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Gaborone, 13-17 September 2004
Item 3.1 of the provisional agenda*

HARMONIZATION OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING FOR BIODIVERSITY-RELATED TREATIES

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the Regional Workshop for Africa on Synergy Among the Rio Conventions and Other Biodiversity-related Conventions in Implementing the Programmes of Work on Dry and Sub-humid Lands and Agricultural Biodiversity, the attached document entitled *Harmonization of Information Management and Reporting for Biodiversity-related Treaties*, prepared by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme.

2. The document is being issued in the form in which it was received by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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Harmonization of Information Management and Reporting for Biodiversity-related Treaties

Final report on UNEP pilot projects

Prepared by the

UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre

Cambridge, UK, July 2004

HARMONIZATION OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING FOR

BIODIVERSITY-RELATED TREATIES

Final report on UNEP pilot projects

This report summarises the results of national pilot projects that tested four different approaches to harmonization of reporting and information management for the biodiversity-related conventions: linking national reporting to the State of the Environment reporting process (Ghana); identifying common information modules and using this as a basis for developing a modular approach to national reporting (Indonesia); exploring potential regional support mechanisms for national information management and reporting (Panama); and assessing the potential for producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions (Seychelles).

This report was prepared by Peter Herkenrath under the general supervision of Jeremy Harrison. Funding for this report was provided by UNEP's Division of Environmental Conventions.

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INTRODUCTION

1. In 1998 the secretariats of the five global biodiversity-related conventions and UNEP commissioned the World Conservation Monitoring Centre to undertake a *Feasibility Study* to identify opportunities for harmonizing information management between the treaties. The five treaties were the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention, WHC). The *Feasibility Study* considered approaches towards development of a harmonized information management infrastructure for the treaties within their existing defined mandates. Its purpose was to consider how the secretariats could improve effectiveness and efficiency in gathering, handling, disseminating and sharing information.

2. In October 2000, UNEP convened a *workshop* in Cambridge, UK to review the issue of harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related treaties. This workshop, attended by representatives of eight countries, eight convention secretariats, and other organisations, had three objectives:

- To identify and consider options for streamlining and harmonizing reporting
- To identify and consider feasible solutions for streamlining and harmonizing reporting
- To develop an action plan and project concepts for pilot testing potential solutions.

3. Following the recommendations of the workshop, UNEP established *pilot projects* in four countries to test the approaches to harmonization for biodiversity-related conventions; with special focus on institutional coordination mechanisms and inter-linkages at national and international levels. The pilot projects were coordinated by the UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions (UNEP DEC) and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

4. Subsequently, the Conferences of the Parties to a number of conventions have welcomed the pilot projects, and UNEP has regularly briefed the *Environmental Management Group* (EMG), established to enhance the UN system-wide inter-agency coordination, on progress.

5. The *aim* of this paper is to draw conclusions from the pilot projects, building on the final reports of the individual projects. The following chapters introduce the pilot projects and their outcomes. Recommendations for the international level are drawn from the pilot projects' conclusions and recommendations as well as from the October 2000 workshop and further discussions (see below). The paper concludes with guidelines for the national level and an outlook, suggesting some initial further steps.

6. Following preparation of a draft report, further discussions were held with three of the four pilot project countries, other interested parties and organisations particularly from developed countries – Belgium, Germany and the UK - and secretariat staff from some of the conventions involved, before and during the 7th Conference of the Parties to the CBD in February 2004.

7. Finally, it is important to note that, since this project was started in 2001, a range of important meetings have taken place including Conferences of the Parties to all biodiversity-related conventions, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa in September 2002. The target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010, as adopted by the CBD Strategic Plan and endorsed by the WSSD, makes it even more essential to develop more efficient reporting systems that avoid unnecessary costs and the duplication of efforts.

THE PILOT PROJECTS

8. The workshop in October 2000 on harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related treaties recommended the undertaking of national pilot projects. Subsequently, UNEP established four pilot projects, and in September/October 2001, Memoranda of Understanding were signed with Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles.

9. As well as reviewing the reporting processes at the national level and delivering reports, each pilot project had a unique task to test one of the harmonization concepts recommended by the Cambridge workshop:

Ghana	Assessing the possibility of linking national reporting to the State of the Environment (SoE) reporting process
Indonesia	Identifying common information modules and using this as a basis for developing a modular approach to national reporting
Panama	Exploring potential regional support mechanisms for national information management and reporting
Seychelles	Assessing the potential for producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions

10. Final reports on the pilot projects were received from the Seychelles in May 2002, Panama in September 2002, Indonesia in July 2003, and Ghana in December 2003, with administrative problems leading to delays in some cases. Copies of the final reports are available on the UNEP-WCMC website (http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/projects.htm).

11. The status of accession to the five biodiversity-related conventions of the pilot project countries is as follows:

	CBD	**CITES**	**CMS**	**Ramsar**	**WHC**
Ghana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indonesia	✓	✓		✓	✓
Panama	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Seychelles	✓	✓			✓

GHANA: Assessing the possibility of linking national reporting to the State of the Environment (SoE) reporting process

12. The rationale behind this project was the observation that many countries already have State of Environment (SoE) reporting processes, which may or may not be linked to international reporting requirements. There is therefore a potential to extend the existing processes to also incorporate the reporting requirements of international agreements.

13. This pilot project assessed the current status of national reporting to conventions and the State of the Environment reporting, and the relationship between them.

14. Ghana has mechanisms in place for reporting to CITES, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the World Heritage Convention. Such mechanisms do not exist yet for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

15. Following a West African sub-regional workshop on Integrated Environmental Assessment and Reporting in 2002, Ghana produced a State of the Environment report although this has not yet been published.

16. So far, there have not been any linkages between the reporting mechanisms for the biodiversity-related conventions and those for the SoE. While each biodiversity convention is reported on separately the SoE reporting is also handled separately by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

17. The project identified a number of gaps in data and information relevant for reporting to conventions and delivering the SoE. Regarding data custodians, the project also found deficiencies in the institutional set-up resulting in a lack of information-sharing.

