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REVIEW OF PROGRESS IN PROVIDING CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORT TO PARTIES, PROMOTING COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS AND STRENGTHENING OF THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AND COOPERATION

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This note complements the “*Proposed work programme for the clearing-house mechanism in support of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020*” (UNEP/CBD/COP/11/31) by providing the Conference of the Parties with information on the implementation of the clearing-house mechanism. It is structured as follows:

(a) Section II describes the progress made by the Executive Secretary on the clearing-house mechanism during this intersessional period since the tenth meeting of the conference of the Parties, and highlights current priorities;

(b) Section III shares some lessons learned throughout the implementation process with a view to improving how to further develop the clearing-house mechanism;

(c) Section IV is a brief conclusion with some final comments and recommendations to the Conference of the Parties;

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(d) Annex I summarizes the support provided by the clearing-house mechanism to programmes under the Convention and to the operations of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and annex II contains the draft decision elements related to the clearing-house mechanism.

II. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES ¹

2. This section summarizes the implementation activities of the clearing-house mechanism in which the Executive Secretary is involved. Under each goal, a distinction is made between the progress made since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and the current priorities for future activities.

Goal 1: The central clearing-house mechanism provides effective global information services to facilitate the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.

1.1. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has the capacity to sustain an effective central clearing-house mechanism.

Progress

3. Since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, a main priority of the Secretariat has been to increase its capacity for the central clearing-house mechanism in order to respond to future needs and requests in a more efficient and cost-effective way. Progress has been made in the following areas:

(a) Expertise – A Website Officer with expertise in developing online information systems joined the CHM team in January 2011, which ensures the availability of stable in-house expertise information and communication technology (ICT) for the CBD website and the central CHM information services;

(b) Web technology – With a view to improving the quality and sustainability of the CBD website and its CHM information services in the long-run, a state-of-the-art content management system (CMS)² was selected based on a series of evaluation criteria including cost, compatibility with the existing infrastructure, multilingualism, built-in features, extensibility, and availability of technical expertise and support;

(c) Translation management – Computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and processes have been introduced to optimize the use of the budget available for website translation;

(d) Project management – Professional staff of the CHM team have acquired the PRINCE2³ certification in project management.

Priorities

4. In terms of capacity, the current priorities can be summarized as follows:

(a) Finalize the configuration of the new content management system and its integration into the CBD ICT infrastructure;

¹ The content of this section is an update of the information contained in the same section of the "Additional information on the proposed work programme for the clearing-house mechanism" (UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/4/INF/12).

² More information on the selected content management system is available at <http://www.kentico.com>.

³ PRojects IN Controlled Environments 2 (PRINCE2) is a structured project management method endorsed by the Government of the United Kingdom as the project management standard for public projects. The methodology encompasses the management, control and organisation of a project.

- (b) Pursue the gradual migration from the legacy content management system to the new one, with priority given to new initiatives;
- (c) Advocate for a component of the core budget dedicated to website translation in order to sustain the availability of the CBD website in all United Nations languages;
- (d) Fill the vacant Documentation Officer post to increase the Secretariat's capacity to manage documentation and terminology;
- (e) Adopt the PRINCE2 methodology when managing projects related to the clearing-house mechanism.

1.2. A high-quality CBD website is available in all United Nations languages.

Progress

5. After the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the content of the CBD website was updated to reflect the major outcomes of this meeting, particularly the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefit Arising from their Utilization, and other decisions. The database of Parties was updated to incorporate the two new protocols adopted in Nagoya.

6. During the first half of 2011, the priority was the preparation of a new version of the CBD website which was launched on 6 June 2011. Thanks to support from Spain and Saudi Arabia, major enhancements were made, including a more attractive look-and-feel, an improved navigation system, and support for the Arabic language. The web portal on the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020 and a first version of the Global Platform on Business and Biodiversity were also launched on 6 June 2011.

