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## **Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice**

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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 Parties included in Annex I to the Convention in their biennial reports and national communications**

### **Report by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

This report describes 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 are due 1 January 2018. The activities include the fourth meeting of lead reviewers for the review of biennial reports and national communications and enhancement of training materials for review experts for the technical review of biennial reports and national communications. Reviews of the second biennial reports were completed in November 2016. Information on the composition of the expert review teams performing these reviews and on the selection of experts for the review teams and the lead reviewers is contained in document FCCC/SBSTA/2016/INF.8.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Mandate**

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP), 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 criteria<sup>1</sup> 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”<sup>2</sup> (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 inventories, BRs and NCs.<sup>3</sup>

### **B. Scope of the note**

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

4. Reviews of the second BRs (BR2s) were completed in November 2016. Information on the composition of ERTs performing the review, including on the selection of experts for the review teams and the LRs, and on the actions taken to ensure the application of the selection criteria is contained in document FCCC/SBSTA/2016/INF.8. No technical reviews of BRs or NCs were conducted during 2017.

### **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. Fourth meeting of lead reviewers for the review of biennial reports and national communications**

6. LRs play a critical role in the BR and NC technical review process. They should ensure that the reviews in which they participate are performed by each ERT according to the relevant UNFCCC review guidelines and consistently across Parties. They should also ensure the quality and objectivity of the thorough and comprehensive technical examination of the reviews and provide for their continuity, comparability and timeliness.<sup>4</sup>

7. Following the UNFCCC review guidelines, only experts who have passed the training module “General and cross-cutting aspects of the review of NCs and BRs programme” are eligible to act as LRs. When inviting experts to act as LRs for the BR2

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

<sup>2</sup> Decision 13/CP.20, annex.

<sup>3</sup> Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 44.

<sup>4</sup> Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 42.

reviews, previous experience in the review processes under the Convention and/or its Kyoto Protocol and demonstrated professional expertise and leadership skills were taken into account by the secretariat.

8. The fourth meeting of LRs for the review of BRs and NCs of developed country Parties was held in Bonn, Germany, on 6 and 7 March 2017. A total of 44 experts from Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties) and 43 experts from Annex I Parties were invited to the meeting. Of the 60 experts who attended the meeting, 27 were from non-Annex I Parties and 33 were from Annex I Parties.

9. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines<sup>5</sup> and taking into account decision 23/CMP.1, the meeting addressed 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, the budget for 2017 and the training for technical teams of experts undertaking the technical analysis of biennial update reports.

### **A. Successes and challenges in the second round of international assessment and review**

10. The LRs noted the successful implementation of the second cycle of the international assessment and review process in 2016, which contributed to enhanced transparency of information on climate action and facilitated trust-building among Parties. The secretariat coordinated 11 centralized reviews between 7 March and 11 June 2016, covering 43 reviews of second biennial reports (BR2s).<sup>6</sup> The review of the sixth national communication (NC6) of Turkey took place in conjunction with the review of its first BRs (BR1s) and BR2s. The LRs also noted that 24 Parties were multilaterally assessed during the working group session that took place at the forty-fifth session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), 17 Parties were assessed during the working group session at SBI 46 (May 2017) and one Party is yet to be assessed. The corresponding Party records were published on the UNFCCC website.<sup>7</sup>

11. The LRs acknowledged the improvement in the timeliness of reviews, noting in particular that the second technical review reports of the BR2s were prepared by the ERTs and published on the UNFCCC website<sup>8</sup> by 6 December 2016, well before the 15-month completion window for reviews stipulated in the UNFCCC review guidelines.<sup>9</sup> A total of 30 of the 43 second technical review reports, were published within 16 weeks after the review week. This improvement in timeliness is due to the increased number of reviewers per Party in the context of centralized reviews, the strong commitment of the reviewers, the secretariat's early preparation for the reviews, improved review tools (such as the virtual team room, checklist and review report template) and the more streamlined review approach (e.g. the introduction of peer review within ERTs).