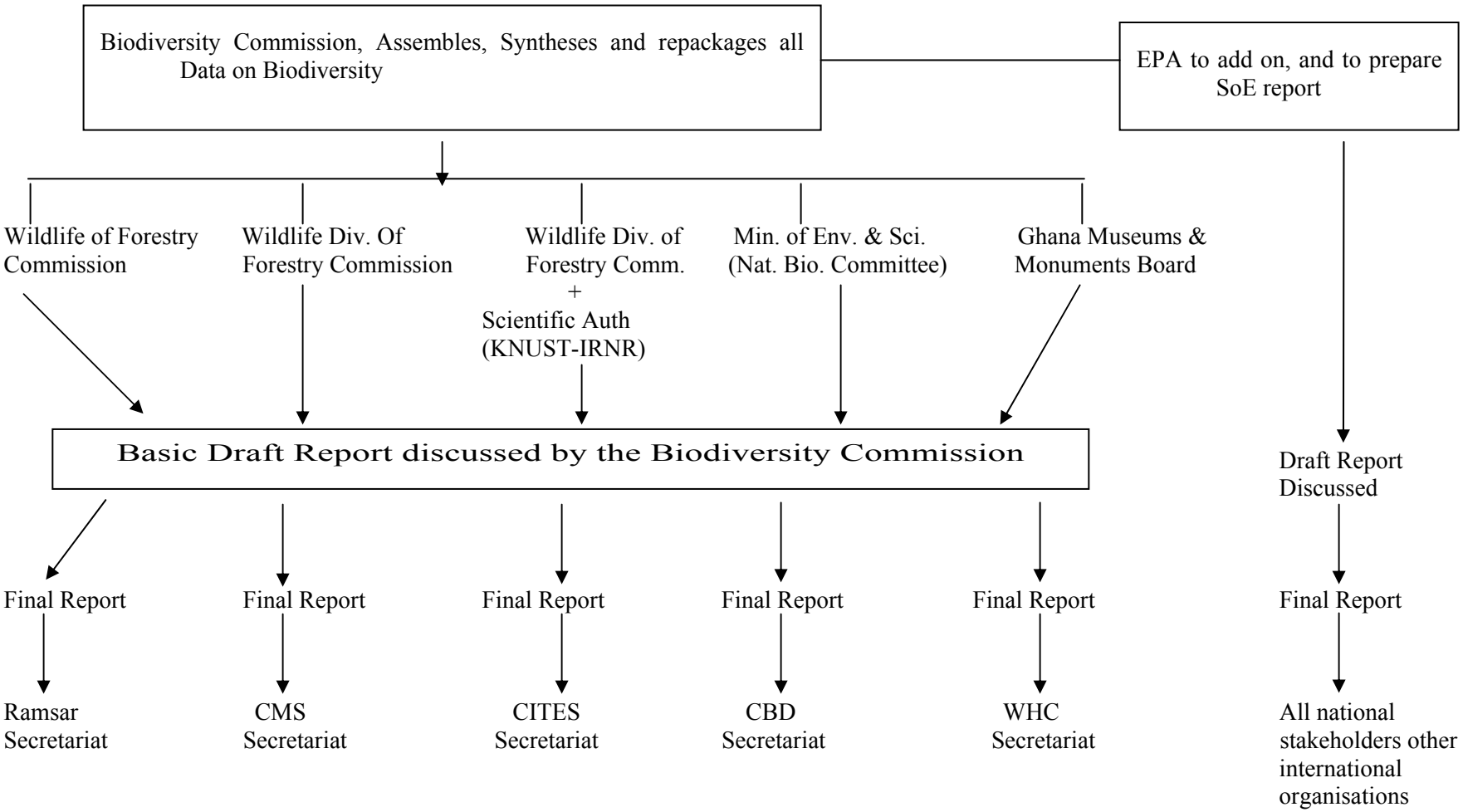
18. The project resulted in a range of recommendations1/ in three clusters:

- Recommendations including the necessary actions to be taken by the Government, on how to streamline the national reporting under biodiversity-related conventions, including institutional strengthening;
- Recommendations, including the necessary steps to be undertaken by the Government, on how the linkages between the reporting mechanisms for biodiversity-related conventions and the SOE reporting mechanism can be ensured or improved;
- Recommendations on how the information management system for the reporting can be improved, including possible information support from outside the country.

19. A model for preparing the reports to the conventions and the SoE report was developed (figure 1, page 9).

1/ The recommendations from the pilot projects are not listed separately for each project; they are summarised further below.

Figure 1: Proposed Mechanism for a Harmonised Reporting System in Ghana



INDONESIA: Identifying common information modules and using this as a basis for developing a modular approach to national reporting

20. Under the "modular approach", the information required for reporting on the implementation of conventions would be defined into a series of discrete information packages or themes. Relevant national agencies and focal points would then provide, and maintain as current, their information packages providing these as appropriate to whichever reports required them.

21. In addition to CBD, CITES, Ramsar Convention and World Heritage Convention, the project added the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) to its considerations.

22. An external consultant was engaged to assist and facilitate the project. The Indonesian Ministry of Environment established a national team of experts to provide guidance to the project. This team of experts, or a subset of it (the so-called "kitchen group") met at regular intervals throughout the project to review progress and provide specific feedback to the consultant on the various outputs of the project. The "kitchen group" agreed that the work should proceed along three project streams:

- Preparation of an institutional map to show the internal administrative arrangements in place in Indonesia for implementing the four global biodiversity-related conventions under consideration and the MAB;
- Designing a modular reporting format and cross-checking this for suitability and utility against recent existing national reports for the four conventions;
- Developing a better understanding of how relevant data, necessary to underpin implementation and reporting, was being gathered and maintained.

23. In August 2002, a workshop of the convention focal points, and other relevant ministries, agencies and organizations was held to discuss the project progress. The modular framework that the project developed is shown below (table 1, page 12).

24. A key finding of the project was that while it is possible to group national reporting information from these four conventions within a thematic modular framework, the current formulations used by the conventions to request this information are so at variance that it provides, in effect, a major barrier to moving to modular reporting. At present, the lack of harmonization at the international level is a key issue to be resolved for the future of any move toward more harmonized national reporting.