7. Throughout 2011, many sections of the CBD website were updated, including those on the national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), south-south cooperation, the clearing-house mechanism, and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing. Support was also requested, in the form of technical advice or programming, to contribute to the implementation of some web-based components for various programmes and initiatives under the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the prototype for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), the case-studies on incentive measures, the blue carbon policy initiative, and the websites for GreenWave and the Rio Conventions Pavilion. Among other things, an automated countdown until the deadline to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets was developed. A table summarizing the support to these programmes and initiatives under the Convention is available in the annex.

8. In parallel, a comprehensive website audit was undertaken and resulted in a web content enhancement plan with detailed recommendations. Progress in their implementation is taking place, but at a pace limited by staff time and time-bound deliverables. With voluntary funding from various donors, it was also possible to make further content of the CBD website available in all United Nations languages.

9. Since the beginning of 2012, work has shifted toward website development on the new content management system (CMS). The Global Platform on Business and Biodiversity was the first CBD portal developed with this tool. Technical work took place to implement the essential infrastructure components of the CBD website on this new CMS in a way that allows smooth coexistence with the legacy CMS. This enabled the launch during the third quarter of 2012 of the web portal to support the preparation of the fourth Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO 4). An enhanced web portal on Local Authorities is also under development.

Priorities

10. A main priority is to continue the ongoing work to improve various qualitative aspects of the CBD website, such as search engine optimization, speed, usability, printer-friendliness, statistics, multilingualism, compatibility with web standards, typography, consistency, detection of broken links, content streamlining, etc. Some of these improvements will occur throughout the migration process to the new platform while others will require time to be addressed. As far as this migration process is concerned, it will have to be done in a way that maintains a single master update point for each information type.

11. Another priority for the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is the preparation of a web content strategy to determine how to make the CBD website as effective as possible to its target audiences. This strategy should combine important elements, such as the core mandate of the Secretariat of the Convention, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, the programmes under the Convention, and the overall strategy for communication, education and public awareness. In this exercise, it is important to keep in mind that effectiveness is determined by the ultimate indirect impact on biodiversity. Brainstorming discussions have taken places and there is a general feeling that the Aichi Biodiversity Targets should be the cornerstone of this strategy.

12. Other priorities are typically determined by major events, such as meetings of major bodies and working groups, as well as web-based deliverables from programmes under the Convention on Biological Diversity which do represent a significant share of the work on the CBD website. Current projects in the pipeline already include new web portals for the Green Wave, Biodiversity for Development, and the clearing-house mechanism.

1.3. Effective information exchange services are fully operational.*Progress*

13. The following projects were carried out thanks to support from Spain:

(a) An interoperability mechanism based on the Open Data Protocol was implemented to automate the transfer of key CBD information (treaties, decisions, news, national information) to the InforMEA web portal (www.informea.org) acting as a one-stop window for MEA information. This work was done in collaboration with UNEP's information and knowledge management initiative (MEA-IKM);

(b) A first version of the knowledge base search engine with faceted searches and dynamic result count was developed in 2011. The features and potential of this search engine were demonstrated at a side-event during the fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Review of Implementation. Since then, technical work was carried out to enhance the performance of this search engine in order to make it suitable for a production environment.⁴ The goal is to make this fundamental feature of the central clearing-house mechanism operational by this Conference of the Parties.

⁴ The underlying technology of this search engine is Solr, a popular fast open source enterprise search platform from the Apache Lucene project. More details are available at <http://lucene.apache.org/solr>.

14. To support the work of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Indicators for the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, an online database of potential indicators was developed prior to the fifteenth meeting Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice held on 7-11 November 2011. Recommendation XV/1 welcomed this database and requested that it be further developed, maintained, and periodically updated, with a view to maximizing its usefulness to Parties and other stakeholders, in collaboration with the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership and other relevant partners.

15. During the third quarter of 2012, work started to develop an online system allowing Parties to submit their national targets to the central clearing-house mechanism. A pilot version of this new service is expected to be demonstrated during a side event at this eleventh Conference of the Parties.

Priorities

16. As far as information services are concerned, the first priority is to fully integrate the new content management system (CMS) within the CBD infrastructure in order to benefit from the built-in components and information services offered by this CMS. Once this step is completed, it will be possible to offer a user workspace with professional collaboration tools and submission mechanisms for Parties and partners. Part of this process will require data migration and redesign which should result in a more effective information model for the clearing-house mechanism.

