

Conclusions and recommendations
Third meeting of lead reviewers for the review of
biennial reports and national communications
Bonn, Germany

3–4 March 2016

1. The third meeting of lead reviewers (LRs) for the review of biennial reports (BRs) and national communications (NCs) was held in Bonn, Germany, on 3 and 4 March 2016. A total of 40 experts from Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties) and 42 experts from Parties included in Annex I to the Convention (Annex I Parties) were invited to the meeting. Of the 52 experts who attended the meeting, 25 were from non-Annex I Parties and 27 were from Annex I Parties.

2. In accordance with 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” (hereinafter referred to as the UNFCCC review guidelines) included in the annex to decision 13/CP.20, and taking into account decision 23/CMP.1, the meeting addressed both procedural and technical issues relating to the reviews of BRs and NCs from Annex I Parties with a view to facilitating the work of the LRs in fulfilling their task to ensure consistency in the reviews across Parties.

Success and challenges of the first round of international assessment and review

3. The LRs noted the successful conclusion of the first cycle of the international assessment and review (IAR) process in 2015, which contributed to enhanced transparency of climate actions and facilitated trust-building among Parties. The first biennial reports (BR1s) and sixth national communications (NC6s) of 44 Parties were reviewed in 2014 and 2015.¹ In total, 43 in-depth review reports (IDRs) of NC6s, one IDR of NC5 and 43 technical review reports (TRRs) of BR1s had been prepared by expert review teams (ERTs) and published on the UNFCCC website, within the 15-month completion deadline for reviews as stipulated in the UNFCCC review guidelines.² The LRs also noted the successful completion of the multilateral assessment (MA) of 43 developed country Parties in 2015, of which 17 were assessed during the working session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) at SBI 41 (Lima, 2014), 24 at SBI 42 (Bonn, 2015) and 2 at SBI 43 (Paris, 2015), and the completion of all Parties’ MA records by February 2016.

4. The LRs acknowledged that 150 experts from 74 Parties (71 experts from non-Annex I Parties and 79 experts from Annex I Parties) participated in the reviews in 2014 and 2015. Owing to the shortage of experts, their unavailability to participate in a review, or some last-minute cancellations, of these 150 experts, 11 experts participated in two reviews and 2 experts participated in three reviews. The LRs acknowledged the significant efforts made by the ERTs, the LRs and the secretariat in successfully completing the reviews of the NC6s and BR1s in 2015 within shorter deadlines than the previous review cycles.³

5. The LRs acknowledged the challenges faced by the secretariat in planning and coordinating the reviews of the NC6s and BR1s in 2014 and 2015 and that these challenges arose from: (a) an insufficient number of experts available to conduct the reviews, due to other competing priorities or a lack of funding to

¹ The reviews of the submissions of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Turkey were scheduled for 2015 because Belarus gave notice of its intention to resubmit its NC6 in early 2015, and the textual parts of the BR1s of Kazakhstan and Turkey, as well as Turkey’s common tabular format tables (CTF) were not submitted in time for the 2014 review cycle. Turkey submitted its NC5 in December 2013; however, it did not submit its NC6, BR1 and CTF tables in 2015. Belarus resubmitted its NC6 in February 2015. Kazakhstan is not an Annex I Party under the Convention. However, by notifying the Depositary of its intention to be bound by Article 4, paragraph 2(a) and (b), of the Convention, Kazakhstan avails itself to the reporting and review requirements for Annex I Parties. Following the submission of its first biennial report, Kazakhstan is subject to the international assessment and review process as defined in decisions 1/CP.16 and 2/CP.17. Turkey submitted its BR1 and BR2 in a joint submission and CTF tables on 29 January 2016.

² Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 17, states that “The ERTs shall make every effort to complete the individual review of BRs within 15 months of the due date of their submission for each Annex I Party.

³ The deadline for previous reviews of national communications was defined by decision 22/CMP.1, which was two years after the submission due date.

cover the travel costs of their participation in cases where experts are funded by the governments that nominated them; (b) the outdated data of experts on the UNFCCC roster of experts (RoE) that is maintained by the national focal points; (c) the need to ensure timeliness of publication of review reports for the smooth operation of the MA process; and (d) the need to improve quality and consistency of the review reports due to their increased visibility under the MA process where findings from these reports are often referred to.

