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MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION,
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND
ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Working Group of the Parties to the Convention

Seventh meeting
Geneva, 2–4 May 2007
Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Capacity-building

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Note by the secretariat¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its sixth meeting, the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention took note of the various developments and activities and encouraged Parties, Signatories, other States and other relevant bodies to continue to provide support for them, taking account of the needs and priorities identified (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/2, para. 62). This document provides an overview of various regional capacity-building activities relating to the Convention and strives to address the main priorities and gaps.

2. The document is primarily based on the input from the fourth meeting of international and regional organizations involved in the capacity-building framework (4 December 2006, Geneva). The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in its capacity of secretariat to the Convention hosted the meeting. Representatives of the following partner organizations were

¹ This document was submitted on the above date because some Parties requested that the deadline for providing their input through the questionnaires be extended to the end of February 2007.

present: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe (CoE), European Commission (EC), Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), European ECO-Forum and Milieukontakt Oost-Europa. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties, Ms. Hanne Inger Bjurstrøm (Norway), chaired the meeting

3. In addition, the document draws on information provided by some of the Parties and non-governmental organizations through a survey carried out by the secretariat (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/2, para. 57). The questionnaire, which was presented at the previous meeting of the Working Group and has also been sent to the Parties and to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations working on the Convention, aims to identify priority constraints in the implementation of the Convention at the national and local levels and steps required to overcome these problems. The survey also asked for an overview and assessment of ongoing capacity-building activities, including those undertaken by the Parties themselves. Responses, which were provided by Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Malta and Romania as well as by NGOs from Azerbaijan and Bulgaria and by CAREC, have been taken into account in the preparation of this document. The original responses to the questionnaire are available via the Convention's website (<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.htm>) and will be made available on the Clearinghouse (see para. 45 below).

4. This document does not attempt to address capacity-building efforts under the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). Such efforts were discussed at the capacity-building meeting on 4 December 2006 and are described in detail in the paper on capacity-building for the Protocol prepared by the Bureau of the Working Group on PRTRs (ECE/MP.PP/AC.1/2007/L.5) and the capacity-building matrix under the Protocol (ECE/MP.PP/AC.1/2007/L.8).

II. CAPACITY-BUILDING EFFORTS AND PRIORITIES

A. General implementation of the Convention and of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration

5. UNITAR reported on the status of the joint UNECE/UNITAR Aarhus Convention National Profile Development Project, which supported three pilot countries (Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and Tajikistan) to assess their regulatory, legal and institutional capacities and practices for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had requested UNITAR's assistance with the follow-up activities. Serbia had started the project later and was in the final stage of completing its National Profile.

6. Based on the methodology tested in the National Profile Development Project in the UNECE region, UNITAR, in collaboration with the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), was preparing a programme of Pilot Projects to Strengthen National Capacities for Democratic Environmental Governance and Principle 10

Implementation. The programme, which would begin in early 2007, would see three partner countries in Central America prepare their national profiles, set national priorities and develop draft national action plans for implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

7. A National Workshop on Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making took place in June 2006 in Cape Town (South Africa) as part of a Pilot Project to Develop a Methodology to Evaluate Lessons Learned from Public Participation in South Africa. Participants had developed a consensus statement which was serving as a basis for follow-up discussions with the Government and for preparation of a final report that would examine the challenges of effective participation of public interest groups in environmental decision-making.

8. UNITAR in cooperation with Participating Organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), the World Bank, UNDP, the Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Secretariat of the Basel Convention also implements a global programme of Pilot Projects for the Implementation of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), with a focus on governance, civil society participation and partnerships within the Integrated National Chemicals and Waste Management Programme. Belarus, Pakistan, Panama and the United Republic of Tanzania will participate in the programme as pilot countries.

9. In addition, the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS) Capacity Building Programme implemented jointly by UNITAR and the International Labour Organization (ILO) had assisted countries in developing GHS implementation strategies through multi-stakeholder collaboration. It aimed to improve chemical hazard communication and workers' and consumers' right to know.