25. The project identified that under an ideal modular reporting system there would be one data warehouse or clearing-house through which national reporting and related information could be accessed. An implication of having such an information management approach, allied to national reporting requirements, is that it can help to identify information gaps for future attention. It can also help to identify opportunities for those gathering relevant information to collaborate with others (both within the country and at the more regional scale), thus saving resources and building more integrated programmes of implementation. One excellent example of this is that of the identification of future protected areas. In Indonesia's case, processes are underway to identify suitable sites under World Heritage, Ramsar, MAB and other types of protected areas. A drawing together of these efforts – as a modular reporting system would encourage – should result in significant cost savings and a more integrated national system of protected areas.

26. The project concluded as follows:

- Recommendations to Indonesia on the institutional arrangements;
- Recommendations to Indonesia on data management issues;
- Recommendations to UNEP and UNEP-WCMC on the modular framework..

Table 1: Modular Framework (Indonesia)

Module number	Reporting theme	CBD	Ramsar	WHC	CITES	MAB
1	**ECOSYSTEM OVERVIEWS**					
	1.1 Biodiversity of inland water ecosystems	√				
	1.2 Marine and coastal biodiversity	√				√
	1.3 Agricultural biodiversity	√				
	1.4 Forest biodiversity	√				√
	1.5 Biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands	√				
	1.6 Biodiversity of mountain ecosystems	√				√
2	**INSTITUTIONAL DETAILS AND ARRANGEMENTS**					
	2.1 Convention Focal Points	√	√	√	√	√
	2.2 Coordinating mechanism(s)					√
	2.2.1 Administrative processes	√	√	√		√
	2.2.2 Non-governmental consultative processes	√	√			√
	2.2.3 Information management	√				√
3	**COOPERATION**					
	3.1 General cooperation – global and regional	√	√	√		√
	3.2 Trans-boundary cooperation	√	√			
	3.3 Technical and scientific cooperation	√	√	√		√
4	**GENERAL MEASURES FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE**					
	4.1 Strategies, policies and programmes	√	√	√		√
	4.2 Integration of conservation and sustainable use into sectoral and cross-sectoral programes and policies	√	√	√		√
5	**IDENTIFICATION AND MONITORING**					
	5.1 Identification					
	5.1.1 Taxonomy	√				√
	5.1.2 Indicators and rapid assessments	√				√
	5.1.3 Inventory	√	√	√		√
	5.2 Monitoring	√	√			√
6	***IN SITU* CONSERVATION**					
	6.1 General *in situ* conservation measures	√		√		√
	6.2 Systems of protected and special areas	√	√	√		√
	6.3 Restoration & rehabilitation of ecosystems and threatened species/populations	√	√			√
	6.4 Management of living modified organisms	√				
	6.5 Invasive species	√	√			√
	6.6 Knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities	√	√			√
7	***EX SITU* CONSERVATION**	√				
8	**SUSTAINABLE USE**	√	√		√	√
9	**INCENTIVE MEASURES**	√				√
10	**RESEARCH AND TRAINING**					
	10.1 Research	√		√		√
	10.2 Training	√	√	√		√
11	**COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS**	√	√	√		√
12	**IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND MINIMIZING ADVERSE IMPACTS**					
	12.1 Impact assessments procedures	√	√			√
	12.2 Transboundary impacts –see module 3.2	√	√			
	12.3 Emergency responses	√				√
	12.4 Liability and redress	√				√
13	**ACCESS TO GENETIC RESOURCES**	√				√
14	**ACCESS TO AND TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY**	√				√
15	**EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION**	√	√			√
16	**BIOTECHNOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTION OF ITS BENEFITS**	√				
17	**FINANCIAL RESOURCES**					
	17.1 Annual and additional contributions	√	√	√		√
	17.2 National financing	√	√	√		√
	17.3 Financial mechanism	√				√

PANAMA: Exploring potential regional support mechanisms for national information management and reporting

27. This project explored ways to improve national reporting through supporting improved information management at the national level, and fostering cooperation among neighbouring countries through the use of existing regional organizations.

28. Panama included not only the five biodiversity-related conventions, but also the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) under the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention), in the project.

29. In Panama, the National Environmental Authority is currently implementing an information office known as the National System for Environmental Information (SINIA), which will be in charge of storing all the country's environmental information and support the National Environmental Authority's environmental management and administration responsibilities. SINIA will undergo an initial phase consisting of establishing a "national environmental information basis" in order to support primarily the production of reports on the state of the environment and environmental indicators.

30. The project began with a workshop with the focal points of the six agreements in question, followed by consultations with relevant staff. The workshop analysed each agreement's reporting mechanisms and looked at the options to harmonize and coordinate reporting to each agreement. Initially, visits to several countries of the region were planned to hold consultations with the focal points of the agreements under analysis. For a variety of reasons, it was only Mexico that could be visited, and consultations were held with the Mexican focal points of the agreements.

31. The project looked specifically at information systems, and identified the need, in the Latin American and Caribbean context, to maximize the use of new information and communication technology regarding biodiversity-related agreements. Some countries lack equipment, reliable and stable access and speed to allow efficient use of these technologies as an effective tool for the development and presentation of reports. Scarcity or absence of technically trained personnel also hinders an efficient use of available equipment and technology.

32. The recommendations from the workshop address the following issues:

- On the national level: coordination for reporting, on-line reports, a reporting manual, a central database on biodiversity information, a scientific committee, appropriate low-cost information technologies, and control of the data quality;
- On the regional level a regional on-line manual, and support from regional organisations, such as UNEP's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Latin American Office of the Council of the Earth, as well as sub-regional ones such as the IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development, including a workshop to establish a common regional reporting arrangement for environmental agreements.

SEYCHELLES: Assessing the potential for producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions

33. The concept here is to prepare one "consolidated" report that would satisfy the obligations of a range of international conventions to which the country is party.

34. As the Seychelles is a former party to the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), this convention was included in the pilot project.