6. The LRs noted that approximately 57 per cent of review experts declined the invitation to participate in NC6 and BR1 reviews. The LRs reiterated the need to continue increasing the number of technical experts who can actively participate in the review process with the support of their nominating Parties, in order to ensure the completeness and balance of expertise of ERTs. The LRs reiterated their encouragement to Parties to continue nominating experts who are actively engaged in the NC and BR preparation at the national levels and to regularly update the RoE. They also reiterated their encouragement to Parties to facilitate experts' participation in the reviews by allocating the necessary time and resources in their workplans and to ensure that experts are fully available for the entire review process.

7. The LRs considered that for successful high-quality, consistent and timely reviews, it is essential to strengthen the role of the LRs along with the dedication and commitment of all review experts. It is also essential to improve the workflow of the review process and user-friendliness of review tools to enhance the timeliness of the reviews, as well as to provide substantive guidance by LRs on review approaches and practices for review experts. The LRs acknowledged the efforts made by the secretariat to address these challenges and the measures implemented for the reviews of BR2s in 2016 with the support and inputs of the review experts as described in paragraphs 8–13 and 15–24 below.

Training for review experts of biennial reports and national communications

8. The LRs welcomed the information on the training activities undertaken by the secretariat in 2015 and 2016 and the planned training activities for the second half of 2016, including the organization of online courses and examinations under 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” (decision 15/CP.20, annex) (hereinafter referred as to the training programme).

9. The LRs noted the scope and focus of the courses of the training programme for the review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties and the examination requirements, which new review experts and LRs must pass in accordance with the specific requirements of the programme. The LRs also noted that the training materials helped review experts to enhance their knowledge of substantive matters and approaches to the technical review process and to enhance the common understanding of the review steps, with a view to facilitating a consistent approach in the reviews across Parties. The LRs further noted that to date 203 experts had passed one or more examinations for qualifying as experts for the review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties.

10. The LRs considered that experienced review experts and LRs should enhance their expertise by acquiring new practical skills and knowledge for reviews provided in the training courses and reiterated that experienced review experts would benefit from taking the general and cross-cutting review course and its examination, as well as the courses and corresponding examinations related to their expertise. The LRs strongly reiterated their encouragement to experienced review experts, in particular LRs, to undertake the relevant online training courses, if possible in 2016. The LRs requested the secretariat to actively disseminate information on the training courses, noting the positive impact that well-trained experts have on reviews, and acknowledging the experience and knowledge that these experts can share in their countries. The LRs requested the secretariat to collect feedback from experts, in particular experts from non-Annex I Parties, who have followed the training courses in order to identify the most critical aspects and challenges faced by these experts during the training process and to address them subsequently.

Approach to the reviews of second biennial reports and multilateral assessment

11. The LRs noted that BR2s of 44 Annex I Parties will be reviewed in 2016 through centralized reviews⁴ in four rounds, two in March (24 Parties in six centralized reviews) and two in June (20 Parties in five centralized reviews). This will allow the TRRs of the BR2s to be published in time for Parties to undergo the MA at the working sessions of SBI 45 (November 2016) and SBI 46 (May 2017). The LRs welcomed the approach taken by the secretariat of grouping Parties for the centralized reviews with the aim of balancing the workload and ensuring sufficient time needed for finishing TRRs in time for the MA sessions. In accordance with this approach, reviews of Annex II Parties with larger economies are combined with those of non-Annex II Parties with smaller economies. The LRs also noted the delay of 15 Annex I Parties in their submission of textual parts of BR2s and/or BR CTF tables by the due date of 1 of January 2016, which hampered the effective organizing of the reviews. The LRs further noted that as of 5 March 2016, submissions of BR2 were still missing or incomplete, which may lead to delays in the review cycle.

12. The LRs acknowledged that early planning and preparation for the review cycle facilitates timeliness and effectiveness of the reviews. The LRs welcomed the good practice implemented by the secretariat to: (i) send the invitations to the experts three to four months before the scheduled review week; and (ii) initiate the communication with the ERT by a review officer one and a half to two months before the review week together with the timely provision of all relevant information to ERTs. To facilitate these early preparations, the LRs encouraged experts to allocate sufficient time for their planned involvement in the BR2 reviews in 2016.

