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Funds Crunch Skews Aichi Targets on Biodiversity

By Keya Acharya

HYDERABAD, India, Oct 9 2012 (IPS) - The United Nations 11th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (COP 11 CBD), underway in this southern Indian city, is lost on where to garner the billions of dollars needed to implement the 'Aichi targets,' due to be met by 2020.

"Decisions made here will lay the foundation for achieving the Aichi targets," said India's minister for environment and president of COP 11, Jayanthi Natarajan. "Expenditure on biodiversity needs to be looked at as investments that will reap benefits for us and our future generations," she cajoled delegates at the start of the 11-day (Oct. 8-19) conference.

But the executive secretary of the CBD, Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, admitted to IPS, prior to the opening on Monday, that finding the money to keep biodiversity issues at the centre of development was not going to be easy.

"All CBD nations, however, have agreed that to meet Aichi targets. We need to change existing structures," Dias told IPS. "There is a need for other sectors, such as health, to be linked to the financing process. I don't expect only environmental agencies to pay this bill."

The Aichi targets, now standing at a steep and seemingly impossible gradient, range from tackling awareness of biodiversity, loss of habitats, alien invasive species, sustainable use of fisheries, ecosystems and agriculture to access and benefit-sharing with indigenous and local communities.

More than 170 countries are represented at the Hyderabad deliberations on the CBD, begun at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and now with 193 parties ratifying.

CBD seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats to climate change, through scientific assessments, development of tools and transfer of technologies amongst other clauses.

The CBD's Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is a subsidiary agreement to protect biological diversity from potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 163 nations have ratified the Cartagena Protocol.

But the CBD's Nagoya Protocol – that asked for commitments on access and benefit-sharing amongst local communities, and is principal to achieving the Aichi targets – has only 17 ratifications against the 50 needed to make the protocol a legal commitment.

Disagreements over how genetic resources and traditional knowledge should be shared led to the 2010 Nagoya Protocol, which CBD members are pledged to incorporate into their national laws that govern biodiversity.

The U.N. Millennium Development Goals separately call for "significant reduction" in biodiversity loss – but even these are likely to be missed.

Dias says new financial mechanisms will look at changing current funding that has destructive trade-offs for biodiversity, make efforts to make business more responsible and engage with the private sector. They will involve state and local governments in all nations.

Pavan Sukhdev, who chairs CBD's new 'High Level Panel on Global Assessment of Resources for implementing the Strategic Plan' till 2020, says at least 70 percent of all finances required are investments rather than expenditure.

An amount of 130 billion dollars in 2013 will stretch to 430 billion dollars as resources needed by 2020 to achieve these targets, but over two-thirds of this will be investments while a third will be recurring maintenance expenditure, according to Sukhdev.

"Achieving one target will invariably have an impact on other targets as well. For instance, financing forest conservation will have a natural impact on the Aichi targets in water," Sukhdev said.

The 'Working Group 2' here at the COP11 has had over 70 interventions from various countries, discussing ways and means to finance biodiversity conservation.

"We have inherited, from COP 10, the need for resource mobilisation as the most imperative of needs," said Indian official delegate Hem Pande at the meeting. "We have to agree on some targets and commitments, or else we will be faced with collective failure."

The European Union, while outlining its proactive stance on biodiversity conservation financing, reiterated the imperative to look at new sources of funding, not least from the 'green economy' sector.

The green economy, commonly associated with The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), established by the G8 and developing country environment ministers, looks to take natural capital into account.

India is one of the first countries to start a TEEB programme within its environmental policies.

TEEB, however has been controversial among civil society sectors which say corporatisation of natural resources cannot be condoned, especially at the cost of local communities that conserve these resources.

The chairman of India's National Biodiversity Authority, Balakrishna Pisupati, told IPS that local communities should be involved in the TEEB process since most have innovative ways of earning livelihoods while conserving biodiversity.