12. The LRs acknowledged the balanced composition of the ERTs in the BR2 review cycle. In 2016, a total of 112 experts from 65 Parties were involved in the review of 43 BR2s and one NC6, of which 61 were from non-Annex I Parties and 51 from Annex I Parties. Among the experts from Annex I Parties 17 were from Parties not included in Annex II to the Convention and 34 were from Parties included in Annex II to the Convention. A total of 43 new experts undertook their first BR review, thus expanding the

<sup>5</sup> Decision 13/CP.20, annex.

<sup>6</sup> Ukraine had not submitted a BR2. It informed the secretariat about its plan to submit the BR2 in conjunction with the BR3, by 1 January 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Available at

[http://unfccc.int/focus/mitigation/the\\_multilateral\\_assessment\\_process\\_under\\_the\\_iar/items/9456.php](http://unfccc.int/focus/mitigation/the_multilateral_assessment_process_under_the_iar/items/9456.php).

<sup>8</sup> Available at

[http://unfccc.int/national\\_reports/biennial\\_reports\\_and\\_iar/technical\\_reviews/items/9534.php](http://unfccc.int/national_reports/biennial_reports_and_iar/technical_reviews/items/9534.php).

<sup>9</sup> Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paragraph 17.

pool of experts with experience in BR reviews. Of 112 experts, 47 were female and 65 were male.

13. The LRs acknowledged that the secretariat faced a similar set of challenges in planning and coordinating the BR2 review cycle as for the BR1 review cycle. These challenges include Parties' delayed submission of their BR2s<sup>10</sup> and the limited number of available experts and LRs qualified to conduct the reviews thereof. In part, these challenges stem from competing priorities and a lack of financial support provided for the participation of experts by their nominating governments.

14. The LRs noted with concern that the delayed submission of some BR2s hampered the preparation for their review, and therefore encouraged Parties to submit their BR3s and NC7s by 1 January 2018.<sup>11</sup> 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 governments, in order to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of experts and the balanced expertise of the ERTs. To that end, the LRs reiterated their encouragement of Parties to continue nominating experts who are actively engaged in NC, BR and biennial update report preparation at the national level or have relevant technical expertise, and to regularly update the UNFCCC roster of experts. They also reiterated their encouragement of Parties to facilitate the participation of experts in the reviews by allocating the necessary resources and time in their workplans in order to ensure that they are available for the entire review process.

## **B. Approach to the reviews of the third biennial reports and seventh national communications**

15. The LRs noted that the secretariat is planning to coordinate the reviews of BR3s and NC7s through a combination of centralized reviews for 10 Parties with small economies and in-country reviews for the remaining Parties in the period 2018–2019, starting in March 2018. The LRs also noted that, for more than 10 Parties, conducting centralized reviews instead of in-country reviews would be more cost-efficient. The LRs further noted a reduced number of experienced review coordinators involved in the reviews of the BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties and thus that it would be extremely difficult to conduct all reviews and complete them within the timelines set out in the UNFCCC review guidelines and to maintain the existing level of quality with that level of review coordination resources at the secretariat. Therefore, there is a need to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of review coordinators in the secretariat or to engage external consultants for the coordination of the BR3/NC7 reviews, recognizing the budgetary implications thereof.

16. The LRs requested the secretariat to continue the good practices of early planning and preparation for the review cycle, the application of a peer review approach during the reviews and updating and enhancing the relevant review tools. To facilitate the preparation for the BR3/NC7 reviews, the LRs encouraged experts to allocate sufficient time for their involvement in the reviews.

17. The LRs welcomed the information on the revised draft of the "Guidelines for the preparation of national communications by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, Part II: UNFCCC reporting guidelines on national communications" (hereinafter referred as UNFCCC reporting guidelines on NCs) provided by the secretariat. They took note of the draft revised UNFCCC reporting guidelines on NCs<sup>12</sup> and noted the ongoing work on the revision of the guidelines under the SBI.

<sup>10</sup> A total of 28 Annex I Parties submitted their BR2s and 29 Annex I Parties submitted their common tabular format (CTF) tables before the due date determined in decision 2/CP.17, while 15 Annex I Parties submitted their BR2s and 14 Annex I Parties submitted their CTF tables after that date, of which 7 submitted their BR2s and 6 submitted their CTF tables within six weeks of that date. The textual part of the BR2 of Luxembourg was submitted on 6 June 2016, during the review of its BR2.

<sup>11</sup> As per decision 2/CP.17, paragraph 13.