13. The LRs also acknowledged that enlarged ERTs and streamlined review coordination approaches proposed by the secretariat will help to improve the efficiency of the review process and that the principle of “draft – peer review – advice” will prove to be a helpful approach to be applied for the reviews. At the same time, all experts of the ERT will bear collective responsibility for the preparation of four TRRs in each centralized review, and each expert will focus primarily on the review of one topic of one BR. Accordingly, one ERT consisting of 10–12 experts will review BRs of four Parties, with two sub-teams focusing on two Parties. Then each expert will peer-review the draft TRR of the sub-team colleague and advise all the ERT members on the remaining TRRs, as needed. The LRs noted that in order to maintain a sufficient number of experts in the pool and facilitate sharing of knowledge and skills, it is also a good practice to involve qualified new experts in the review process, therefore the LRs acknowledged the efforts of the secretariat to include 10–20 per cent of new experts in the 2016 review cycle, while ensuring the geographical and regional balance of the ERTs and at the same time trying to improve gender balance.

14. The LRs also acknowledged the challenges the secretariat has been facing when composing the ERTs due to outdated data on experts nominated to the RoE, the lack of funding for experts from Annex I Parties for the BR2 reviews and competing needs for experts for various review processes under the UNFCCC (i.e. the technical analysis of biennial update reports, reviews of greenhouse inventories and supplementary information under the Kyoto Protocol, and the technical assessment of reference levels), which limit the availability of experts. The LRs noted that around 115 experts are required to conduct the centralized reviews of the BR2s in 2016. The LRs reiterated their encouragement to Parties to allocate the necessary time and resources for their experts participating in the reviews, to update and nominate new experts to the RoE, as appropriate, and to ensure that experts are fully available for the entire review process.

Improvements in the review process and review tools

15. The LRs expressed their appreciation for the steps taken by the secretariat to facilitate improvements in the timeliness, efficiency and consistency of the review process, including through formal training and examination of experts and the improvements in the review tools. The LRs noted the secretariat’s efforts to streamline the review process, to front-load the preparations for the review and to provide further tools, such as the schedule with deliverables for the preparation of the review reports.

16. While acknowledging the efforts made by the secretariat towards early preparation for the review of the BR2s, the LRs agreed to support these efforts by recommending early review preparation by ERTs, including by encouraging preparation of the draft report by the ERT to the extent possible ahead of the

⁴ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 19, states that “In the years when the BR is not reported in conjunction with the NC, the BR shall be subject to a centralized review”.

review week and by making every effort to support ERTs to complete the first draft of the review reports on the last day of the review week. The LRs welcomed the quality control/quality assurance (QC/QA) approach taken by the secretariat as a tool to help them ensure consistency across review reports. The LRs requested the secretariat to provide them with a simplified QC checklist for use and guidance during the review of BR2s.

17. The LRs reiterated the effectiveness of the review tools used by the ERTs throughout the review process in 2014 and 2015, including the review report template, the checklist and the biennial report virtual team room (BR VTR) application. The LRs expressed their appreciation for the enhancements made to the review tools as presented by the secretariat during the meeting. In particular, the improvements in the user-friendly format and additional guidance included in the TRR template, the checklist and the BR VTR were highlighted by LRs at the meeting. The LRs further noted the usefulness of the TRR template and the checklist in the preparation of high-quality and consistent review reports and recommended that experts continue using them during the reviews. The LRs noted that the use of the BR VTR is expected to help greatly in improving the efficiency, timeliness and transparency of the review process. The LRs urged experts and LRs to widely promote and support the use of the BR VTR during the BR2 review cycle and in future reviews. The LRs provided suggestions for improvements and further enhancement of the user-friendliness of the review tools, which the secretariat will consider during the next update of the tools. Among the suggested improvements, the LRs noted the need to broaden the range of usable web browsers and versions of word processors, user-friendly options to work offline and easier login options for the BR VTR, together with unique login credentials for accessing applications related to all UNFCCC review processes.

Role of lead reviewers in the second biennial report reviews

18. The LRs reiterated that efficient and consistent reviews, as well as high-quality review reports, depend to a great extent on the guidance and leadership provided by the LRs to their teams. The LRs expressed their appreciation for the initiatives and incentives by the secretariat to strengthen the engagement of LRs and experts in their reviews such as the recognition scheme for LRs, as well as the periodic communication with national focal points and LRs and the newsletter on the review activities.

19. The LRs reaffirmed their commitment to continue strengthening their role in leading ERTs in all phases of the review process by: regularly inviting the active engagement of the ERT throughout the review process; leading the early preparation by the ERT before the review week; holding a conference call between LRs before the review week; ensuring that questions are sent to the Party well before the review week; ensuring the clarity of the questions formulated by ERTs to the Parties under review; leading in the timely provision of all deliverables during and after the review week; aiming to send all questions to the Party before the Tuesday evening during the review week; starting the peer review of the sections of the review report on the Thursday during the review week; and by overseeing the overall quality of the ERT's outputs throughout the review process guided by the simplified QC checklist provided by the secretariat.

