

Conclusions and recommendations
Sixth meeting of lead reviewers for the review of
biennial reports and national communications of developed country Parties
Bonn, Germany

11 and 12 March 2019

1. The sixth meeting of lead reviewers (LRs) for the review of biennial reports (BRs) and national communications (NCs) of developed country Parties was held in Bonn, Germany, on 11 and 12 March 2019. A total of 81 experts were invited to the meeting. Of the 66 experts who attended the meeting, 35 were from Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties) and 31 were from Parties included in Annex I to the Convention (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”¹ and taking into account decision 22/CMP.1 in conjunction with decision 4/CMP.11 and decision 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.

Katowice outcomes on transparency and the evolving role of lead reviewers

3. The LRs took note of the information presented by the secretariat on the outcomes from the third part of the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA), held in Katowice, Poland, in December 2018, and the implications on the review process. In particular, the CMA, through draft decision -/CMA.1,² adopted the modalities, procedures and guidelines for the enhanced transparency framework (ETF) and thus made the Paris Agreement operational. The CMA mandated the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice to undertake further technical work to operationalize the modalities, procedures and guidelines by CMA 3 (November 2020), namely to prepare (i) common reporting tables for national greenhouse gas inventories; (ii) common tabular format tables for tracking progress towards nationally determined contributions; (iii) common tabular format tables for information on financial, technology development and transfer, and capacity-building support provided and mobilized, and needed and received; (iv) outlines of the biennial transparency report (BTR), national inventory document and technical expert review report; and (v) a training programme for technical experts participating in the technical expert review.

4. Through the same decision, the CMA also decided that the BTRs are to be submitted by all Parties to the Paris Agreement (small island developing States and the least developed countries may submit the information at their discretion), on a biennial basis, at the latest by 31 December 2024; final biennial update reports (BURs) are to be submitted no later than by 31 December 2024 and final BRs are to be submitted no later than by 31 December 2022. These timelines imply that even though the ETF under the Paris Agreement will supersede the current measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) system under the Convention for each Party to the Paris Agreement, this may occur at different points in time for individual Parties, and both systems may need to operate in parallel at least during the period 2022–2024. Moreover, some Parties that choose early submission of the BTRs under the ETF (i.e. well before 2024), might be expected to submit their final BR/BUR in 2022 and their first BTR in conjunction so as to avoid placing an undue burden on those Parties and the secretariat.

5. The LRs noted that for the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice to fulfil its mandate and complete its work on the ETF by the end of 2020, it is critical to advance work in 2019 through comprehensive submissions from Parties. The LRs further noted that it has been good practice for the

¹ Decision 13/CP.20, annex.

² Draft decision -/CMA.1 on the modalities, procedures and guidelines for the transparency framework for action and support referred to in Article 13 of the Paris Agreement.

secretariat to provide a template of a review report³. This allowed the review report to flexibly reflect the evolving review process, taking into account, on a continuous basis, advice from the LRs in updating the template of the review report.

6. The LRs recalled that in accordance with the modalities, procedures and guidelines of the ETF, the LRs, as a forum of the ETF, will discuss how to improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of technical expert reviews under the Paris Agreement and develop conclusions. The LRs noted that in accordance with existing review practices, the engagement of the LRs in finalizing and enhancing the training programmes prepared by the secretariat for reviewers under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol has ensured that the training has been fit for purpose and has reflected both a good understanding of the requirements and best practices in terms of reporting and review.

7. With regard to reporting under the ETF, the LRs noted that the Consultative Group of Experts, as of 1 January 2019, will also be serving the Paris Agreement by providing support for the implementation of Article 13 of the Paris Agreement, inter alia by facilitating the provision of technical advice and support to developing country Parties, as applicable, including for the preparation and submission of their BTRs and facilitating improved reporting over time.

