they are aligned with plans at national and other levels; and that their objectives are integrated across functions of local government and are not the isolated responsibility of a few biodiversity practitioners. ICLEI, in partnership with the United Nations University – Institute for Advanced Studies and the SCBD, are currently in the process of compiling guidelines to aid local governments in the compilation of LBSAPs. ICLEI has also facilitated local government representation at a number of workshops made possible by funding from the Japanese government and coordinated by the SCBD. At the events held around Africa and in Asia, Mesoamerica, and the Pacific region, local governments were given unprecedented opportunities to present their cases to a variety of national government representatives. The workshop in Montpellier is the seventh NBSAP workshop that involves local government, but takes the idea much further through a fully integrated program in which local and national governments will interact, exchange ideas and solutions, and explore partnerships. It will also mark the establishment of a local government network for Mediterranean biodiversity.