35. For the pilot project, a project team was formed under the leadership of the Ministry of Environment. To facilitate the streamlining of reporting to the conventions in question, the team undertook a range of analyses as follows:

- Assessment and synopsis of the objectives and fundamentals of CBD, CITES, ICRW and WHC;
- Assessment and critique of the reporting requirements under each convention;
- Analysis of the national reporting mechanism, including the identification of gaps in information and data existing in the country;
- Stakeholder analysis.

36. The results of these assessments and analyses provided a sound basis to then attempt a streamlining of national reporting. Various means of streamlining were investigated and ultimately a logical association of functional articles of the various conventions was pursued to enable a thematic approach to a streamlined reporting process.

37. This process was followed through to its logical conclusion, even though it became apparent during the elaboration that whilst conceptually sound, it would not likely result in practical procedural benefits to the reporting process. Many of the difficulties in this regard were due to the disparate nature of the four conventions in question. However, it was felt that the process undertaken would still yield useful insights into potential pathways for streamlining.

38. The project did determine that if certain barriers to streamlining – most notably the various temporal reporting cycles, ranging from one to six years – could be addressed, then a singular reporting process within Seychelles would yield benefits in terms of lessening the bureaucratic burden. Figure 2 on page 16 shows a model harmonised reporting mechanism for CBD, ICRW and WHC. 2/

39. The project resulted in a number of recommendations to the Government of Seychelles, as well as international recommendations. Perhaps the most important output of the project was the logical association of convention articles as follows (table 2 on page 15). It is hoped that this approach may offer potential for future attempts at streamlining and consolidating national reporting.

2/ As reporting to CITES was felt to be a purely administrative exercise, CITES is not included in the flowchart (see also below).

Table 2: Grouping of Themes Covered in Articles of the Various Biodiversity-Related Conventions (Seychelles) 3/

THEME	CONVENTIONS Article (*Paragraphs*)			
	CBD	**CITES**	**ICRW**	**WHC**
International Cooperation (Incl. Capacity-Building)	5, 12, 13(*b*), 16(*1,2,4,5*), 17, 18, 20(*2-7*), 26	8 (*4c, 7*)	7, 8(*3*)	7, 8
Policies and Strategies	6, 8(*b*),10(*a*) 11, 12, 13(*a*), 14, 20(*1*)	8 (*1, 2*)	9	5, 27
Identification and Monitoring	7	4(3) [11, 15, 16]	8	3, 11, 24
In-Situ Conservation	8	(Scientific Authority) 4(*3*), [11]	8(*3*)	4, 5, 6
Ex-Situ Conservation	9	8	x	x
Sustainable use	10	8	+	o
Matters Unique to CBD	15, 19, 16(*3*) Biotech references			

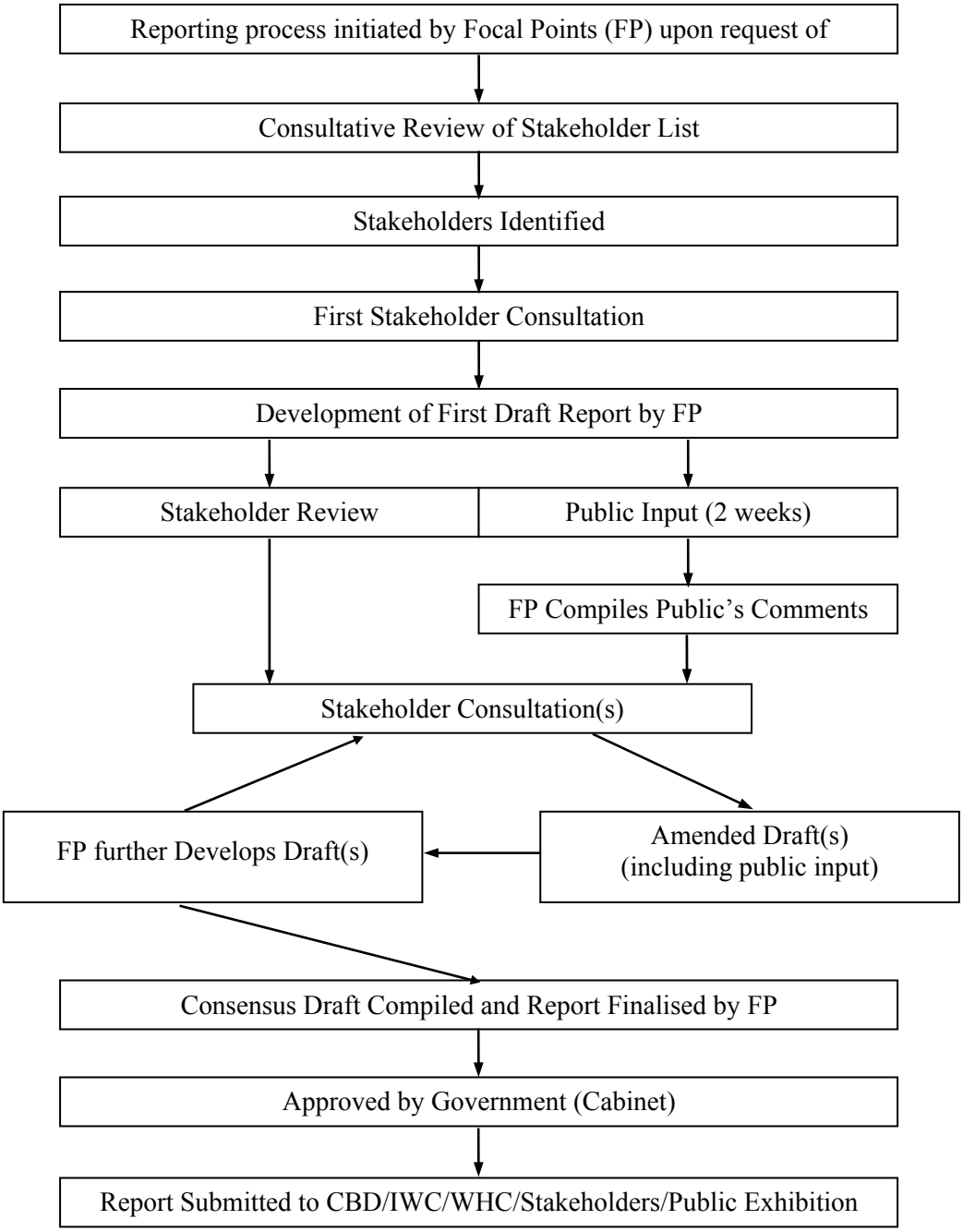
40. At the end of the project process, it was further concluded that:

- The CBD, being the broadest convention in terms of scope, provided the best potential as a starting point for streamlining reports and reporting;
- The issue of differing reporting cycles aside, a single reporting process on a national basis did offer a way of lessening the reporting burden to some degree. This in fact would only be the streamlining of three conventions, as the CITES reporting process was deemed to be an administrative exercise. However, it was still felt that the CITES focal point should actively participate in the streamlined process as benefits would occur in particular with regard to identification and monitoring activities pertaining to CITES.

