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Enhancing the CHM as a mechanism for connecting people to people particularly for technology transfer and development

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Background

Article 18(3) provides that "the Conference of the Parties, at its first meeting, shall determine how to establish a clearing-house mechanism to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation."

From our experience in operating the CHM in NZ, we have concluded that there are two broad ways to facilitate s&t cooperation.

The first is to provide improved access to information that is within the public domain or can be brought into the public domain. This might be data that people can combine with their own data, analysed data and conceptual thinking (e.g. scientific papers, grey literature) or technology (e.g. best practice manuals, software). In this case the information is generally provided in the form in which it was originally produced, and it is up to the seeker of the information to find and adapt the information. The role of the CHM is to make the finding of the information easier, but does not extend to helping with adaptation. The CHM might facilitate the finding of information by moving the information into a location where it is easier to find, by translating the information into other languages, or by giving people access to the technology needed for searching information sources (e.g. internet access).

The second approach is to facilitate connections between people who can then work together to:
- transfer and adapt existing information or technology;
- jointly develop new information or technology;
- partition the responsibility for developing new information or technology that is of interest to both parties.

The emphasis of this latter approach to the CHM is on connecting people so that they can increase the total amount of information or technology available. The emphasis of the former is on increasing access to existing information or technology and helping people to search for it.

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Both are important parts of the CHM, but in our view the CHM is not, at this point in time, addressing these areas equally. This is not surprising, as making existing information more accessible is clearly easier than other aspects of the CHM work.

With the new emphasis (from COP 7) on the CHM playing a role in technology transfer, improving the balance of our work is even more vital.

Connecting People to People

In our view, the key to broadening the role of the CHM is to focus on connecting people to people, rather than on connecting people to existing information, because:

1. Only by connecting people can we get an increase in the total amount of information and technology;
2. Much of the existing information that people might find useful will never be put in a searchable location because:
    - It is not in suitable form, and the holder of the information has no incentive to put it in a suitable form (e.g. the knowledge of how best to undertake a management practice may only be in the expert's head);
    - The owner of the information has no idea that anyone else might be interested in it;
    - The information is of a type that the holder would be unwilling to put down in writing but might be willing to provide verbally to another person in their field (e.g. judgements about how good an expert is);
    - The owner of the information wishes to restrict access to the information for some reason (to ensure it is only used for appropriate purposes, to gain a revenue stream, cultural sensitivity reasons, etc) and in some cases may not even want the existence of the information to be publicised outside a restricted group of people;
3. The information may not be useable without adaptation, which requires the involvement of another person other than the searcher;
4. In many cases, the best way to search for information is to ask an expert in the field, rather than to use other search methods.

Models

The following are some of the mechanisms currently in place that affect work that NZ is involved in, and which provide possible models for improving the effectiveness of the CHM.

Cooperative Islands Initiative

The CII was set up to facilitate cooperation between island managers in relation to alien species issues. A key role of the CII is to allow managers to identify best practice, potential partners for projects, and sources of information.

This is principally done by having a coordinator who keeps up to date on the subject, and who can respond to queries. At the side event on the CII which we held at COP 7, we identified a number of advantages of this approach, as opposed to developing a data base of expertise or similar system:

- The coordinator is likely to be more up-to-date than a data base.
- The coordinator can help the enquirer to refine their questions, and steer them into areas they might not have even thought about. For example, an island manager may only enquire about one pest on their island, believing that the other species are in-eradicable, when there is in fact new technology available for those species.
- The coordinator can provide information that would not be available from public information sources (see above on why this might be the case).
- The coordinator can tailor the information provided to exactly fit the enquiry.
- The coordinator can provide information in a range of ways, including ways suitable for people without access to the internet.

And this may be a cheaper way to provide the information. Searching for the same information on the web might take many more hours, produce less information that is less accurate, and require the use of slow and expensive internet services. In addition, this approach allows donors to fund one project that serves the needs of all island countries.

