

Agenda item 12.4

Strategy for improving the status and resourcing of the Small Grants Fund

Action requested: It is suggested that the Subgroup on Finance and the Standing Committee brainstorm this issue with a view to providing the Secretariat with more ideas to research and use to prepare a more detailed paper to be circulated out of session later in the year and finalized for SC35.

Issues:

1. COP9 in Resolution IX.13 urged the Standing Committee, with the assistance of the Ramsar Secretariat, to actively pursue alternative funding mechanisms to resource the SGF and specifically instructed the Secretary General to propose to Standing Committee at its 34th meeting strategies for improving the status and resourcing of the SGF, with a particular focus on ensuring that dedicated sources of funding similar to “Wetlands for the Future” are developed for developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
2. COP9 also requested the Standing Committee to bring to COP10 new proposals for establishing a more vigorous mechanism to support the SGF, including the possible development of regional support funds.
3. The short time between COP9 and SC 34 has not allowed for a full and proper examination of options, although our experience is clear – the funding is simply not available in significant amounts through traditional channels to support a significant SGF fund. We therefore need some new perspectives, new avenues for possible funding support..
4. It is true that we have now better access to the GEF, and it is also true that our IOPs are becoming more successful in obtaining significant funding to assist in-country implementation of the convention. And regionally the MedWet Coordination unit has also been highly successful in obtaining funds for implementing the Convention.
5. Against this background we remain depauperate in the Small Grants Fund, which all acknowledge is a very special and helpful aspect of our convention. The Wetlands for the Future programme for the Americas and the Swiss Grant for Africa provide some regional support, but Asia and Oceania have no such special funds, nor Europe. As document SC34-15 notes there is some small promise of funding as part of the Danone funding for the Convention, traditionally more restricted to communication/outreach issues.

6. Support from the private sector is a possible way to go, but this also means continued monitoring and surveillance of the source, and is less permanent than traditional donor funds (although we should note the Groupe Danone has funded the Convention consistently for eight years, and has expressed its intention to so continue).
7. The situation remains largely unchanged therefore from six years ago, when the idea of a large funding support for the Convention was being explored, and 10 years ago when there was a suggestion to develop a special fund around the 25th anniversary of the Convention. Other conventions have different funding sources, including direct access to GEF or funding provided for specific purposes, such as the World Heritage in Danger funding. The UNCCD has attempted to develop a source of funding for itself, with some success, but the parallels between the two conventions are not significant.
8. Given the record, it is suggested FSG and SC initiate a general brainstorming discussion, and the Secretariat attempt to follow through with results from this discussion, drawing also on the proposals in SC34-15. As a follow-up, a paper should be circulated out of session to SC members in September 2006 for further reflection and comment, prior to a more substantive paper being prepared for SC35, as part of the deliberations for preparations for COP10.