41. The project also noted the potential that technology offered to assist in terms of a website for draft reports to be viewed and commented upon. This medium could, with some training of stakeholders, greatly lessen the procedural load of reporting.

3/ Key: x -Not covered
o - Not covered specifically
+ - Not cited specifically but embodies the fundamentals of the convention
[ ] - No requirement for reporting but could constructively be recorded under Administrative and Regulatory measures.

Figure 2: Flowchart Illustrating a Harmonised Reporting Mechanism for CBD, ICRW and WHC in the Seychelles



CONCLUSIONS

Linking national reporting to the State of the Environment reporting process

42. The Ghanean project has established a model for linking the national reporting to the five biodiversity-related conventions to the State of the Environment (SoE) reporting. A new institution, the National Biodiversity Commission, would serve as the body that coordinates the information management efforts of those agencies in charge of the individual reports. The Commission would prepare a synthesis report that could be used by the individual agencies to prepare the reports to the conventions and on the SoE.

43. This model might be one that countries might find attractive to adopt, given the availability of the initial resources needed and the allocation of appropriate responsibilities within the government system. The coordinating body would, in some cases, exist already or might be established within the existing government structure.

Developing a modular approach to national reporting

44. The Indonesian pilot project tested to which extent the issues of the CBD, Ramsar Convention, World Heritage Convention, CITES and the MAB overlap. The project concluded that it is possible to develop an overarching thematic framework for modular national reporting that accommodates the reporting needs to these conventions. This framework would deliver a consolidated reporting matrix, consisting of a number of modules that can be used to fulfill the reporting requirements of the conventions.

45. The project also pointed out that only small amendments to the framework would allow to integrate the reporting requirements of the CMS.

46. The project identified a number of external constraints to the implementation of a modular approach to national reporting, i) how national report questions are formulated, and ii) the frequency of the reporting cycles. In addition, the limited resources for establishing and maintaining the individual modules was recognised as of great concern, particularly for developing countries and transition countries. Given that these issues could be satisfactorily addressed by the international level, the modular approach to information management and national reporting is expected to deliver results that considerably ease the reporting burden and simplify the reporting process in the longer term.

Providing regional support to national information management and reporting

47. The pilot project in Panama analysed the impediments to an efficient biodiversity information management and national reporting to the five biodiversity-related conventions and the SPAW protocol. These efforts centred around a national coordination unit for biodiversity information and the database and software requirements. The project also identified a number of areas where regional support could be provided to national authorities. This includes, amongst others, maximising the use of new information technology, and establishing a regional on-line manual.

48. The project proposed a regional workshop to establish common reporting arrangements across the region, fostered by UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Latin American Office of the Council of the Earth, the Central American Commission for Environment and Development, and/or the IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica.

49. It is expected that similar approaches to regional support to national information management and reporting could be explored by countries in other (sub)regions that would need to explore their specific needs and opportunities. Support to harmonization of national information management and reporting could be channelled through (sub)regional organisations.

Producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions

50. The Seychelles pilot project included CBD, CITES, World Heritage Convention and in addition the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling. The project, while arranging themes covered in the articles of the conventions, found that producing one consolidated report was extremely difficult due to the disparate nature of the conventions involved. It was suggested that different packages of conventions, *e.g.* CBD, Ramsar and CMS, might produce different results.

51. The project also identified the widely differing reporting cycles as a major impediment to any streamlining efforts. These problems aside, a single reporting process on a national basis was thought of offering a way of lessening the reporting burden to some degree.

52. The model of producing a consolidated report that satisfies the needs of several conventions might be useful to test with more closely related conventions, in particular CBD, Ramsar and CMS.

