CITES and Livelihoods

CoP14 Doc.14 (Argentina, China, Germany, on behalf of the European Community Member States, and Nicaragua) on CITES and livelihoods

SSN VIEW: OPPOSE CoP14 Doc. 14

Effect of Document

CoP14 Doc. 14 includes one draft Decision that directs the Standing Committee to initiate processes to:

• develop, by CoP15, tools for rapid assessment at the national level of the impacts of CITES trade regulation on human well-being and the livelihoods of the poor.
• develop, by CoP15, draft guidelines for Parties on how to consider the impacts on the livelihoods of the poor, particularly in developing countries, when implementing CITES. These should incorporate, where appropriate, the findings of a Secretariat assessment.

A second draft Decision directs the Secretariat to:

• provide an assessment to the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC) of the “ways in which the implementation of CITES processes and measures has taken, or could take, place in ways that consider and positively address likely negative impacts on the livelihoods of the poor, particularly those in developing countries”; and indicate positive processes available to address such impacts in a way which reduces and if possible removes those impacts to support human well-being and livelihoods. Processes including the significant trade review and its evaluation and wildlife trade policy reviews should be assessed.

Reasons to Oppose CoP14, Doc. 14

Not Central to CITES Objective

• The objective of CITES, as set out in the preamble to the Convention, is “the protection of certain species of wild fauna and flora against over-exploitation through international trade”. While CITES Parties have recognized “that implementation of CITES-listing decisions should take into account potential impacts on the livelihoods of the poor”(RC 8.3 (Rev. CoP13)), this should remain a tangential issue that is taken into account, on a voluntary basis, by Parties when implementing CITES at the national level.
• Unfortunately, CITES is poorly implemented and enforced by many Parties. Many CITES-listed species continue to be threatened by illegal or poorly-regulated international commercial trade. As of October 2006, over 50% of Parties still lacked adequate CITES implementing legislation (SC54 Doc. 36 Annex). Funds and capacity to address CITES issues are limited, especially in developing countries. We believe, therefore, that CITES must make implementation and enforcement of the Convention its top priority. In our view, the outcome of these draft Decisions will not only be impossible to implement under the conditions that exist in most CITES Parties, they will serve to complicate and undermine implementation and enforcement.
• CITES regulates international trade in species but has no mandate to regulate the distribution of benefits of such trade. Moreover, CITES does not have the capacity or expertise to address “human well-being and the livelihoods of the poor”. Many social, cultural and economic factors, as well as issues of good governance, need to be considered when evaluating such issues. CITES Parties could spend considerable time and funds debating what negatively affects “human well-being and the livelihoods of the poor” without ever reaching a consensus. That is an evaluation best left to each Party to solve as part of its broader socioeconomic and development policies; at best, CITES can assist Parties in ensuring that these national policies take the goals of CITES into account.
• The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the appropriate forum to address biological diversity and livelihoods of the poor. The issue is central to CBD’s objectives and has been capably addressed by that Convention for many years. The CBD has the capacity, expertise and financial and political support to do so, while CITES does not.

Subjugates CITES Objectives to Human Well-Being and Livelihoods of the Poor

• CITES has protected taxa against over-exploitation through international trade by reducing or stopping the trade when warranted and after analysis of scientific information on the impact of trade on wild populations. Obviously, any regulation of trade will have economic consequences and may affect livelihoods of people involved in the trade either negatively or positively.
• The draft Decision directed to the Secretariat could result in restricting the scope and undermining the effectiveness of CITES processes, such as the Significant Trade Review, by subjugating these processes to socioeconomic considerations. Moreover, differing socioeconomic conditions from country to country would lead to varying standards of CITES implementation which would weaken efforts to ensure that objective, science-based non-detriment findings are made for species in trade.
• While Resolution Conf. 8.3 (Rev. CoP13) recognizes that “implementation of CITES-listing decisions” should take into account potential impacts on the livelihoods of the poor, the draft Decision directed to the SC refers to the impacts of “CITES trade regulation”, which was not the original intention. The effect may be that, in the future, proposals to amend the CITES Appendices would be subjected to a “human-well being and livelihoods of the poor impact assessment”. This could inhibit Parties from submitting listing proposals, and may, in effect, be regarded as an informal listing criterion, thus undermining RC 9.24 (Rev. CoP13).

Negative Bias

• The draft Decision directed to the Secretariat calls for the assessment of the ways in which CITES could address “likely negative impacts of CITES on the livelihoods of the poor”. This language implies that CITES generally has a negative impact on livelihoods of the poor—a suggestion which, in and of itself, brings the Convention into disrepute and reflects a misunderstanding of how wildlife is utilized by the poor. CITES protection of wildlife from over-exploitation provides direct and positive contributions to the livelihoods of poor people who often are directly dependent on the conservation of natural resources.

Conclusion

• CoP14 Doc. 14 should be rejected because it only serves to undermine the core purpose of CITES as well as important on-going processes that enhance the effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention. Parties may already take into account human well-being and livelihoods of the poor as part of their broad conservation and socioeconomic planning at the national level. The use of any such measures should continue to be voluntary (as recommended by the CITES and Livelihoods Workshop). CITES has already recognized “that implementation of CITES-listing decisions should take into account potential impacts on the livelihoods of the poor”(RC 8.3 (Rev. CoP13)) and should not elaborate further on this complex issue which is already being addressed in other more relevant fora.