AliensL

This is a listserv run by IUCN/ISSG. It allows people with an interest in alien species work to send out questions that other members may be able to answer. The discussions on the listserv fall into three broad groups:

- queries about technical questions (e.g. I am looking for any information on the health effects of fireweed (Senecio madagascarensis) on geese or other waterfowl.)
- alerting people to press releases, conferences, etc that might interest them
- debates about philosophical questions

Cooperation Surveys

NZ has a strong aid and biodiversity relationship to Chile. As CHM Focal Point I undertook an exercise to identify potential areas of technical cooperation between the two countries. This involved:

- I visited Chile and met with senior people in key agencies to identify the type of work that they are doing.
- I then wrote a paper setting out those areas where I felt that NZ expertise could be useful to them.
- We then met again to prioritise areas for cooperation.
- I have since helped them to access funding from NZ Aid and other donors to undertake the cooperation work, e.g. by helping them write funding applications.

A colleague then gained NZ Aid funding to undertake a more detailed survey of the potential for cooperation with Chile and Argentina in the area of marine biodiversity.

We are now looking at similar exercises with Peru and Mexico.

In many cases, the areas of potential cooperation were not ones which the Chilean officials had considered. In some cases this was because they were not aware of how different their approaches were to what NZ considers best practice. In other cases it was because they did not realise that NZ had similar biodiversity or similar work areas.

CHM Focal Point as Point of Contact

Rather than creating a web site, we have used the CHM focal point as our main CHM mechanism. Biodiversity managers outside NZ can contact me and ask about NZ expertise in specific areas. I will then help them to identify whether NZ has expertise that may help them, and if so to connect with that expertise.

For example, a Chilean agency recently sought help with finding an expert they could hire to work on standards to reduce waste oil discharges to inland waters. I identified a number of possible experts in NZ, translated the spanish documents to English for them to read, and then helped them to respond to Chile. Interestingly, the Chileans had concluded by looking at NZ web sites that NZ was the right source of expertise, but our experts advised that while NZ had standards that looked good on paper, the system was not functioning well in practice and we were not the right place to look for the type of expertise they wanted.

Mink Network

In working with the Chileans, I learned that they have a problem with invasive minks. Discussions with a Danish colleague at COP 6 meant that I knew that Denmark also had a problem. At COP 7, I identified 5 countries (Chile, Denmark, Iceland, Finland and the UK) who all had mink problems and were either working on that problem now or planning work in the near future. Representatives of all the countries agreed that creating an email network of the experts working in the field would be useful. I also hope to connect them to NZ's network of people working on stoat control (another mustelid species). My role would be simply to provide an initial connection and occasionally encourage them to maintain the link.

What Could We Do to Enhance the CHM

Looking at these models and our experience, I would suggest that there are three things that we could do in the short term that would enhance the effectiveness of the CHM.

Create More Cooperative Networks

Identify a small number of issues in which technology transfer and development would enhance biodiversity management in a number of countries. The following are a few

examples of areas that have been discussed in the margins of the CBD, but there may be better issues out there:

- Development of standards for deciding whether hull fouling is a quarantine risk (for the Pacific and adjacent Southern Ocean).
- Identifying best practice for establishing quarantine systems within a country for offshore islands and archipelagos.
- Identifying and enhancing best practice for forest fire risk assessment systems, generally and for groups of countries with similar vegetation (looked at from a fuel perspective).

Find one person who would act as a network facilitator for setting up an initial linkage between experts working in these fields. Then use the CHM focal points network to identify potential collaborators for the network and pass these to the linkage person.

If the CHM focal point network worked on even only a few of these a year, it would be a significant contribution to technology cooperation at very small cost to focal points.

Advertise Networks and Cooperative Initiatives

We could add a place on the CHM web site in which networks could advertise themselves, or where people could advertise a need for a network.

Encourage the Funding of New Cooperative Initiatives

The CHM (in the form of the Secretariat unit and the focal points) could "adopt" one or two new cooperative initiatives (based on the islands model), and actively seek support for them (funding for a coordinator or hosting for the work). In the case of the CII, the coordinator is funded by the NZ Government, and his accommodation and administrative support provided by ISSG and Auckland University.

In choosing suitable topics for initiatives, the programme officers could play a key role, and SBSTTA Focal points could be consulted as well. The programme officers could then take a lead in providing terms of reference for the initiative. COP has already explicitly identified the need for a cooperative initiative on marine alien species, and there are probably elements in POWs that could be achieved through such initiatives.

Identifying Translation Services

COP 7 recognised that there was a need to develop new sources of free translation for technical material of interest to other countries. Again, the CHM focal points network could seek possible sources of such services, and then help connect them to priority needs. Possible sources would be language courses, companies that use translators and might be prepared to donate a proportion of their time, volunteers, universities, etc.