<sup>12</sup> Contained in document FCCC/SBI/2016/8, annex I.

18. The LRs recognized that it would be helpful to discuss at their next meeting possible issues relating to the NC7 reviews stemming from the use of the revised UNFCCC reporting guidelines on NCs, in case such guidelines are adopted at COP 23, in order to facilitate a consistent approach during the NC7 reviews, taking into account the status of the SBI work.

19. The LRs noted that the full implementation of the mandates related to measurement, reporting and verification during the next review cycle will be possible only if adequate financial resources are provided in the budget to be adopted at COP 23. The LRs acknowledged the resource constraints faced by the secretariat and encouraged Parties to support the review activities by providing sufficient resources to continue and strengthen the implementation of the review work.

### **C. Improvements in the consistency of reviews**

20. The LRs acknowledged that the consistency of reviews has improved owing to enhanced guidance from LRs, the consistent application of the “Review practice guidance for national communications and biennial reports of Annex I Parties” (hereinafter referred to as the review practice guidance) and the assessment scoreboard on the completeness and transparency of the reported information.

21. The LRs welcomed the draft review practice guidance for 2017 and supporting background papers prepared by the secretariat as input to the LR meeting on the main challenges experienced and practices applied in reviewing the BR2s in 2016.<sup>13</sup> The LRs recommended that the secretariat revise the draft review practice guidance by incorporating the improvements agreed at the LR meeting. The LRs agreed that the review approaches presented in the review practice guidance for 2017 will be applied by the ERTs in the BR3/NC7 reviews.

22. In order to prepare the review practice guidance for 2018, the LRs requested the secretariat to further analyse the issues that were not agreed on at this meeting (see paras. 23 and 24 below) and an additional topic (see para. 25 below) raised by the LRs during this meeting and to present the updated review practice guidance for consideration by the LRs at their subsequent meetings.

23. The LRs requested the secretariat to further analyse the issue of the use in the technical review reports of the latest available greenhouse gas inventory submissions and greenhouse gas inventory data reported by Parties in their BRs and common tabular format tables and to present the results of that analysis as input to the discussions at the next LR meeting in the context of the review practice guidance update.

24. The LRs also requested the secretariat to analyse the existing review approaches to assessing the completeness and transparency of the information reported only on the new policies and measures implemented or planned since the previous NC/BR and to present relevant information as input to the discussions at the LR meeting to be held after the BR3/NC7 reviews in the context of the review practice guidance update.

25. The LRs further requested the secretariat to explore how the multiple mandatory requirements (i.e. “shall”) contained in the same paragraph (e.g. paragraph 17) of the “UNFCCC biennial reporting guidelines for developed country Parties” were considered in the reviews of BR1s and BR2s following the guiding principle that one missing mandatory requirement should trigger no more than one recommendation, and to present such analysis as input to the discussions at the next LRs meeting in the context of the review practice guidance update.

26. The LRs welcomed the updated background paper titled “2017 Update of the Analysis of the Assessment of Completeness and Transparency of Information Reported in

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<sup>13</sup> Available at [http://unfccc.int/national\\_reports/biennial\\_reports\\_and\\_iar/items/10059.php](http://unfccc.int/national_reports/biennial_reports_and_iar/items/10059.php).

Biennial Reports”.<sup>14</sup> They invited ERTs to use the completeness and transparency assessment scoreboard provided in the review practice guidance for 2017 in future reviews with the aim of facilitating consistency across technical review reports. However, ERTs should continue applying a qualitative assessment in their expert judgment to make a final determination on the level of completeness and transparency.

#### **D. Training of reviewers of biennial reports and national communications**

27. The LRs welcomed the information provided on the training activities within 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”<sup>15</sup> (hereinafter referred to as the training programme) undertaken by the secretariat in 2016 and the planned activities for 2017 for the BR3/NC7 review cycle, to be held in 2018–2019.

28. The LRs noted that the secretariat has received positive feedback from Parties and experts on the scope and focus of the courses of the training programme, including the final examinations required to be passed in order to take part in the reviews of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties. The LRs also noted that, to date, 202 experts have passed one or more examinations.