17. Networking services will then enter into play to enable the two-way exchange of information between the central and national clearing-house mechanisms as well as with relevant partners. Interconnections with LinkedIn will also be a priority to establish an online networking platform for national focal points, experts, practitioners, and other relevant contacts.

18. Dissemination services should be reviewed to align to current trends and demands. Mobile devices and e-publication should be considered. Another objective is to make the whole content of the knowledge base accessible through an open application programming interface (API) and/or feeds supporting querying and filtering features.

19. The establishment of the following information services is envisaged:

(a) The extension of the online system to submit national targets into a more comprehensive system providing further information on the implementation of the Convention;

(b) A web plug-in to enable national clearing-house mechanism to easily display national information hosted by the central clearing-house mechanism;

(c) The use of selected indicators to assess the effectiveness of the clearing-house mechanism;

(d) Further enhancements to the CBD search engine, such as search engine optimization (SEO) and the incorporation of a thesaurus;

(e) A semi-automated mechanism to generate online versions of decisions and recommendations based on official documents;

(f) Further automation of the website translation workflow which should be feasible when the next version of the CMS is released (fall 2012);

(g) An information exchange mechanism with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to make its database of biodiversity projects searchable through the knowledge base with CBD metadata;

(h) Interconnection with Mendeley Web (www.mendeley.com), an online social network for researchers.

1.4. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity facilitates the development of a network of experts and practitioners among Parties and partners.

Progress

20. Over the years, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has accumulated significant amount of contacts, including experts and partner organizations, but this information originates from various initiatives and is stored in separate locations. The main sources have been identified and an analysis took place to determine which processes should be put in place to centralize the information and make it searchable through the knowledge base without affecting existing services and operations. For the time being, the technical implementation has not yet started due to more urgent tasks and the size of this new project.

Priorities

21. The following priorities have been identified to make progress towards this objective:

(a) The centralization of existing expert contact information at the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to make it searchable through the knowledge base;

(b) The establishment of the online networking services described in the previous section, including the interconnection with LinkedIn.

1.5. Guidance is available for Parties and partners to exchange information through the clearing-house mechanism network.

Progress

22. A description of the information exchange services of the clearing-house mechanism is available in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2010/1/3.⁵ General guidance on how to exchange information was provided to Parties through workshops and in response to requests for assistance. More specific guidance will depend on the technical implementation of the information exchange services.

Priorities

23. The priority is the establishment of the new online services mentioned above (user workspace, submission mechanism, collaboration tools, networking services). Once they are established, it will be possible to prepare corresponding guidance.

⁵ This document is available online at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=chmiac-2010-01

Goal 2: National clearing-house mechanisms provide effective information services to facilitate the implementation of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

Progress

24. Table 1 below compares the status of the network of national clearing-house mechanisms between 2010 and 2012. Overall, there has been an increase of 5 national clearing-house mechanism websites but a slight decrease in the number of national focal points. While the launch of new national websites is encouraging, this table gives a general impression of status quo. Some Parties, especially those which have not yet designated any national focal point for the clearing-house mechanism, probably remain skeptical about the cost-effectiveness of investing in a national clearing-house mechanism.

25. The comment made in the previous paragraph should be balanced by the fact that the table does not reflect the quality (content, features, user-friendliness, attractiveness, etc.) of existing national clearing-house mechanisms, nor the efforts made to maintain and enhance them. These aspects are difficult to quantify in an objective manner but overall national clearing-house mechanism websites remain roughly equally split between three categories: excellent/very good, good/average, and poor (most of the time in terms of content and attractiveness), as indicated in the progress report submitted to the tenth Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/10/15). This means that at least one third of the national CHM websites would need further improvements.