Experience from the reviews of third biennial reports and seventh national communications

8. The LRs acknowledged the continuous strengthening of the review process under the existing MRV under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol with active engagement from Parties and experts and support from the secretariat. They noted the multiple benefits of reviews, such as (i) improved quality of reporting (e.g. through the resubmission of BR common tabular format tables by 10 Parties triggered by the review); (ii) increased understanding of the reporting requirements and review modalities and practices both by national experts from the country under review and by the expert review teams (ERTs); and (iii) increased interest of national experts from the countries under review in becoming part of the ERTs. The LRs noted that Parties could make greater use of their BRs and NCs as a communication channel to share their experience and enhance the visibility of their achievements and success stories. The LRs further noted that preparation before the review week by ERTs is essential in delivering a timely review report. The LRs requested the secretariat to prepare a concise review report template for the review of BR4s.

9. The LRs noted the actions taken by the secretariat to coordinate the reviews of BR3s and NC7s, including 10 centralized and 31 in-country reviews organized between February 2018 and April 2019. This timeline has allowed Parties a period of at least nine months to address the BR3 review findings, which are usually shared with Parties at the end of the review week, in the BR4 submissions due by 1 January 2020. All review reports are scheduled to be finalized by the ERTs by August 2019, well within two years of the submission due date for BR3s/NC7s (1 January 2018). The LRs also noted that the secretariat organized a multilateral assessment session for 11 Parties at the forty-ninth session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and is planning to organize one for 20 Parties at SBI 50 (June 2019) and for 9 Parties at SBI 51 (December 2019).

10. The LRs further noted that the ERTs were balanced in terms of regional distribution and gender. In total, 184⁴ experts were involved in reviews. The composition of the ERTs was as follows: 91 experts from non-Annex I Parties and 93 from Annex I Parties; and 88 female experts and 96 male experts. In total, 29 experts were from Asia-Pacific States, 31 from Latin American and Caribbean States, 65 from Western European and other States, 35 from Eastern European States and 24 from African States. Involvement of 88 female experts in the BR3/NC7 review cycle has resulted in a 6 per cent increase in the number of female experts compared with the BR2 review cycle in 2016–2017. Furthermore, the 70 new experts participating for the first time in the BR3/NC7 review cycle has resulted in a 39 per cent increase in new experts involved in reviews compared with the BR2 review cycle in 2016–2017.

11. The LRs welcomed the information provided by the secretariat on the status of the 972 experts nominated to the UNFCCC roster of experts for the BR/NC reviews. However, the LRs noted with concern

³ Based on the elements for such reports that are outlined in relevant COP and CMP decisions, e.g. para 48 of decision 22/CMP.1.

⁴ Provisional total based on the data available on 1 March 2019.

that only 25 per cent, or 239 experts, have enrolled since 2015 in 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”⁵ and successfully completed the required training modules, thereby becoming eligible to take part in the BR/NC reviews. The LRs acknowledged the usefulness of the training programme in fostering an understanding of the review process and enabling consistency of reviews. Since the existing training programme provides a good understanding of the assessment of Parties’ progress towards their emission reduction target and their provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support, the experience with this programme could inform the development of the training programme for the ETF. The next opportunity for experts to participate in the training programme is in August–September 2019.⁶

12. The LRs noted that in the light of the increasing demand for reviewers under the ETF, the number of experts should in turn be increased to maintain and enhance the quality and effectiveness of future reviews. To this end, the LRs encouraged the national focal points to nominate new experts to the UNFCCC roster of experts,⁷ in particular experts involved in the national institutional arrangements for MRV, so as to enable the respective governments to benefit from the expertise gained by these individuals during the BR/NC reviews. The LRs encouraged the experts nominated to the UNFCCC roster of experts to enrol in the training courses and complete the relevant exams, which will make them eligible for participation in future BR reviews. The LRs also strongly encouraged Parties to allocate sufficient support to their experts to enable them to participate in the review process.

13. The LRs acknowledged that the secretariat’s efforts to compose the review teams based on the feedback from experts on their availability for participation in ERTs, requested well before the review week, as well as to streamline review practices and fine-tune the review tools, facilitated the effectiveness, consistency and efficiency of the reviews. In particular, the LRs found the use of the virtual team room and the improved template and checklist very helpful.