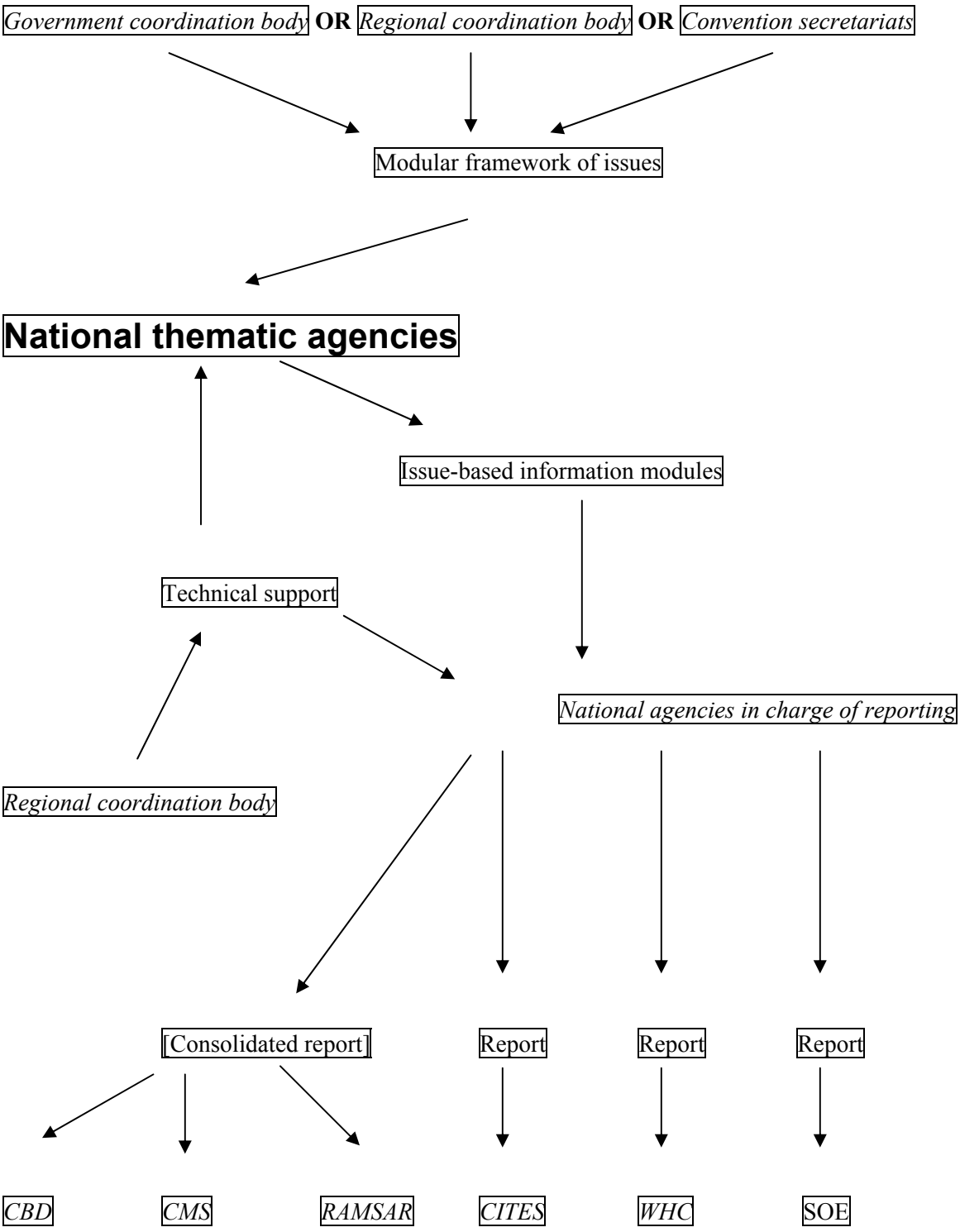
Overall view

53. As expected from the outline of the pilot projects, their results are not mutually exclusive. They have identified similar impediments to harmonizing information management and national reporting – these are subject to the recommendations and guidelines in the following chapters. Most projects used discrete packages of thematic information, or information modules, at some stages of the project. It was found that the information needed for reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions could indeed be presented in the form of such moduls, many of which would be useful for reporting to more than one convention.

54. A combined model of information management and reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions could observe the scheme shown in figure 3 (page 19).

Figure 3: An integrated scheme of national information management and reporting to biodiversity-related conventions and State of the Environment

(Institutions are shown in *italics*)



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

*55. The following recommendations for the international level combine the relevant conclusions and recommendations from the national pilot projects, building primarily on the pilot project reports, taking into account the subsequent discussions with pilot project countries, other interested parties and organisations, including the three developed countries (Belgium, Germany, UK) and staff from the secretariats of some of the conventions*4/*.*

56. Consider opportunities for more synchronised reporting cycles

The different reporting cycles under the biodiversity-related conventions pose a major difficulty for the harmonization of the reporting process at the national level. Therefore, consideration should be given to how the reporting cycles for some of the conventions could be synchronised. One option could be to dissociate the timing of national reporting from the timing of the Conferences of the Parties (COPs), while ensuring that the national reports continue to be directed to and remain a major input to the COPs. Synchronisation of reporting cycles would need to avoid heavy reporting burdens for national governments at specific times.

57. Consider more harmonized reporting formats of the conventions

Harmonizing the structure and questions in national reporting formats with the aim of producing a framework which can accommodate the reporting requirements of most related conventions would facilitate the reporting process and ease the financial and human resource burden on many countries. The CBD being the broadest convention in terms of scope might provide a useful basis for streamlining reporting via harmonizing reporting formats and for considering a modular or consolidated approach to reporting, perhaps with a focus on progress towards the 2010 target. This process would need to ensure that no important detail for any convention is being lost and would need the agreement of the several Conferences of the Parties.

58. Develop a consolidated Biodiversity Reporting Manual

The development of a consolidated Biodiversity Reporting Manual, detailing reporting requirements under the biodiversity-related conventions and with clear, concise guidelines/instructions on how to report, would assist national focal points in reporting to the conventions and facilitate the way in which reporting is done. Moreover, this might help ensure comparability of reports from various parties. Development of the manual could begin with compiling the existing guiding documents from the various conventions and subsequently be further expanded. The manual should be made available on the Internet or/and CD-ROM, allowing access by national focal points and policy makers.

59. Implement Joint Programmes of Work

Following on from existing joint work programmes between the biodiversity-related treaties, potential exists for developing and implementing broader joint programmes of work between and among biodiversity-related MEAs to tackle common themes such as international cooperation (including capacity-building), policies and strategies, identification and monitoring and *in-situ* conservation, based

4/ For reasons stated above, reports to CITES are unique and might not be considered in the context of some of the following recommendations and guidelines.

on well-established communication routes between the conventions. This could enable a harmonized reporting on these issues and would thus inevitably lead to greater integration.

60. Expand to other MEAs

The experience and recommendations from the harmonization project could be evaluated with the view to facilitate the inclusion of more related MEAs and programmes, for example the Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCCD), regional biodiversity-related agreements, and the regional seas agreements and programmes. The UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme should also be considered.

61. Make national reporting formats serve as a national planning tool

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands has integrated its Strategic Plan, with its operational objectives and related actions, with the national reporting format. This enables a dual purpose of the national reporting format. Besides the pure reporting purpose, it also serves as a tool for national wetland planning and priority setting for national implementation of the Convention. Modular reporting, if approached in the same way, would help national efforts to integrate the implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions, and would focus the reporting exercise on the implementation of the individual conventions and particularly on the 2010 target. Care would need to be taken to avoid overloading the reporting process.