29. The LRs further noted that the training materials 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. The LRs invited ERTs to continue to use the training materials during the BR3/NC7 reviews, thus facilitating a consistent approach across the reviews. Therefore, the LRs reiterated once more their strong encouragement of experienced review experts, in particular LRs, to undertake the relevant training courses and examinations.

30. In order to expand the pool of qualified reviewers available for the BR3/NC7 review cycle, the LRs reiterated their encouragement of Parties to continue nominating experts to the UNFCCC roster of experts and to encourage experts to take the relevant courses and examinations of the training programme and update their existing information on the roster.

31. The LRs noted that the experience gained during the BR1/NC6 and BR2 review cycles may be used to update and further develop the courses of the training programme in order to enhance the consistency of reviews. The LRs also noted that this would help the review experts to gain up-to-date knowledge on substantive matters related to the technical review process and to further strengthen their common understanding of the approaches to the reviews. The LRs further noted that the updated training programme would facilitate a consistent approach to the reviews across Parties, taking into account the possible adoption in 2017 of the revised UNFCCC reporting guidelines on NCs and the experience gained so far with reviews.

32. The LRs acknowledged that a possible extension of the implementation of the training programme and any enhancement or further development of its courses will be considered by the SBSTA in 2017.

33. The LRs acknowledged the resource constraints faced by the secretariat and encouraged Parties to support the training activities by providing sufficient resources to continue and strengthen the implementation of the training programme.

#### **E. Organization of the meetings of lead reviewers**

34. The LRs acknowledged the usefulness of the refresher seminar and the discussion on the challenging reporting and review issues that arose during the BR2 reviews and

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<sup>14</sup> Available at [http://unfccc.int/files/national\\_reports/annex\\_i\\_parties/application/pdf/backgroundpaperanalysismostlypartially\\_published.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/national_reports/annex_i_parties/application/pdf/backgroundpaperanalysismostlypartially_published.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Decision 15/CP.20, annex.

requested the secretariat to organize refresher seminars on relevant topics, as appropriate, to take place during subsequent LR meetings, such as on an overview of the review practice for non-mandatory requirements (i.e. “should” or “may”) included in the “UNFCCC biennial reporting guidelines for developed country Parties”.

35. The LRs noted that the awarding of LRs promotes a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the review processes under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, and encouraged the secretariat to continue this good practice of nominating and awarding LRs who demonstrate excellence in their work during BR/NC reviews.

### **III. Enhancement of the materials of the training programme for review experts**

36. SBSTA 46 requested the secretariat to enhance the materials of the training programme, on the basis of decisions 24/CP.19 and 9/CP.21 and taking into account the experience gained in conducting the technical reviews of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties since 2014, before the start of the reviews of NC7s and BR3s of Annex I Parties in 2018. The SBSTA also requested the secretariat to enhance the user interface of the training courses with a view to making them more user-friendly.<sup>16</sup>

37. In response to that request, the secretariat developed enhanced materials of the training programme and enhanced the online user interface of the training courses, taking into account:

(a) The experience gained and approaches applied in conducting the technical reviews of BR1s and BR2s and NC6s of Annex I Parties since 2014;

(b) The conclusions and recommendations from the second, third and fourth meeting of LRs for the review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties.

38. The training programme for the technical review of NCs and BRs of Annex I Parties includes the following four online training courses:

(a) Course 1: General and cross-cutting aspects of the review of NCs and BRs;

(b) Course 2: Technical review of targets and policies and measures, their effects and their contribution to achieving those targets;

(c) Course 3: Technical review of greenhouse gas emissions, emission trends, projections and the total effect of policies and measures;

(d) Course 4: Technical review of the provision of financial, technology transfer and capacity-building support.

39. On 13 September 2017, the secretariat launched the online courses of the training programme in accordance with SBSTA 46 conclusions.

40. In preparation for the technical review of NC7s and BR3s in 2018, the secretariat invited 819 experts nominated to the UNFCCC roster of experts for the technical review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties to participate in the training programme. Of the 819 invited experts, 207 agreed to participate in the training cycle (111 from non-Annex I Parties and 96 from Annex I Parties) and were given access to one or more courses of the training programme. The online examinations associated with the courses will be held by the secretariat from 25 to 27 October 2017.

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<sup>16</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2017/4, paragraph 85.