20. The LRs also agreed to promote the importance of a management plan prepared by them for the centralized review week featuring daily deliverables to ensure the preparation of complete draft review reports by the end of the week.

Review practice guidance

21. The LRs welcomed the draft "Review practice guidance for national communications and biennial reports of Annex I Parties" (hereinafter referred to as RPG) and supporting background papers⁵ prepared by the secretariat as an input to the LRs' meeting on the main challenges and review practices experienced in reviewing BR1s and NC6s of Annex I Parties in 2014 and 2015. These papers were prepared in accordance with the recommendations by the LRs at their second meeting requesting the secretariat to prepare an updated

⁵ Discussion paper entitled "Biennial reports and national communications: review challenges and practice" and background papers entitled "Review practice guidance for national communications and biennial reports of annex I Parties", "Analysis of further options to use the gradations "mostly" or "partially" in the assessment of completeness and transparency in biennial reports" and "Implications of changes in the UNFCCC Annex I inventory reporting guidelines on the review of the second biennial reports". Available at <http://unfccc.int/national_reports/biennial_reports_and_iar/items/9296.php>.

discussion paper that includes the agreed outcomes, the presentations of the LRs and the outcome of the breakout groups at the same meeting.

22. The LRs noted that the draft RPG and supporting background papers provide examples and describe common approaches used by the ERTs to address the main challenges faced by ERTs during the BR1 and NC6 reviews. These challenges include those on cross-cutting topics such as the treatment of recommendations and encouragements in review reports or the assessment of completeness and transparency of the reported information, among others, as well as challenges on substantive topics such as progress towards the quantified economy-wide emission reduction targets, provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support, and supplementary information under the Kyoto Protocol.

23. The LRs exchanged views on their experiences in reviewing cross-cutting and substantive matters in the NC6s and BR1s and discussed common practice approaches to address the challenges experienced in the reviews in 2014 and 2015 taking into account the information contained in the draft RPG and supporting background papers. The LRs recommended that the secretariat revise the draft RPG by incorporating the outcomes as discussed and agreed during the LRs' meeting,⁶ including the review approach for a new issue as included in the annex to these Conclusions and Recommendations and make it available for the BR2 review cycle. The LRs, taking into account the outcome of discussions, agreed that the review approaches presented in the RPG 2016 should be applied by the ERTs, as appropriate, in future reviews.

24. The LRs noted that the RPG will facilitate the enhancement of consistency of the reviews and the quality of the review reports across Parties and shall be provided by the secretariat to ERTs reviewing BR2s and those ERTs reviewing subsequent BRs and NCs.

25. In this context, the LRs welcomed the background paper "Analysis of further options to use the gradations "mostly" and "partially" in the assessment of completeness and transparency in BRs". The LRs requested the secretariat to provide an update of the analysis carried out in the background paper based on the results of the technical review of the BR2s and present such analysis as an input for discussion during the next LRs' meeting in the context of the update of the RPG.

26. In the preparation of the RPG 2017, the LRs requested the secretariat to collect and analyse further topics raised by the ERTs of BR2 reviews, including those issues included in the annex to these Conclusions and Recommendations, and present an updated RPG for consideration of LRs at their subsequent meetings, taking into account the experiences and common practices applied by the ERTs in future reviews of BRs and NCs.

⁶ Outcomes agreed during the parallel group discussions of the LRs' meeting for the revision of the draft RPG are available at < http://unfccc.int/national_reports/biennial_reports_and_iar/items/9296.php>.

Annex

1. The LRs requested that the secretariat revise the RPG by incorporating the following review approach for a new issue discussed and agreed during the third LRs' meeting:
 - a. The ERTs should note in the TRRs when Parties report in BR CTF table 7(b) Annex I Parties as recipient countries.

2. The LRs requested that the secretariat further analyse the following topics raised and discussed during the third LRs' meeting and present them as inputs for discussions during the next LRs' meeting in the context of the update of the RPG:
 - a. Approaches for the technical assessment by ERTs of the progress made towards achieving the target;
 - b. Transparency issues experienced by ERTs when reviewing CTF table 7(a), specifically on the columns "Status", "Financial Instrument" and "Sector";
 - c. Interpretation by ERTs of the term "as appropriate" when reviewing information reported under paragraph 17(a) of the BR guidelines in relation to the status of different funds;
 - d. The use in the TRR of the latest available greenhouse gas inventory submission from the Party and of the GHG inventory data reported in the BR/CTF tables.