

Global Strategy for Plant Conservation – Report of an Informal Consultation

11th March, 2001 - SCBD, Montreal

Introduction

1. The 5th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Nairobi in May 2000 addressed the issue of plant conservation and decided to consider the establishment of a global strategy for plant conservation at the 6th meeting in April 2002. Decision V/10 of the Conference of the Parties (COP) noted the importance of plants for humankind, the threats they are facing, and a recent call for the development of a global strategy for plant conservation contained within the Gran Canaria Declaration. The Decision also recognized that there are ongoing international initiatives that should contribute to developing such a strategy. It requests the Executive Secretary to liaise with these existing initiatives and requests the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) to examine the issue. SBSTTA will consider this issue at its 7th meeting to be held in November 2001.

2. In furtherance of Decision V/10 of the COP to the Convention on Biological Diversity to consider the possible establishment of a global strategy for plant conservation, an Informal Consultation was convened by the Executive Secretary in Montreal on 11 March 2001. The meeting was attended by representatives of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations of relevance to plant conservation.

Opening of the consultation and organizational matters

3. The meeting was opened by Hamdallah Zedan, CBD Executive Secretary, who expressed the hope that the meeting would help resolve how a Global Plant Conservation Strategy could complement and enhance on-going activities of the Convention and seek to determine not only what would be the precise elements of such a strategy but also how it could be coordinated. He suggested that if a Global Strategy could be created containing real targets and indicators that this would be a considerable achievement.

4. Cristián Samper, SBSTTA Chair, commented on the considerable value of bringing together the range of organizations and institutions represented at the meeting to co-operate closely towards the creation of a draft strategy over the coming months. He outlined the history of the initiative, arising as a result of a resolution of the 16th International Botanical Congress calling for plant conservation to be recognized as a global priority in biodiversity conservation. He noted that in April 2000 a high level ad hoc group representing key organizations and institutions active in plant conservation had met in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, to consider the need for the development of a global plant conservation strategy. He suggested that the aim of such a strategy would be to halt the current and continuing loss of plant diversity by supporting and facilitating appropriate plant conservation initiatives at all levels. The conclusions of this meeting were issued as the Gran Canaria Declaration (UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/32). He pointed out that following COP5, SBSTTA now has a mandate to consider this issue. He stressed that the development of the strategy was not intended to duplicate any existing initiatives in plant conservation but to complement such work and provide a broad framework to help ensure that such initiatives act in harmony, and to identify gaps where new initiatives are required and existing resources available.

5. Following these introductory remarks the participants introduced themselves and outlined their interest and involvement in the proposed Global Plant Conservation Strategy as well as their current activities of relevance to this process. A list of participants is attached as annex 2.

6. The agenda, attached as annex 1 was agreed. The meeting was chaired by David Cooper (CBD Secretariat).

Consideration of Submissions from Parties and Organizations

7. The meeting noted submissions and proposals made by a range of organizations, including the Gran Canaria Declaration, the Resolutions of the XVI International Botanical Congress (St Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., 1999), the resolutions of the World Botanic Gardens Congress (Asheville, North Carolina, U.S.A, 2000), the resolutions of the IUCN World Conservation Congress (Resolutions 25 and 68), (Amman, Jordan, 2000), a proposal from WWF, a submission from the SBSTTA focal point for New Zealand, and other submissions. A range of existing instruments, plans and programmes were also considered to identify elements for incorporation into a draft strategy and to highlight areas where sectoral co-operation could be enhanced by means of such a strategy. These included the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the FAO Global Plan of Action for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme, the Global Invasive Species Programme, the Plant Conservation Programme of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation, the WWF-UNESCO People and Plants Initiative, and others. It was noted that a European Strategy is being developed under the auspices of *Planta Europa*.

Discussion on the scope and structure of the proposed strategy

8. The meeting included a wide-ranging discussion on the scope and elements of the proposed strategy. Participants were in agreement of the need for the development of a Global Plant Conservation Strategy. They concluded that in order to stem the continued unacceptable loss of plant diversity worldwide it must be bold, imaginative, innovative, practical and flexible. It would draw upon existing initiatives and not seek to replace or duplicate them.