Table 1: Comparative status of the network of national clearing-house mechanisms (2010 vs. 2012)

	Countries¹	Parties		NFP		Websites	
Year		2010	2012	2010	2012	2010	2012
Africa	53	53	53	48	46	25	26
Asia and the Pacific	56	56	56	44	44	12	14
Central and Eastern Europe	23	23	23	17	18	13	15
Latin America and the Caribbean	33	33	33	28	28	17	17
Western Europe and Others ²	31	28	28	25	25	22	22
Totals	196	193	193	162	161	89	94

Notes:

1. The European Union has been counted as in the Western Europe and Others group.
2. The NFP and websites include those of a non-Party (USA).

26. The following meetings were organized in collaboration with Parties to support the development of national clearing-house mechanisms:

(a) The *2011 Meeting of the European Biodiversity CHM network* took place on 17-18 November 2011 at the European Environment Agency (EEA), in Copenhagen, Denmark. Major discussion topics included: (i) the development of the European CHM and its integration with the Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE); (ii) the use of common tagging terms; (iii) the proposed new template of the European CHM portal Toolkit; and (iv) the role of the CHM in managing national targets;

(b) The *Subregional capacity-building workshop for South Asia on the Clearing-House Mechanism* was convened on 12-16 December 2011 in Dehradun, India, thanks to support from the Governments of Japan and Belgium. The objectives of the workshop were: (i) to build capacity and provide guidance on how to establish and sustain effective national CHMs in South Asia; and (ii) to contribute to the establishment of a regional CHM for SACEP member countries. The corresponding report (UNEP/CBD/CHM/CBW/2011/SA/4) is available online at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=chm-cbw-2011-sa;

(c) The *Workshop to review the implementation of the Clearing-House Mechanism in partner countries of the Belgian CHM* was organized on 23-25 April 2012 in Cotonou, Benin, by the Governments of Belgium and Benin. This workshop gathered representatives from ten African countries as well as a regional organization (COMIFAC) to support the development of national clearing-house mechanisms in the region in accordance with decision X/15.

Priorities

27. The priority at this Conference of the Parties is to advocate for a regular post of Programme Assistant to support the development of the clearing-house mechanism network. The incumbent's duties will be to assist, on an ongoing basis, in reviewing all national clearing-house mechanisms, monitoring their progress, assessing their needs, identifying and capturing lessons learned and best practices, preparing corresponding guidance, sharing knowledge and experiences on their development, and liaising with clearing-house mechanism national focal points.

28. This position is needed because there is currently no dedicated person to support Parties in the development of their national clearing-house mechanisms. Given the continuous heavy workload to strengthen and maintain the central clearing-house mechanism, it is not possible to significantly support Parties without negatively affecting the development of the central clearing-house mechanism. This is an opportunity for this Conference of the Parties to contribute to the network of national clearing-house mechanisms in a cost-effective way. This position would also ensure that any capacity-building workshop is part of a sustained process instead of being a punctual event with limited impact.

29. In addition to the previously-described duties, current priorities to support the development of national clearing-house mechanisms are:

(a) The organization of the next capacity-building workshop for the clearing-house mechanism thanks to the financial support of Japan;

(b) The preparation of an enhanced web portal for the clearing-house mechanism with updated guidance and best practices for developing national clearing-house mechanisms; the content provided on this portal will depend on the availability of the programme assistant to support the CHM network;

(c) The establishment of an online system to capture information on progress and needs of national clearing-house mechanisms;

(d) Collaboration with the European CHM to improve their Portal Toolkit with a view to increasing the effectiveness of national clearing-house mechanisms built with this toolkit.

Goal 3: Partners significantly expand the clearing-house mechanism network and services.*Progress*

30. The Secretariat of the Convention contributed to the following partner initiatives with a view to expanding the clearing-house mechanism network and services:

(a) The Secretariat participated in the Second and Third *Steering Committee meeting of the MEA Information and Knowledge Management Initiative* respectively held on 14-16 June 2011 in Glion, Switzerland, and on 24-26 June 2012 in Montreux, Switzerland. Additional working group meetings were also attended through videoconferencing. The main outcome of this collaborative work is the InforMEA web portal (www.informea.org) acting as a one-stop window aggregating information from various multilateral environments (MEAs);

