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Working in the UNFCCC Secretariat

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I. The structure of the UNFCCC negotiations

The UNFCCC was created at the Rio Convention in 1992 along with two other sister environmental conventions. Secretariat of the UNFCCC facilitates international climate change negotiations, houses discussions on ways to effectively implement the Convention, and provides a venue where Parties and stakeholders can come together and further explore ways to effectively solve the problems generated by climate change.

The work of UNFCCC Secretariat can be best understood by two pivotal events: the meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which usually takes place in November/December, and the May/June session of Subsidiary Body meetings. Parties to the Convention meet annually at the Conference of the Parties to negotiate ways to fully implement the international treaty. Decision texts are drafted towards the end of the talks, and these texts often contain work plans to be implemented and/or outline further issues to be explored or negotiated. Many of these results are then transferred to the Subsidiary Bodies of the Convention for actual implementation with the help of the Secretariat, or for further negotiation on the details. The Subsidiary Body discusses the transferred agendas in a more in-depth and practicable manner, and they produce draft conclusions which are then brought back to the Conference of Parties for review and further guidance. This cyclical process between the Conference of the Parties and the Subsidiary Bodies forms the basic structure of the climate change negotiation process.

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In parallel with this cyclical process, there are currently three ad hoc working groups under the Convention, namely the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA), the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP). These ad hoc working groups are “ad hoc” in that they all have specific purpose to achieve and a limited lifespan.

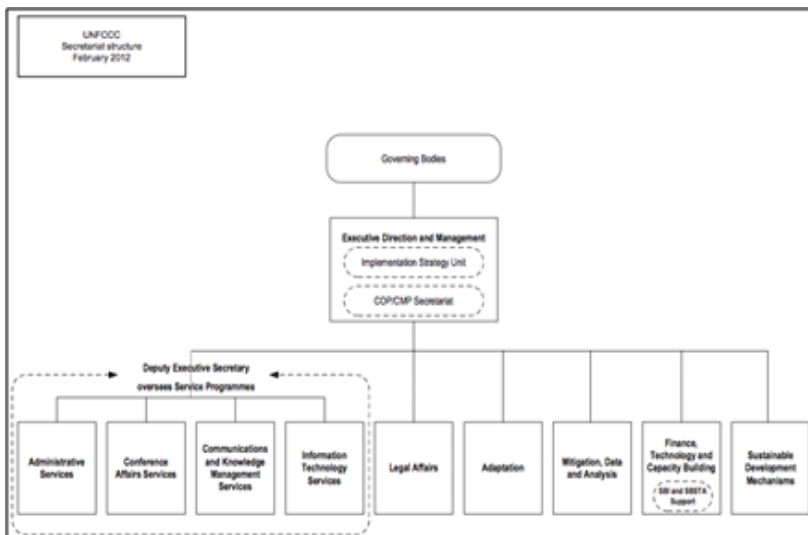
The AWG-LCA was established at the Conference of the Parties held in Bali in 2007, and its goal is to conduct a comprehensive process to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action up to and beyond 2012 (The original deadline for this ad hoc group was in 2010, but it was extended twice to finish its work by this year). The goal of AWG-KP until 2011 was to decide what to do when its first commitment period expires in 2012, but as Parties agreed in Durban to continue the Kyoto Protocol into a second commitment period starting from 2013, the remaining goal of the AWG-KP is to determine the quantified emission reduction targets of the Annex I countries for the second round of the Protocol. The main goal of ADP is to adopt a legal agreement that is applicable to all Parties on climate change as soon as possible and no later than 2015. The three ad hoc working groups hold negotiation meetings in parallel with the Conference of the Parties and the Subsidiary Body meetings, and they will be terminated once their goals are accomplished. It is expected this year that the AWG-LCA and AWG-KP will both be terminated and the discussions within those two tracks will be merged into ADP, looking further ahead towards 2020 and beyond.

II. The UNFCCC Secretariat and its work

Located along the Rhein River of Bonn, Germany, the UNFCCC Secretariat is accommodated by a castle named Haus Carstenjen (renowned as the venue where the Marshall Plan was signed) and three adjacent buildings that house approximately 500

staff members. Since it is a Secretariat that supports an international convention, it does not have any regional offices elsewhere outside Bonn. The city of Bonn, which used to be the capital of West Germany, hosts many other UN agencies in its UN Campus, including the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The UNFCCC and its negotiation meetings deal with several agendas that are related to adaptation, mitigation, finance, technology, and capacity building. The UNFCCC Secretariat is organized in a fashion to best support the negotiation and implementation of each respective topic, and each programme of the Secretariat (i.e. the equivalent of department in firms) is designed to best meet such needs. (Figure 2). Monthly work of each programme is planned according to the timeline of major negotiation meetings in June and December. The work includes supporting the Parties in implementing the decisions through the launching of various committee meetings and the drafting of conference documents and papers.