10. OSCE's continued support for the establishment and operation of the Aarhus Centres (see ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/7, para. 10) included the opening of new Centres in Tbilisi and Tirana, as well as several local centres in Armenia. The Centres' activities focused on raising awareness of the Convention (e.g. by producing publications, working with the media, assisting with legislative analysis and, in some cases, providing legal advice to the public). An international meeting was organized in Georgia in September 2006 to bring together experts involved in setting up and running the Centres. The meeting had discussed achievements, shortcomings and possible future activities of the Centres. Its participants had noted that among the outstanding issues were the sustainability of the Centres, their institutional relations with the respective national authorities and their possible role in facilitating the implementation of the third pillar of the Convention. Possible future fields for the Centres' operation included participation in the development of national implementation reports and plans, collaboration with parliamentarians (in particular on the development of legislation to implement the public participation provisions of the Convention), efforts to involve sectoral ministries in the work on implementation of the Convention and greater focus on gender issues. It was expected that an evaluation report on the Aarhus Centres would be released in early 2007.

11. OSCE reported that, in cooperation with REC, it had carried out an assessment of training and capacity-building needs for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Azerbaijan. Based on the assessment, a training and capacity-building programme had been proposed which

covered all pillars of the Convention as well as issues of cooperation between authorities and NGOs.

12. The European Commission provided further information about an upcoming two-year project under the TACIS programme in Central Asia. The project was intended to support implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the subregion. While there had been a delay in launching the project in 2006, a call for tender would be launched in February 2007 with the aim of getting a contract signed in the middle of that year. In the programming stage of the tender, all five Central Asian countries had expressed their interest in participating in the project. However, in March 2006, Uzbekistan had informed the Commission that because preparations for the ratification of the Convention were not among its priorities it was not interested in the project. Despite this, an invitation to endorse the terms of reference and participate in the project had been sent to all five potential beneficiary countries.

13. REC reported that it had concluded implementation of its two-year project on “Improving the Practices of Public Participation: Next Steps in Implementing the Aarhus Convention” in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo (currently under the interim UN administration) funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The project supported development and application of various mechanisms and capacity-building for officials, NGOs and other stakeholders, and it included a specific component on preparations for the implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs in four countries. Outcomes included legislative and institutional assessments and practical recommendations relating to the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Convention, implementation of the access to justice pillar in Albania and Montenegro, implementation of the principles of the Convention in Kosovo and preparations for the ratification of the Protocol in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. The project results also included several capacity-building seminars and training events in each country or entity, guidance materials for officials at the national and local levels and brochures for the public. The resource materials and results of the project were available at http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/improving_practices/default.html.

14. The project on “Enhancing Access to Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making” implemented by REC under the UNDP/Global Environmental Facility Danube Regional Project had also been finalized. The project covered Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. It had strengthened the implementation capacity of government officials and NGOs in the water sector and had addressed needs related to the implementation of the obligations on access to information and public participation under the Water Framework Directive and the Aarhus Convention. Project outcomes included recommendations on legislative amendments on access to information, in particular with regard to confidentiality of information, and on public participation. They also included guidance materials for officials, brochures for NGOs and the public, and development of a meta-database on water-related information and improvement of information dissemination through the website of the River Basin Authorities. In the framework of the projects, NGOs in cooperation with local authorities had implemented five pilot projects in hotspot areas. Project information was available from <http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/DanubeRiverBasin/default.html>

15. Milieukontakt Oost-Europa reported that it had established a network of 30 trainers specializing, *inter alia*, in trainings on public participation. An Internet-based training format developed with the support of the network included a module on public participation for grass-roots NGOs which had been tested in Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine.

16. European ECO-Forum reported that with the financial support of Norway it had continued to facilitate involvement of the NGOs of the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) in the Convention's activities by ensuring national-level networking and feedback on the matters addressed in the intergovernmental forums under the Convention. It was also working with NGOs to promote ratification of the amendment to the Convention. To facilitate NGO involvement in the work on the implementation of the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums, European ECO-Forum had created a list of organizations with relevant experience and was developing a questionnaire for NGOs on related practices in international forums. It was also planning to carry out a survey on implementation of Convention-related legislation in the European Union. Furthermore, it was envisaged that in preparation for the next meeting of the Parties, European ECO-Forum would organize an international NGO strategy meeting on the Convention in autumn 2007.