14. The LRs noted that the involvement of an increased number of new experts required the LRs and review coordinators to spend more time in guiding the ERTs and coordinating the workflow. The LRs also noted that the involvement of between five and six experts in one ERT and the even distribution of review tasks among the experts, as well as the coordination of a review by two review officers, was an effective practice. The LRs requested the secretariat to take these findings into account when updating the review tools and adjusting review practices.

15. The LRs took note of the submission due date for the BR4s of 1 January 2020 and the plan by the secretariat to make available to Parties as of June 2019 the BR common tabular format application adjusted for the BR4 submission. The LRs recalled that Parties are expected to address the recommendations and encouragements of the report on the technical review of the third biennial report (TRR3) when preparing the BR4. Parties are also expected to submit the BR4 on time to allow for timely arrangements to be made for the reviews, including for the centralized reviews of BR4s that are planned to take place in the period March 2020–March 2021.

Improvements in the consistency of reviews

16. The LRs welcomed the background paper “Completeness and transparency assessment of information reported in technical review reports of 3rd biennial reports – 2019 update”⁸ prepared by the secretariat. Based on the results of the analysis presented during the sixth meeting of LRs, the overall completeness and transparency of information provided in the BR3s has increased in comparison with the BR2s.⁹ The consistency of assessment across the TRR3s has improved since the TRR2s owing mainly to the experience gained and expertise refined through the three BR review cycles; the use of the suggested review approaches from the Review Practice Guidance (RPG) that were based on real examples; and the guidance provided by the LRs in assessing the completeness and transparency consistent with the guiding principles and the assessment

⁵ Decision 15/CP.20, annex.

⁶ More information on upcoming training opportunities is available on the UNFCCC website.

⁷ Information on the UNFCCC roster of experts is available on the UNFCCC website.

⁸ The background paper is available on the UNFCCC website.

⁹ This analysis is based on the TRR3s of 32 Parties whose review reports were published or were in the final phase before publication at the time of preparation of the secretariat’s background paper (i.e. 15 February 2019).

scoreboard. The LRs requested the secretariat to continue compiling the review findings and to update the analysis carried out in the background paper based on the results of the remaining technical reviews of the BR3s and present the analysis as an input for discussion during the next meeting of LRs in the context of the update of the RPG.

17. The LRs considered several issues identified during the BR3 review cycle, inter alia: (i) the contribution of units from market-based mechanisms towards achieving the emission reduction target (guidance for the member States of the European Union); (ii) the assessment of impacts of individual mitigation measures; (iii) the consistency among greenhouse gas emission trends and projections and the economy-wide emission reduction target when land use, land-use change and forestry and nitrogen trifluoride are included in the target; (iv) the description of success and failure stories when reporting on the provision of technological support; (v) consistency between the textual part of the BR and the common tabular format tables; (vi) the financial support provided to Annex I Parties; (vii) distinguishing between the support provided to non-Annex I Parties through public and private channels; and (viii) presentation of the ‘with additional measures’ projections on a gas by gas basis. The LRs requested the secretariat to prepare the RPG 2019 by incorporating the approaches discussed and agreed at the sixth meeting of LRs. The LRs agreed that the review approaches presented in the RPG 2019¹⁰ will be applied by ERTs in ongoing and future reviews.

18. The LRs also requested the secretariat to continue collecting information on and analysing the review-related issues raised by the ERTs during reviews, with a view to presenting them for discussion at the seventh meeting of LRs, including best practices in formulating recommendations and encouragements to Parties.

Organization of the meetings of lead reviewers

19. The LRs acknowledged the usefulness of the hands-on practice of the challenging reporting and review issues and the opportunity for LRs to exchange knowledge and share review skills among peers. The LRs requested the secretariat to continue organizing interactive and practical activities on relevant topics based on the suggestions of the reviewers and LRs during the sixth meeting, as appropriate.

20. The LRs also requested the secretariat to provide opportunities for sharing and discussing the experience gained in the international consultation and analysis process that might be of relevance both to LRs engaged in BR reviews and to co-leads engaged in technical analysis of BURs.

¹⁰ The RPG 2019 will be available on the UNFCCC website.