[Figure. 1 The structure of UNFCCC Secretariat (<http://unfccc.int>)]

The UNFCCC Secretariat requires its staff to have a wide-angle perspective on issues with an analytical touch because of its international nature of work. Unlike

country-based UN agencies which usually focus on a specific country's policies or its regional surroundings, the UNFCCC Secretariat focuses more on the global scale of policies since it has to facilitate international negotiations amongst all the Parties to the Convention. The UNFCCC is a large environmental convention with 194 Parties, and it hosts numerous conferences throughout the year with in which states and other actors from all over the world participate in. Parties to the Convention conduct bilateral and multilateral negotiations via their delegations made up of diplomats and climate change experts. After the negotiation is completed at the technical negotiators' level, the ministerial segments of the negotiation are taken care of to hammer out the political issues at stake. Such working modality and process is rather similar to the working atmosphere of the Secretariat of the UN headquarters in New York where the staff support the General Assembly with universal participation of all member states.

The Secretariat staff are thus required to have a profound understanding of the negotiating stance of the regional groups and Parties, how each agenda item under the Convention is interlinked with another, and how the ongoing discussion will affect the UNFCCC's programmes. The innate complexity of each agenda item of the annual Climate Change Conference and the exhaustive list of agendas make the job sound daunting – yet they are the inevitable challenges that one has to overcome in order to be a competitive UN officer. As such a UNFCCC Secretariat staff is required of such competency to be able to balance the different views of the Parties and to facilitate sensitive negotiations.

III. Work of the finance team in 2012 (The Standing Committee)

The Standing Committee is a thematic body under the Convention that is composed of twenty climate finance experts. The Committee was created by the Cancun decision in 2010 to assist the Conference of the Parties in exercising its functions in relation to the financial mechanism of the Convention. There are four functions of the Standing Committee: improving coherence and coordination in the delivery of climate change

financing; rationalization of the financial mechanism; mobilization of financial resources and measurement; and reporting and verification of support provided to developing country Parties. In order to achieve these four functions, the Conference of Parties mandated the committee with six related activities in 2011, and the Committee has set sail for the very first time in 2012. Before the creation of this committee, the issues of financial mechanism of the climate change convention had been dispersed across the agendas of the Subsidiary Bodies and the Conference of the Parties, which made it harder to achieve coherence and coordination. The Committee was thus created to enhance these two important aspects. All finance related matters under the Convention are now dealt singlehandedly under one thematic body composed of climate finance experts.

The Durban decision stated that the Committee should have its first meeting before May 2012, but it held its first meeting in September because of delayed nomination of its members. After its second meeting held in Cape Town in October, the Committee will initiate the process to prepare its report to the Conference of the Parties in Doha, Qatar. The finance team of the UNFCCC Secretariat has been working around the clock to support this Committee by preparing the necessary meeting documents, facilitating the communication between the committee members, arranging the draft rules and procedures of the committee and arranging the host country agreements where the meetings will be held. Once the Committee's report is submitted to the Conference of the Parties, the Parties will be asked to adopt the recommendations of the report and endorse its draft work programme which outlines its work plan for the period before 2015.

IV. Work of the finance team in 2012 (The Long-term Finance Work Programme)

Another major workstream of the team is related to the long-term finance work programme, which has been carried out since 2012. According to Cancun decision the

developed countries should be committed to the goal of jointly mobilizing 100 billion USD per year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries. To achieve this goal, the Parties decided in Durban to undertake a work programme on long-term finance in 2012 in order to make progress on long-term finance. This work programme was established because although the developed countries are willing to mobilize large amounts of financial resources to support the developing countries, there is no clear roadmap on how to do so. As a result, the Parties decided to establish the one year work programme under the Convention to conduct research and to contribute to the on-going efforts to scale up the mobilization of climate change finance. The work programme is coordinated by two co-chairs- one from a developing country and another on from a developed country- and it is made up of various activities including two international workshops, online discussions via e-forum and multiple rounds of online seminars with climate change expert panelists. The results of this work programme will be included in the co-chairs' report on the workshop of the long-term finance work programme, and the report will be presented to the Conference of Parties in Doha, Qatar. The finance team of the UNFCCC Secretariat has been supporting the co-chairs of the work programme by arranging large-scale international workshops on long-term finance, reviewing literatures on climate finance mobilization and supporting the technical aspects of other various activities related to the work programme. Based on this report, the Parties will discuss ways to mobilize 100 billion USD by 2020.

V. Moving towards Doha

The Secretariat is now gearing itself towards the climate change conference to be held in Doha next month. Although the negotiating process is expected to be complicated and challenging, it is the pride and responsibility that motivates the UN staffs in the Secretariat to advance forward to face the challenge. Even in an era when UN-based multilateralism is under fire, the staff of the UNFCCC Secretariat nevertheless continue to prepare for the difficult negotiation meeting so that it will bring good changes to our climate and world for good.