17. In addition to continuing its coordinating role in the capacity-building framework and its role in the national profiles project with UNITAR, UNECE has contributed to initiatives implemented by other organizations. Examples of such activities included contributions to the OSCE regional meeting of Aarhus Centres in September 2006 in Tbilisi (see para. 10 above), and to the regional meeting in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) under the REC public participation project (see para. 13 above) in November 2006 in Brcko, Bosnia and Herzegovina. To raise awareness of the Convention among education experts, the secretariat organized a side event on education for sustainable development and the Aarhus Convention in the UNECE region at the second European Fair for Education for Sustainable Development in Hamburg, Germany.

18. UNECE also continued to promote the Convention and Principle 10 outside the region. The secretariat delivered training on procedural aspects of human rights and environment to participants in the Fellowship Programme on International and Comparative Environmental Law. The Programme, implemented by UNITAR in July 2006, constituted an intensive three-week course in environmental law and policy for selected legal officers of national ministries of environment, judges and legal professionals from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

19. The secretariat also reported on its contribution to the development of measures to strengthen public participation in environmental protection in China. In a new initiative aimed at furthering environmental democracy as well as educating and engaging the public with regard to environmental protection, the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) was supporting the development of a set of rules for public information and participation in environmental decision-making. UNECE had been invited to contribute to the process by sharing its experience with the Aarhus Convention, in particular with regard to implementation efforts and issues in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to providing comments on the draft, the secretariat had participated in a symposium on the drafting of the "Measures on Public Participation in Environmental Protection" (Beijing, 13–22 August 2006) co-organized by the

Chinese Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims and the Natural Resources Defense Council, in cooperation with SEPA, to gather comments and fine-tune the draft regulation. The participants included representatives of the Chinese parliament's environment committee, national, provincial and local government representatives, academics, students and environmental organizations.

B. Access to information and public participation

20. UNDP reported that in addition to the development of its own public information and disclosure policy, it also supported CARNet, a digital information network in the area of environment and sustainable development in Central Asia and Russia (www.caresd.net). CARNet was a voluntary, non-political, decentralized network community consisting of representatives of civil society, the public sector, mass media and the private sector, as well as independent experts and researchers. CARNet promoted ideas of sustainable development in a coordinated manner using the newest information and communication technologies (ICT) and strengthened public awareness and participation in the formulation of sustainable development policies and environmental protection by building on existing experience and best practices. It strove to provide opportunities to involve civil society in the implementation of national and regional action plans for environmental protection and sustainable development.

21. UNDP also reported that it was involved in the development of an early warning system in conflict zones which relied on NGOs and members of the public with relevant expertise. It had also organized training for journalists in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley in the use of Web-based materials and tools. Some of UNDP's general environmental projects indirectly facilitated implementation of the Convention's provisions; an example was a project supporting the establishment of a waste inventory in Georgia's Ministry of Environment.

22. OSCE reported that the Aarhus Centres established with its support performed an important role in facilitating access to information. The Centre established jointly with Georgia's Ministry of Environment, for example, was helping to develop the national node of the Aarhus Clearinghouse (<http://aarhus.dsl.ge>).

23. UNECE, in its capacity as secretariat of the Convention, was planning to organize two workshops on capacity-building for the Aarhus Clearinghouse Mechanism and Electronic Information Tools. The first workshop, to be organized in March 2007 in cooperation with REC, was intended for designated experts from UNECE Member States from Western and Central Europe and SEE and civil society organizations. The second workshop (for the EECCA region) would be organized later in 2007.

24. UNECE and the Association for Progressive Communications had organized a panel discussion on Greening Development through Information and Communications Technology and Civic Engagement. The discussion was held at the Inaugural Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in October 2006 in Athens. It addressed bridging the paradigm gap between environmentally sustainable development and the "information society" through institutional and legal mechanisms which strengthen the capacity of civil society to participate in environmental decision-making. The secretariat had also contributed to the first meeting of the Environmental Watch expert group on information networking organized in May 2006 by UNEP and the

European Environment Agency and to the workshop on the Aarhus Convention organized by the EU Committee of the British Chamber of Commerce in the framework of the Conference on Environmental Hot Topics in Europe in February 2006 in Belgium. UNECE also contributed to a workshop on Disclosure of Environmental Information in Asia organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation within the Asia-Europe Environmental Forum in November 2005 in Jakarta.