(b) The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) convened, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the *Informatics expert meeting on invasive alien species* held on 5-6 September 2011 in Copenhagen. The outcome of this meeting was a “*Joint work programme to strengthen information services on invasive alien species as a contribution towards Aichi Biodiversity Target 9*”;

(c) In response to paragraph 5 (c) of decision X/15 and paragraph 2 of decision X/7, the Secretariat facilitated the preparation by the Conservation Commons of the report entitled “*A review of barriers to the sharing of biodiversity data and information, with recommendations for eliminating them*” (UNEP/CBD/COP/11/INF/8). This document highlights the importance of sharing biodiversity data and information for the implementation of the Convention and the Conference of the Parties is invited to welcome it as a contribution towards the achievement of Aichi Biodiversity Targets 1 and 19, as proposed in section B of annex II;

(d) In paragraph 4 of decision X/15, the Executive Secretary and the Global Environment Facility were requested to cooperate to facilitate access to funding for the clearing-house mechanism as a key component to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention for the Post-2010 period as well as the implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans. The corresponding response from the Global Environment Facility was the provision of support for the clearing-house mechanism in the proposals supporting the revision of the national biodiversity strategies and action plan, as indicated in page 24 and annex 11 of its report to this Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/11/8).

Priorities

31. Current priorities to support partners expanding the clearing-house mechanism network are:

(a) Ongoing collaboration with UNEP on the MEA Information and Knowledge Management Initiative through its technical working group in order to contribute to the implementation of the activities planned by the Steering Committee;

(b) Collaboration with the Global Environment Facility to make information on biodiversity-related projects more accessible from thematic programmes under the Convention on Biological Diversity;

(c) Collaboration with interested thematic and regional partners to investigate ways to build capacity and improve services through the clearing-house mechanism network.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

32. This section shares some lessons learned throughout the implementation process with a view to further developing the clearing-house mechanism. Its main purpose is to draw the attention of the Conference of the Parties to key findings that should be kept in mind when making decisions related to the clearing-house mechanism. The following topics are covered:

- (a) The mandate of the clearing-house mechanism;
- (b) The role of the informal advisory committee;
- (c) National coordination between the CBD and CHM national focal points;
- (d) Cost-effective spending;
- (e) Stable reliable expertise;
- (f) Integrated approach.

Mandate of the clearing-house mechanism

33. After 20 years of existence of the Convention, the clearing-house mechanism has evolved. In addition to its original mandate to facilitate technical and scientific cooperation, there are expectations that the clearing-house mechanism should also support other articles, particularly Article 17 on exchange of information, Article 16 on access to and transfer of technology and Article 13 on education and public awareness. The clearing-house mechanism is not aimed at covering the full implementation of all these articles, but rather to contribute to their implementation in a cross-cutting way, therefore it is useful to look at some definitions of the term “clearing-house” from reputable reference sources in Table 2 below to get a more precise idea of nature and scope of activities generally understood under this concept.

Table 2: Definitions of Clearing-House

Source	Definition
Merriam-Webster	A central agency for the collection, classification, and distribution especially of information; broadly: an informal channel for distributing information or assistance http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clearinghouse
Dictionary.com	A central institution or agency for the collection, maintenance, and distribution of materials, information, etc http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/clearinghouse
Cambridge University Press	A central organization which collects and sends out information for other people or organizations http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/clearing-house

34. The above definitions all share the notion of a two-way information exchange services built around a central hub. It is interesting to see that these definitions do not mention anything about the platform or channel used to provide these information services. What is important is their effectiveness independently of the technicalities behind them. This is in line with the mission, goals and objectives of the clearing-house mechanism as defined in decision X/15 and with the corresponding proposed work programme for the clearing-house mechanism in support of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 (UNEP/CBD/COP/11/31).

35. There is definitely no contradiction between the above clarification and the fact that the Convention would benefit from further scientific and technical cooperation. On the contrary, the clearing-house mechanism should strive to provide the most effective services to facilitate scientific and technical cooperation with its available expertise and capacity.