9. It was agreed that a strategy focusing on plant conservation is justified for the following reasons:

- (a) plants are primary producers and provide habitat infrastructure for many ecosystems;
- (b) setting meaningful targets is feasible since scientific understanding of at least higher plants, though incomplete, is better than for most other groups.

10. Participants agreed that the proposed strategy should include targets for plant conservation that are measurable, achievable and quantifiable. They would relate to ultimate outcomes of the strategy, such as the level of plant diversity documented and conserved, and thus they would be complementary to the existing targets set under the various work programmes of the CBD, which, generally, relate to products of the work programmes themselves. Such an approach might be a pilot for the Convention as a whole and would increase the usefulness of the proposed strategy to the Convention process. It was envisaged that, in due course, such targets developed under the Convention might be endorsed by the international community as a whole. (An analogy would be the International Development Targets which were developed by a series of UN conferences and subsequently endorsed by agencies and others.) It was agreed that the proposed strategy should have a 6 – 10 year timeframe.

11. The proposed strategy would address the Plant Kingdom. In practice, focus might be on Higher Plants and macro algae. The setting of measurable targets for this set of taxa is more credible than for many lower plant groups. There is also a rationale, which needs to be

further considered, to include possibly some obvious fungi (Basidiomycetes and Ascomycetes) and macrolichens. It was noted that for, e.g. Bryophytes, conservation is often met simply by habitat conservation, and that many algae are simply incompletely known taxonomically. This does not imply these groups do not have important ecological functions, but that effective action will be best achieved by focusing on achievable outcomes for known taxa.

12. It was agreed that the elements of a strategy outlined in the Gran Canaria Declaration and subsequently developed in a paper submitted for the Informal Consultation by Cristián Samper, Kerry ten Kate and Peter Wyse Jackson, provided a useful basis on which to determine the scope of the strategy. These elements included:

- Integrated *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation;
- Research, monitoring and management of information;
- Social and economic benefit of plant diversity; and
- Education and public awareness.

Additionally these papers addressed:

- Capacity building; and
- A mechanism or process to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the strategy.

13. The relative importance of ecosystem and species approaches to conservation and the integration of *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation were also considered. The meeting concluded that a strategy should be integrated and cross-cutting in nature, to facilitate, encourage and maximise a wide range of resources and approaches to plant conservation and to enhance synergies at all levels. The strategy should also be closely linked with the three objectives of the CBD: biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing. It would address plant conservation in an integrated way, broadly across landscapes both in and outside protected areas. Consistent with Article 9 of the Convention, *ex situ* measures would be predominately for the purpose of complementing *in situ* measures.

14. It was proposed that in its drafting, the proposed strategy should align its targets to relevant articles of the Convention and highlighting linkages with existing relevant CBD thematic and cross-cutting work programmes. The document submitted on behalf of WWF provided a useful structure in this regard. It was concluded that a number of decisions and work programmes of the CBD could contribute substantially to the strategy, and that relevant elements of these should be fully incorporated into the strategy.¹

15. The participants also noted the importance of integrating the plant conservation priorities, programmes, plans and instruments of other actors, such as those outlined in paragraph 7 above, into the possible strategy. The meeting concluded that all those involved in this initiative should help to ensure that wide understanding is promoted amongst the

¹ This includes CBD work programmes on:

- Global Taxonomy Initiative
- Agrobiodiversity
- Forest biological diversity
- Biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands
- Indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices
- Access to genetic resources and benefit sharing
- Alien invasive species
- Education and Public Awareness Initiative

Parties on the need for this strategy and how it would relate to the existing thematic and cross-cutting CBD work programmes.

16. Discussion focused on the need to ensure that the strategy would deliver practical conservation action at the local level and, for that reason, the participants considered the importance of ensuring that the strategy would encourage and support the inclusion of plant conservation priorities into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

17. It was also agreed that regional components of the strategy might be developed, perhaps using a biogeographical approach. In this respect the strategy under development for Europe, which includes clear targets, was noted as a possible model.

18. The need for a co-ordination and monitoring system or mechanism for the strategy was considered and it was agreed that this was an important area where further discussions would be necessary to explore possible options. Nevertheless it was agreed that a flexible mechanism should be developed to ensure that the strategy is closely coordinated with existing and new initiatives within and beyond the CBD.