25. Some of the capacity-building activities for implementing the two first pillars of the Convention are also undertaken by the Parties. So, for example, the Government of Armenia co-funded activities of Aarhus Centres set up with the financial support of OSCE and provided capacity-building for public officials in the framework of the Management Academy. In Georgia, the Ministry of Environment set up a hotline for information requests and allocated resources for maintenance of its website (www.moe.gov.ge). In Belarus the Ministry of Environment was implementing an awareness-raising campaign through the media, the national environmental forum and the Ministry's website (www.minpriroda.by). In many countries ministries had implemented general awareness-raising tools such as promotional videos, brochures and presentations. The Government of Romania with the support of the EU PHARE funds and bilateral projects has done substantial work to improve and implement legislation on strategic environmental assessment, including public consultation procedures. It has also implemented environmental assessment trainings for the National Environmental Guard.

26. Information provided by the Parties and other stakeholders in response to the questionnaire indicates that typical capacity-related problems with access to information relate to availability of environmental data within the public authorities and lack of clarity as to what information is available from which institution. While certain steps have been taken to overcome these problems (e.g. development of an internal information database in Georgia's Ministry of Environment, compilation of a list of public authorities that deal with environmental information in Belarus, and establishment of an inter-agency commission on implementation of the Convention in Armenia), the lack of technical and managerial capacities required to resolve them remains a constraint, in particular where sectoral agencies and institutions are concerned.

27. Lack of personnel trained to deal with provision of information, mentioned by countries such as Malta, is another problem which appears to be relevant for other Parties. The Maltese response also highlights the need for properly trained environmental journalists to facilitate provision of information. Availability of reliable monitoring data is an issue for the public authorities in the EECCA region. Respondents from Georgia and Azerbaijan identified problems with the dissemination of data on emissions, the latter referring to the local level. Belarus indicated that its main capacity-building priorities related to the need in financial resources and also the need to set up a network of environmental information centers at the local level. Armenia identified similar needs, indicating that it needed technical support in setting up an electronic information network between various authorities and institutions. Romania and Bulgaria also identified a need for technical equipment for public information units of the ministry and local environmental authorities.

28. Lack of detailed provisions regulating public participation procedure in various decision-making processes and lack of trained personnel to facilitate public participation remain among the main obstacles in the EECCA region. This relates particularly to participation in early stages of the decision-making process, availability of guidance and skill to properly identify and

address the public concerned or to ensure due account of public comments, and so on. The problems are not exclusive to the EECCA region. In Romania, for example further legislative work might be organized to synchronize procedures laid down in sectoral legislation with the procedural requirements of the environmental decision-making process (e.g. providing adequate time for consultation in environmental assessment procedures). Further work, including training of relevant officials, might also be required here to ensure that public comments are properly taken into account as well as to promote public awareness of and trust in the commenting procedures. Romanian and Bulgarian respondents to the questionnaire emphasized the need for capacity-building on organization of public consultations and hearings, while Malta considered that its planning legislation might require changes to ensure proper public participation procedures.

C. Access to justice

29. UNEP reported that it was finalizing a series of environmental law training materials for the judiciary in the context of the Global Judges Programme. The materials included a manual and a handbook on environmental law, a Legal Drafters Handbook on specific topics, two collections of texts of selected documents on international environmental law and a compendium of summaries of judgments in environment-related cases from around the world. The materials covered some issues relevant to access-to-justice provisions of the Convention. UNEP was also planning to organize training in environmental law for judges and legal professionals in the SEE region. The training was expected to have a component on implementation of article 9 of the Aarhus Convention.

30. The Council of Europe (CoE) jointly with the European Community was implementing a programme on judicial reform in EECCA and SEE. It was particularly involved in facilitating the establishment and operation of the Judicial Training Centres (JTCs). This was helping to put the training of judges and prosecutors in the region on a more sustainable basis. Several countries, such as Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine, had developed legal frameworks for JTCs or had already established JTCs. The CoE also carried out training for judges, prosecutors, court administration officials, bailiffs and lawyers on implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The training included a component on article 6 of the ECHR (due process) that had direct relevance to implementation of article 9 of the Aarhus Convention, *inter alia*, with regard to issues of costs and length of review procedures. The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPJ) of the Directorate General on Legal Affairs of the CoE had carried out an evaluation of the judicial systems in the CoE Member States. The report contained a number of facts and figures on problem areas, including legal aid, implementation of article 6 of ECHR, alternative dispute resolution and training for judges). The complete report was available from http://www.coe.int/t/dg1/legalcooperation/cepej/evaluation/2006/CEPEJ_2006_eng.pdf and a summary could be found at http://www.coe.int/t/dg1/legalcooperation/cepej/evaluation/2006/Report2006resume_en.pdf.