62. Test a (sub)regional approach to harmonization of reporting

Regionally based approaches to harmonization could be explored, with a focus on comprehensive assistance from the (sub)regional level to national governments. A starting point could be the Biodiversity Reporting Manual (see above), which could be tested on a regional or subregional basis. This could be further expanded to testing joint (sub)regional information management systems and associated support to national-level information management. (Sub)regional organisations within the UNEP system or regional economic integration organisations could be asked to take up such a task, perhaps with a pilot project in Central America based at the Central American Commission for Environment and Development. (Sub)regional workshops, for example a workshop for Latin America or the Caribbean, could further explore this option. Also, the experience of the Convention on Wetlands in developing a consolidated regional view of implementation, with national components, could be reviewed, and the extent to which this meets reporting requirements.

63. Continue testing the different approaches to harmonizing national reporting

The pilot projects have yielded significant results that could be further explored by expanding the testing of the different approaches to more countries, with a wide geographic coverage, including developed and developing countries, countries with economies in transition, and small island developing states, as well as large and small states with their specific challenges for information management and reporting. The inclusion of other conventions (see above) should be considered in further projects.

64. The recommendations below stem from the October 2000 UNEP workshop on harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related conventions and from subsequent considerations of the issue in the framework of the Environmental Management Group, as well as discussions with the project teams themselves and other interested parties, including convention secretariats.

65. Make national reports and joint search engines available on the Internet

The convention secretariats should, wherever possible and appropriate, continue their efforts to make available electronic copies of all national reports over the Internet, to increase use that is made of the information provided. A link to the national report sites of the individual conventions should be included in the joint website of the biodiversity-related conventions. As a further step, joint search engines for all reports could be established.

66. Share terminologies

Development and/or sharing by the biodiversity-related conventions of common glossaries, lists of abbreviations, definitions and terminology, and the possible future adoption of cross-convention standards including regarding species taxonomy would considerably support the harmonization of reporting and may well make certain aspects of reporting easier for countries. For example, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests is promoting standard definitions for just this reason.

67. Establish the "big picture"

The reporting requirements of the key international agreements should be reviewed, with a view to identifying how the range of reports presents the "big picture" of the world's biodiversity, and what else would be required to complete it. Other relevant processes such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the Global Environment Outlook, and the Global Biodiversity Outlook, should be involved in this process. This is particularly relevant in the context of the 2010 target. The next stages of the harmonization process could be streamlined towards the contribution to reporting against that target.

68. Link the harmonization process to the Millennium Development Goals

As efforts are underway to establish and strengthen linkages between environmental conventions and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), efforts for harmonization of information systems and national reporting could be oriented towards supporting the implementation of the MDGs. This could be achieved through alligning reporting formats with the Strategic Plans of the Conventions where those have established links with the MDGs. It would, in addition, be useful to explore the usefulness of national harmonization systems for the national implementation of the MDGs.

69. Support the harmonization efforts of developing countries

Information is a basic prerequisite for the effective implementation of multilateral agreements. The harmonization of information management systems supports national reporting and makes efforts for the harmonization of reporting easier. These processes crucially require financial and technical support to developing and transition countries, especially Least Developed Countries and Small Island Development States. Conventions and donors should consider lending such support in the interest of the implementation of the conventions. Support could include organising regional and national training workshops, focusing on information systems and communications technology.

70. Continue to promote the issue and to share information and experience

All those working on harmonization issues should seek to share information and experience, and to promote harmonization and synergies. With this in mind, UNEP-WCMC should further develop and promote its website on harmonization of reporting. In addition, the draft action plan prepared under the aegis of the EMG and already discussed with convention secretariats should be further reviewed, resourced and implemented. Also, the joint website of the biodiversity-related conventions could be further developed to reflect the progress on technical infrastructure and training regarding harmonization efforts.

GUIDELINES FOR THE NATIONAL LEVEL

71. The following guidelines draw on the results and recommendations of the national pilot projects, taking into account the subsequent discussions with pilot project countries, other interested parties and organisations, including the three developed countries (Belgium, Germany, UK) and staff from the secretariats of some of the conventions. The guidelines might not be applicable for all countries, and the specific circumstances of countries would need to be considered in every case.

72. Review relevant institutional and administrative arrangements

The problem

The national responsibilities for the biodiversity-related conventions are often split between different departments or agencies, making a coordinated approach to national reporting difficult. This extends not only to the reporting mechanisms, but also to the information systems that are used to prepare the reports.

Suggested action

- Review the institutional and administrative arrangements for reporting to the different conventions, perhaps at a national workshop.
- Prepare an institutional map of national responsibilities, relevant for national reporting and the underlying information systems.

Outcome

The institutional map of national responsibilities for managing the relevant information and for the reporting process itself would enable the identification of opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness and for further action to streamline and harmonize reporting.

73. Establish a national coordination mechanism

The problem

Most countries lack a central mechanism facilitating the reporting to conventions and on the State of the Environment. This leads to duplication of work and a non-coordinated approach to reporting.

Suggested action

- Establish a national coordination unit or similar mechanism comprising the national focal points of the conventions and national agencies responsible for their implementation, with the aim of facilitating reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions and on the State of the Environment.
- Enable the participation of representatives of key stakeholders and scientific bodies (see also number 6 below).

The coordination process could enable regular consultations of the national focal points to the different conventions, perhaps functioning under the general guidance of a national biodiversity committee or commission. A more specialised technical/scientific committee or task force could address data compatibility issues, and needs for technical and scientific standards such as taxonomy and classification.

Outcome

A national coordination mechanism would collate, compile, manage and authenticate data/information for the reporting process, in collaboration with stakeholders. It would also coordinate the reporting process. This would enable a streamlined process of reporting to different conventions, avoiding overlap and duplication of work.

74. Establish a national biodiversity database/clearing-house mechanism and/or information network

The problem
The information needed to fulfill the reporting obligations for different conventions is often not available in a central database. The difficulties with this are described by one of the pilot projects as follows: *"Inter-agency rivalries and mistrust, overlapping portfolios, conflicting interests, 'empire-building' tendencies and personalities all conspire to make much, even basic baseline, information treated as a jealously guarded commodity"*.