Consideration of further steps in the development of the proposed strategy

19. The meeting concluded that there is a need for the preparation of a draft strategy document for consideration by SBSTTA 7 in November, 2001 and participants offered their support to the CBD Secretariat to help elaborate and draft this document. For this purpose, the participants agreed to continue to communicate, *inter alia* by email, to elaborate further the elements of the strategy and to help define its objectives, measurable targets and a proposed timeline.

20. It was agreed that if meaningful targets, as discussed in paragraph 10 above, were to be included in the draft strategy prepared for SBSTTA 7, early consideration would need to be given to their identification. While all participants agreed to address this matter, those participants who are also members of the Plant Conservation Programme of the IUCN Species Survival Commission agreed to take a lead and to report back to the group, so that such targets could be incorporated into the strategy.

21. Botanic Gardens Conservation International proposed to hold a 2nd meeting of the ad hoc Gran Canaria group at the Royal Society in London on 17-18 May, 2001, invited the participation of those bodies represented at the Informal Consultation, and noted that limited funds might be available to facilitate the participation of experts from developing countries. It was agreed that this meeting would provide a useful opportunity to elaborate the proposed strategy, and that the Secretariat would liaise with BGCI in this regard.

22. The participants also noted that other opportunities to discuss further the proposed strategy including:

- At the forthcoming conference of the International Association of Botanic Gardens in Cordoba, Spain in June 2000; and
- At the meeting of Planta Europa in the Czech Republic, in June 2000. (This might also provide an opportunity to align the proposed global strategy and the strategy being developed for Europe.)

23. It was agreed that a discussion note should be prepared, in light of the conclusions of this meeting, as a basis for soliciting further views from Parties and other stakeholders. This could be made available via the Clearing House Mechanism, and if possible, should be prepared in time for the proposed London meeting in May.

AGENDA

1- Welcome and Introductions (0900 – 0920)

Welcoming statement on behalf of the Executive Secretary, followed by self-introductions of participants

2- Background to the proposed Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (Decision V/10)

An outline of COP Decision V/10, which provides the mandate for this work, and of the purpose of the informal consultation.

3- Proposals for the Global Strategy and relevant resolutions of other organizations (0920 – 1100)

Introduction of the relevant proposals for the Global Strategy. These provide possible options for the structure and content of the proposed Strategy. They can be consulted via the CBD Website.

- (a) Gran Canaria Declaration
- (b) Resolution of the XVI International Botanical Congress, St. Louis, Missouri, USA, 1999
- (c) IUCN World Conservation Congress Resolutions 25 and 68
- (d) Planta Europa Resolution
- (e) Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (proposal from Gran Canaria Group **ABG**) |
- (f) WWF Proposal
- (g) Submissions from Parties
- (h) *Others/Questions*

4- Consideration of existing relevant instruments, plans and programmes: (1010 – 1030)

A brief overview of existing relevant instruments, plans and programmes. (Due to the short time available, there will not be an opportunity for individual presentations on each of these. Accordingly, Participants will be requested to familiarize themselves with the following before the meeting. They can be consulted via the CBD website)

- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
- International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources of the Food and Agriculture
- The FAO Global Plan of Action for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- The UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme
- The Global Invasive Species Programme
 - UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/6/INF/9: GISP strategy
- The Plant Conservation Programme of the IUCN Species Survival Commission
- Proposed Plant Conservation Strategies for Europe

- The International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation
- Others

(1030 –1045. Short break, Coffee available to bring back into the meeting room)

5- Discussion of possible elements of the Global Strategy. (1045 – 1210)

Amongst the possible points for discussion are the following:

- Options for the structure of the proposed Strategy;
- Possible Elements for the proposed Strategy;
- Activities (including consideration of relative importance of *in situ* and *ex situ* approaches);
- Actors (including consideration of the role of national/local and international levels);
- Ways and Means (including support for capacity building)
- Outputs and Timeframe:
- Links to existing relevant instruments, plans and programmes;

6- Conclusions of the informal consultation and follow-up actions. (1210- 1300)

6.1 Conclusions from item 5.

6.2 Agreement on follow-up actions, including the following possibilities:

- a summary of the main points from the informal consultation, and a renewed call for views from Parties, to be made available as an official notification through the CHM, and also through announcement by the ES/Chair at SBSTTA-6
- members of the informal consultation to constitute a reference group for the further elaboration of a draft proposed strategy

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