31. The European Community intended to carry out an inventory of the 25 EU Member States' legislation implementing the third pillar of the Aarhus Convention, and in particular Article 9, paragraph 3. This inventory was due to be finalized in mid-2007.

32. In the course of REC's project on implementation of the Convention in SEE (see para. 13), the Handbook on Access to Justice prepared by it within the framework on the Task Force on Access to Justice in 2003 had been translated into the local language in Montenegro. The translated version was available in electronic form. In addition, the REC in cooperation with the School of Magistrates in Albania had organized a seminar for judges and prosecutors on access to justice.

33. The REC in cooperation with the Austrian Society for Environment and Technology had implemented a project on environmental mediation as a tool for public participation and conflict resolution. Within the project funded by Austria, Finland and Germany, 10 case studies from the CEE region and six from Austria and Germany had been collected, described and analysed. The analysis covered key findings, lessons learned and recommendations for mediation and other conflict resolution processes. A workshop had been organized on 22–23 January 2007 in Budapest as a forum for exchange of experience. It had provided a good overview of the benefits, principles and practices of using environmental mediation procedures for conflict resolution and had led to the establishment of a network of experts on environmental mediation. Further information on the project was available at www.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/mediation/default.html.

34. CAREC in cooperation with UNDP had prepared Guidelines on Access to Justice for Kyrgyz NGOs and had carried out a corresponding training in Kyrgyzstan. It was planning to prepare similar guidelines in all the countries of Central Asia. CAREC's project on local environmental action plans in the subregion also provided for practical experience of public participation in planning.

35. European ECO-Forum had organized a training event on access to justice for EECCA NGOs. It had established a permanent expert group of environmental lawyers to assist relevant activities of NGOs throughout the UNECE region. A compilation of cases and information on access to justice was being prepared in advance of the next meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice.

36. UNECE in its capacity of the secretariat of the Convention was involved in preparations for the workshops on access to justice for the judiciary. The Task Force on Access to Justice had mandated the Chair to further explore the possibilities and develop a proposal for organizing capacity-building activities, in particular for the higher levels of the judiciary and initially focusing primarily on the subregional level, which could be organized under the auspices of the Task Force and/or in cooperation with other actors. Pursuant to this mandate, the Chair had developed a proposal, subsequently supported by the members of the Task Force, which envisaged the organization, with the support of the secretariat, of two workshops for the higher levels of the judiciary. One workshop would be organized in the Eastern Europe and South Caucasus subregion in the first half of 2007 and the second workshop would be held in Central Asia in the first half of 2008 within the framework of the TACIS project on the Aarhus Convention (see para. 12 above). In this regard, the involvement of judges from the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment was seen as an important aspect of the preparation of the workshops. Involvement of institutions such as JTCs supported by the CoE was also seen as very useful, as was the use of some of the materials prepared by UNEP in the context of its Global Judges Programme (see para. 29). To ensure synergies with the latter process, both the

secretariat and the Chair of the Task Force had attended a meeting of UNEP's advisory panel of senior judges in June 2006 in Geneva, at which the draft materials had been discussed. Further discussions were also being held with UNEP about the planned training for judges and legal professionals in SEE (see para. 29).

37. Unlike activities to support implementation of the first two pillars of the Convention, capacity-building activities focused on access to justice have not been extensive. At the same time, implementation of access to justice provisions remains the most problematic area of implementation under the Convention throughout the UNECE region. Awareness among the judiciary of the requirements and standards introduced by the Convention and the implementing legislation is of primary importance. Constraints related to the abilities of members of the public to exercise their rights under article 9 also continue to pose significant problems. Limited availability of legal aid for public interest litigation, lack of training and financial support for public interest lawyers and the overall issue of costs associated with litigation are among some of the main concerns identified by the Parties, civil society and experts. While training events planned under the Task Force on Access to Justice will help to address the problem, more focused national-level capacity-building efforts are needed to raise awareness among members of the judiciary and other legal professionals, including prosecutors and attorneys. The role of and support for existing institutions like the Judicial Training Centers and Magistrate Schools can be particularly important in this regard. A more strategic approach to the establishment and support of environmental advocacies in the region might also be required to at least partially address the issue of costs associated with access to justice.

