



**CONVENTION ON
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CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Fifth meeting
Nairobi, 15-26 May 2000
Item 19 of the provisional agenda*

COOPERATION WITH THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION FACILITY
(GBIF) AND THE MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION FACILITY

1. In its recommendation V/1, on cooperation with other bodies, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technical Advice (SBSTTA), took note of the prospective Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), encouraged its development in conformity with the Convention, and invited it to include as many countries as possible in its development and implementation. SBSTTA also requested the Executive Secretary, in consultation with its Bureau, to identify with the GBIF Interim Steering Committee arrangements for cooperation between the Convention and the Facility, and mechanisms to involve countries that are not currently participating in the elaboration and implementation of the GBIF project, and to inform the Conference of the Parties at its next meeting on the outcome of these discussions.
2. During the discussion on the GBIF at the fifth meeting of SBSTTA, emphasis was laid on the role of the Facility in relation to the clearing-house mechanism under the Convention, and the need to focus strongly on accelerating the Global Taxonomy Initiative.
3. The present note contains the results of the discussions held between the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Interim Steering Committee of the GBIF on the occasion of the most recent meeting of the Steering Committee, held from 12 to 14 February 2000 in Arlington, Virginia, United States of America.
4. In order to promote the involvement of countries that are not currently participating in the elaboration and implementation of the GBIF - project, it was agreed that the Interim Steering Committee should:
 - (a) Slow down the process of the GBIF for two additional months (in order to accommodate the request of SBSTTA at its fifth meeting) to allow time for the involvement of as many countries as possible, in particular developing countries, in the development and implementation of the Facility;

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(b) Invite SBSTTA Bureau members to participate in the final Steering Committee meeting, in September 2000, to allow for a regionally balanced involvement in the development of the GBIF;

(c) Redraft the Implementation Agreement into a non-binding memorandum of understanding to reflect the comments received and the recommendations given by of the fifth meeting of SBSTTA and to send a letter to all Governments to request comments on the draft final memorandum;

(d) Lower the cut-off for membership contributions to \$500 per annum and per participant. All participating and paying members in the GBIF have voting rights in the GBIF Governing Board;

(e) To include a representative from GBIF in the proposed coordination mechanism of the Global Taxonomy Initiative.

5. With regard to cooperation arrangements between the Convention and the Facility, it was agreed that:

(a) GBIF will open its World Wide Web page for comments by countries by March 2000 and will propose to organize 3-4 side-events at the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to enhance awareness of its objectives;

(b) The Chair of the Interim Steering Committee will keep the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity informed about the steps to be taken to accommodate the recommendations of SBSTTA at its fifth meeting and their results;

(c) Further discussions will take place toward more formal cooperation arrangements after the entry into force of the GBIF;

(d) The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity will have a (non-voting) seat in the GBIF Governing Board.

(e) The next meeting is planned for late September 2000.

6. The Executive Secretary submitted a draft of the present note to the SBSTTA Bureau, together with a copy of the letter sent by the Chair of the GBIF Interim Steering Committee in order to request the Bureau to assess the appropriateness of the measures proposed by the GBIF Interim Steering Committee.

II. MILLENIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

7. In paragraph 1 of its recommendation V/1, SBSTTA requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, to explore with the Interim Steering Committee of the Millennium Assessment and other relevant conventions and organizations, ways and means of collaborating in undertaking the proposed Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and to inform the Conference of Parties at its fifth meeting on the outcome of these discussions. By this recommendation, SBSTTA also recommended that the Conference of the Parties note the proposed Millennium Assessment, taking into account and making use of the Global Biodiversity Assessment, and consider follow-up action based on the outcome of the consultations of the Executive Secretary with the Interim Steering Committee of the Millennium Assessment.

8. The recommended consultation between the Executive Secretary and the Interim Steering Committee took place on 18 April 2000. There follows a brief report on the discussions and the outcome of the consultation.

Institutional arrangements

9. All participants noted that the specific institutional arrangements for collaboration between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the proposed Millennium Assessment will depend on the outcome of the consideration by the Conference of the Parties of the operations of the Convention (item 19 of the provisional agenda). Participants in the meeting discussed the desirability that the Millennium Assessment be undertaken as a "joint assessment" involving the Convention, other ecosystem-related conventions (such as the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar) and the Convention to Combat Desertification) and other key users. The institutional arrangements must thus ensure "ownership" of the Millennium Assessment by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as by the contracting parties to the other relevant conventions.

10. Depending on the outcome of the consideration by the Conference of the Parties of the operations of the Convention, two possible institutional arrangements were considered in some detail as properly promoting cooperation. First, the Conference of the Parties could endorse the establishment of the Millennium Assessment as a technical experts working group established jointly with other conventions and key users. Second, if the Conference of the Parties decides to establish a Scientific Assessments Panel on Biological Diversity under the auspices of SBSTTA as described in the note by the Executive Secretary on the operations of the Convention UNEP/CBD/COP/5/17, then the Conference of the Parties could decide that the working group established under that Scientific Assessments Panel to provide information on ecosystems would be the Millennium Assessment and would be established jointly with other conventions and key users.

Governance

11. In order to ensure effective communication of the information needs of the Parties to Convention and effective oversight of the Millennium Assessment process by the Convention, participants discussed the importance of representation from the Convention bodies on the Executive Committee of the Millennium Assessment Board. While the full Millennium Assessment Board will include representatives of other users of the findings of the Millennium Assessment and will meet only 3-4 times during the four-year process, the Executive Committee will meet every six months and include only the representatives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Chairs of the Millennium Assessment Board and Millennium Assessment Panel, and one "at-large" member from the Board.

12. At a minimum, participants in the meeting felt that the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Chair of the SBSTTA should represent the Convention on the Executive Committee and Board. Participants discussed the desirability of keeping the Executive Committee relatively small, but also noted the importance of effective representation of these Convention bodies on it.

Operations

13. For the Millennium Assessment to provide useful information to the Parties to the Convention, an effective mechanism must exist for the Parties to communicate their information needs to the Millennium Assessment

process and for the findings of the Millenium Assessment process to be communicated to the Convention bodies.

14. In order to ensure effective communication of information needs to the Millenium Assessment process, participants discussed the need for both initial input and for ongoing input during the course of the Assessment. Participants agreed that an effective way to ensure initial guidance would be for the Conference of the Parties to ask SBSTTA to hold a workshop at the outset of the Millenium Assessment process involving Parties to the Convention and the experts involved in the Millenium Assessment. The aim of this involvement would be to specify the types of information needed by the Parties. This workshop would also provide an opportunity to explore the overall scientific assessment needs of the Convention and which subset of those needs would be addressed by the Millenium Assessment. Additional formal guidance could be provided early in the process through discussions and decisions at the next meeting of SBSTTA.

15. Once the Millenium Assessment is under way, responding to this initial guidance from the Convention on Biological Diversity and the other conventions, it will be important for the Millenium Assessment to regularly report to SBSTTA on its activities and progress and for SBSTTA to provide additional guidance and direction as needed.

16. The means of transmission of the findings of the Millenium Assessment to the Convention bodies were discussed at length but will again depend in part on the outcome of the upcoming decisions by the Conference of the Parties regarding the operations of the Convention.