Suggested action
- Create a national biodiversity database, clearing-house mechanism (CHM) and/or information network, accessible via the Internet and building on existing databases and information systems. This "metadata warehouse" would ideally incorporate relevant scientific data and information from key stakeholders and would reflect the status and trends in the implementation of the conventions. It would also make past reports, case studies and lessons learnt available. The national CHMs under the CBD that are being currently established in many countries might be in an ideal position to fulfill this function.

Outcome
The national information infrastructure would support both implementation and reporting. It would improve data collection and management, allow for the control of data quality and reliability as well as for the identification of information gaps. The accessibility via the Internet would allow for improved information dissemination, exchange and sharing, with relevant stakeholders. It would also simplify the repatriation of data that resides outside the country.

75. Provide adequate IT facilities and training

The problem
The costs of software licenses as well as the technical capacity of staff involved could be a major factor affecting the information systems that national reporting (and information to support implementation) needs to draw upon. This is especially a problem for developing countries.

Suggested action
- Explore modern IT facilities and standardised, affordable software/operating systems and programmes.
- Consider acquiring systems based upon open source codes that are available at low or no costs.
- Provide adequate training for IT staff.

Outcome
The management of data and the implementation of the reporting process would be facilitated through support to enhance computer databases, if possible in connection with establishing or improving the clearing-house mechanism. Costs for acquiring suitable software would be considerably reduced. Well-trained staff would guarantee smooth running of the facilities.

76. Establish on-line reporting

The problem
Unless they are available on-line, national reports are difficult to access for other ministries or agencies other than the one that has produced the report, and it is also difficult for the range of other stakeholders that might be participating or interested in the report.

Suggested action

- Make national reports available on-line.
- Establish a search configuration for users to allow for quick access to any specific topic.
- In the framework of modular reporting, consider the options for a regular updating of the information held on-line.

Outcome

On-line availability allows for on-line consultation in drafting of the reports and easy access to the final reports for stakeholders including government, agencies, planners, business, and non-governmental organisations. It would also foster regional cooperation on convention-related issues. In addition, it would also allow for potential development of a "virtual reporting" approach, which is one of the options for national reporting that the UNEP workshop in 2000 discussed.

77. Consider establishing an operational framework for biodiversity stakeholder interaction

The problem

Relevant information for the national reports is often fragmented between different public and private agencies. In addition, avenues for an effective information flow between these agencies and the units in charge of national reporting are often inadequately developed.

Suggested action

Consider establishing an operational framework for stakeholder interaction, allowing for a participatory process and facilitating information flow. This could be in the form of a government biodiversity policy document setting out the rights and obligations of the various stakeholders, including dispute resolution, and the development of incentives for stakeholders to participate in the reporting or related processes.

Outcome

The framework for stakeholder interaction would help to ensure effective involvement in implementation and reporting of stakeholders such as scientists, business, non-governmental organisations, but also indigenous and local communities as holders of traditional biodiversity-related knowledge.

78. Incorporate indicators of convention implementation into projects

The problem

There is a magnitude of biodiversity-related projects being carried out, but the lack of objectively verifiable indicators makes it often difficult to use information from these projects for an effective reporting that meets the obligations set by the conventions.

Suggested action

Encourage agencies and stakeholders to incorporate objectively verifiable indicators, which relate to convention implementation, into biodiversity projects.

Outcome

Incorporation of objectively verifiable indicators into projects would enable more rapid and accurate reporting as well as a better utilisation of national capacity to implement the conventions. It would also support current processes, for example under the CBD, to develop indicators to assess progress towards the achievement of the target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

OUTLOOK

79. The increasing burden that reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions – as well as other multilateral environmental agreements – pose on parties to these treaties, has resulted in much attention being paid by the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the conventions to efforts to address this issue. The pilot projects, which have been welcomed by these COPs, have explored four different ways to harmonize the reporting between the biodiversity-related conventions as well as some other global and regional agreements. These approaches are not mutually exclusive; the pilot projects have rather covered a good amount of common ground. This includes the elaboration of advantages, disadvantages of and impediments to implementing these approaches.

80. The projects have expressed a strong commitment by parties to implement a synergistic approach to national reporting, while recognising that this would require adjustments to the reporting obligations by the conventions at the global level. In addition, technical and financial assistance, and the provision of training and capacity-building would be needed for developing countries and economies in transition to start implementing a more harmonized approach. Discussions with some of the pilot project countries revealed a need for follow-up on the national level through national workshops, allowing for discussing the findings of the projects with a wider national audience.

81. It seems likely that the implementation of many of the recommendations coming out of the pilot projects would in the shorter term lead to increased costs. It is therefore important to recall one of the goals of the harmonization projects, the reduction of the burden to countries that reporting is producing. It should also be recognised that harmonization of information management and national reporting bears benefits on the national level that go beyond the (long-term) impacts on the reporting process. Information on biodiversity that in many cases is otherwise scattered amongst different institutions becomes streamlined and readily available for potential national as well as international users. There is also the option to integrate information of different backgrounds, for example ecological and social information. Resources for future efforts of data collection and research can be allocated wiser and more cost-effective.

82. The results and lessons learned from the pilot projects will be further discussed at a workshop organised by the Belgian government and UNEP-WCMC, in collaboration with the pilot projects and the convention secretariats, in September 2004. This workshop will further analyse the experience of the pilot projects with the different models they have tested, make available other existing experience with the harmonization of information management systems and reporting, and develop the next steps in the process of harmonizing national reporting to biodiversity-related agreements.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHM	Clearing-House Mechanism
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
COP	Conference of the Parties
EMG	Environmental Management Group
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FP	Focal Point
ICRW	International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling
IMG	Issue Management Group
IT	Information technology
IUCN	World Conservation Union
IWC	International Whaling Commission
MAB	Man and the Biosphere Programme
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
ROD	Reporting Obligations Database
SINIA	National System for Environmental Information
SoE	State of the Environment
SPAW	Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-DEC	UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions
UNEP-WCMC	UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WHC	Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention)
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development