III. LESSONS LEARNED IN IMPLEMENTATION OF CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

38. While the region has seen notable progress has been made in increasing capacities to implement the Convention, some of the capacity constraints identified in earlier studies remain. The overall lack of awareness both among public authorities and among the public remains the most commonly identified problem in implementation across the region. Other problems relate to the need for targeted training of officials of environmental and sectoral agencies and the need to build public trust in the effectiveness of domestic public participation and access to justice tools and mechanisms.

39. There are still a significant number of activities that facilitate and promote implementation of the Convention in the region, but the last several years the number of activities focused on the Convention itself seems to have decreased. Instead the elements promoting implementation of the Convention's provisions and those of the corresponding domestic legislation tend to be integrated into projects and activities addressing broader environmental management issues. While this is an excellent way to promote synergies and reach out to sectoral institutions as well as to promote application of the Convention's principles, it is important that the Convention's focal points and other experts be actively involved in design and implementation of such activities. Involvement of sectoral institutions in implementation of any activities focused on the Convention also remains very important.

40. While in the EECCA and SEE regions the majority of projects and activities continue to be implemented by international organizations or with their financial support, there is an increase in the activities funded and implemented by the Parties themselves. Such activities can result in a stronger feeling of ownership, greater sustainability of outcomes and a better chance of follow-up.

41. International programmes like the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme in SEE, while implemented and funded with the assistance of the international community, provide more opportunities for the Parties to express their preferences, request particular activities and in general to have a greater impact on the design and implementation of the projects.

42. Many of the projects implemented in the past have carried out assessments of legislation and practical arrangements (e.g. the TACIS project on Environmental Information, Education and Public Awareness implemented in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus countries in 2002–2004, several REC projects on implementation of the Convention in SEE implemented in 2000–2006, UNITAR/UNECE National Profiles projects (see para. 5), current assessment implemented by the Aarhus Centre in Georgia). These assessments are still relevant and useful. Where new projects are being developed for these countries, it is important that they build on the information available and focus more on addressing legislative and other gaps by, for example, facilitating the development of a comprehensive set of regulations or the design of inter-agency information systems.

43. Parties and other stakeholders often express a preference for projects that have a clearly defined follow-up. For example, where a project supports development of new legal acts or administrative regulations, it should include a clear implementation plan, budget and timeline.

44. Many of those who responded to the questionnaires have noted a need for training officials. At the same time, some have emphasized that projects based solely on ad hoc training were not particularly useful and tended not to produce lasting results. A more comprehensive approach integrating training into practical activities (e.g. a specific decision-making or monitoring procedure), or where a training component is designed for an existing governmental capacity-building institution or programme, is usually found to be more useful.

45. Other criteria of project success identified by those who responded to the questionnaire included projects that incorporate a participatory approach and multi-stakeholder involvement; projects that are designed by their beneficiaries, have built-in flexibility and do not prescribe one or another approach from the outside; and those that provide a choice of practical examples and case studies from other countries and regions.

IV. INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION ON CAPACITY-BUILDING INTO THE CLEARINGHOUSE

46. The secretariat described progress made in integrating information on capacity-building into the clearinghouse mechanism. A new interface of the Clearinghouse, to be launched in May 2007, had been developed. The Clearinghouse would henceforth include detailed information on achievements and capacity constraints in Parties' implementation based on the data provided in

the national implementation reports. The new interface would also allow information on capacity-building needs, ongoing and planned projects, available materials, experts and other resources to be reflected.

V. FURTHER WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CAPACITY-BUILDING FRAMEWORK

47. Participants at the meeting on capacity-building organized by the secretariat in December 2006 discussed the need for future such meetings. It was generally agreed that, notwithstanding the recent and anticipated improvements in the electronic presentation of information on capacity-building activities, the meetings provided a useful venue for multilateral exchange of information and opportunities for bilateral contacts and discussions which would continue to provide added value. As regards the frequency of meetings, the participants expressed their wish to continue holding such meetings annually. It was agreed that the next meeting would be organized in autumn 2007 with a view to providing input into the relevant agenda items of the third meeting of the Parties to the Convention to be held in June 2008 in Latvia.