36. At this juncture, it should be stressed that certain aspects of scientific and technical cooperation are beyond the scope of the clearing-house mechanism and are expected to be taken care of directly at the programme level. For instance, scientific and technical cooperation on marine biodiversity requires specific knowledge from those in charge of this thematic area. The whole point here is to realize that boundaries of responsibilities exist when dealing with such a broad topic as scientific and technical cooperation.

Role of the Informal Advisory Committee (CHM-IAC)

37. As indicated in decision VII/23, the mandate of the informal advisory committee to the clearing-house mechanism (CHM-IAC) is to provide advice to the Executive Secretary on matters related to the clearing house-mechanism. This committee has an important role to play as a representative of the user community expressing needs and providing feedback for improvements. It complements formal bodies of the Convention by being more flexible and able to deal with more details than them. It is therefore expected that the Conference of the Parties will extend the mandate of this committee which expires at this meeting, as proposed in section B of annex II.

38. However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of the informal advisory committee has been affected by the lack of budget to hold its meetings. Any meeting has to be held at the margins of a major meeting of the Convention with participation limited to the CHM-IAC members attending this CBD meeting. The meeting of the Conference of the Parties is usually the one during which participation can be maximized. Still, such timing is inadequate because the Conference of the Parties cannot directly consider the outcomes of this CHM-IAC meeting. So, it would be beneficial to organize one main face-to-face CHM-IAC meeting in the middle of the intersessional period so that the recommendations made can be taken into account by both the Executive Secretary and the next Conference of the Parties. To limit expenses, this CHM-IAC meeting would still be held back-to-back with a major intersessional meeting under the Convention and the available budget would be used to maximize participation.

Coordination between CBD and CHM National Focal Points

39. Good coordination between the CBD and CHM national focal points (NFP) is essential to establish an effective national clearing-house mechanism. The CHM NFP is expected to deliver a national CHM for the CBD NFP and those implementing the NBSAP in the country. For the national CHM to be effective, the CBD NFP should be involved in this process as the main client who has the responsibility to express his vision and needs, and to check that the national clearing-house mechanism responds to these needs.

40. There are definitely good prospects for coordination and synergies in countries where the same person is the national focal point for both the Convention and its clearing-house mechanism. However, these roles are very different and both require sufficient time and dedication to be effectively fulfilled. In such circumstances, it is expected that an appropriate team structure is in place with the same attention paid to coordination.

Cost-efficient spending

41. The Secretariat is often under pressure to deliver short-term results. There are several reasons for this pressure but one of them deserves special attention: voluntary funding with short spending deadlines. In some cases, this is a perverse incentive rewarding those who spend huge amounts quickly and discouraging those who would favor a more cost-effective approach. In projects whose objectives include the establishment of information services, quick spending often results in poorly designed systems with little provisions for maintenance and long-term viability. Even when the project is successfully implemented in time, there may actually be a false sense of accomplishment as it cannot be sustained over time. An analogy can be made between fast fuel-hungry cars with little autonomy, and slower fuel-efficient cars able to drive a long distance.

42. In current times of financial crisis, there is an ethical responsibility to deal with this issue, for instance through constructive negotiations with major donors about resource optimization to maximize impact. Donors sponsoring an initiative expected to last several years (e.g. until 2020) may agree to allow the Executive Secretary to decide on the rhythm of spending. Expenditures would then be primarily result-bound rather than time-bound with reasonable provisions for sustaining the project over its expected lifecycle.

Stable reliable expertise

43. A major issue faced when implementing information and communication technology (ICT) projects is the lack of appropriate in-house expertise. A typical example is the need for a web application developer who knows the nitty-gritty details of our database and software code. Experience has shown that hiring consultants for this type of work has often been quite costly and ineffective for several reasons:

(a) The hiring and selection process is time-consuming and inherently introduces delays and risks. Once available, the newly-selected consultant needs to learn the CBD infrastructure and has to be coached;

(b) Often, deliverables do not match expectations especially when the hourly rate is high;

(c) There are little provisions for maintenance by the consultant, and when the project is handed over, serious issues can arise when the Secretariat of the Convention is expected to maintain a system that was not designed by its staff;

(d) Overall, there is a significant internal overhead for the Secretariat throughout the whole consultancy.

44. To avoid the above situations, CBD staff should be preferred over consultants whenever possible even if this implies some delays in project execution. If additional expertise is required, perhaps resources can be pooled to have one additional stable person that will take care of several projects during a long period. In the majority of cases, the technical expertise required from the consultant is the same across different programmes and could be developed in-house. This can lead to significant longer-term savings and more successful projects by avoiding repeated recruitment, training and hand-over overhead. It is important to keep this point in mind during budget discussions about the decision elements contained in Annex II in order to increase impact while possibly reducing necessary funding.

Integrated approach

45. One lesson learned is that, over the years, the Secretariat has developed, in response to independent requests, many information systems which are isolated from each other. Some of the consequences of this approach are listed below:

- (a) Web pages on decisions do not provide direct links to guidance or funding for their implementation;
- (b) Distinct case-studies databases have been developed for various programmes, resulting in duplication of efforts and lack of cross-references;
- (c) Separate contact databases exist (national focal points, meeting registration, rosters of experts, mail log, etc) while these contacts are mostly the same people interacting with the Convention;
- (d) Many guidance documents are posted on the website without metadata to facilitate their retrieval;
- (e) Side events are not linked to the initiatives that they describe;
- (f) Large systems such as the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) and LifeWeb operate as separate islands of information.

46. While it will not be possible to resolve the above issues overnight, a more integrated approach is needed when making decisions about new information services. The key recommendation is to stop building isolated or duplicate information systems. Instead, efforts should focus on providing a range of core information services which can serve the common needs of most programmes while enabling cross-references whenever appropriate. For instance, if online reporting is requested, then it makes sense to set it up a way that can serve the reporting needs of all programmes instead of ending up with various separate versions. This approach should be kept in mind when negotiating decisions and the corresponding budget for the Executive Secretary to implement the requests in section C of annex II.

IV. CONCLUSION

47. During this intersessional period between the tenth and eleventh meetings of the Conference of the Parties, substantive progress was made to strengthen the capacity of the central clearing-house mechanism, particularly in the field of information and communication technology. There has been limited capacity to manage content and knowledge, but it is being mitigated now by the recruitment of a Documentation Officer which is in progress. Despite the high number of pending activities from both the work programme and annex II, prospects are fairly good for the next intersessional period as long as lessons learned in the previous section are taken into account when making future decisions related to the clearing-house mechanism.

48. More specifically, the Conference of the Parties is invited to consider the following in order to further contribute to the implementation of the clearing-house mechanism in a cost-effective manner:

- (a) Create a Programme Assistant post to support the development of the clearing-house mechanism network, as indicated in paragraph 27, and to respond to paragraph 10 (b) of recommendation 4/1 (in section A of annex II);
- (b) Provide funding for capacity-building workshops after the above post is agreed, otherwise the workshops will have limited impact and the overhead associated with the corresponding preparatory activities will significantly delay further developments of the central clearing-house mechanism;
- (c) Provide funding for website translation from the core budget;
- (d) Avoid tight deadlines and short-term consultants for developing information services;
- (e) Allow the flexibility for cost-efficient spending and resource pooling to maintain stable expertise;
- (f) Consider decisions that encourage an integrated approach to information services;

(g) Provide funding to hold one meeting of the informal advisory committee to the clearing-house mechanism.

*Annex I***SUMMARY OF SUPPORT TO PROGRAMMES AND OPERATIONS**

Tables 3 and 4 below summarize the support provided by the central clearing-house mechanism to various programmes under the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the operations of the Secretariat during the intersessional period between the tenth and eleventh meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

Table 3: Summary of CHM support to CBD programmes

Decision	CBD Programme	CHM Support
X/1	Access and benefit-sharing	Technical advice for the ABS Clearing-House
X/2	Aichi Biodiversity Targets	Development of an automated countdown
X/6	Biodiversity for development	Technical support for web portal redesign
X/7	Indicators	Establishment of a database for headline indicators
X/8	United Nations Decade on Biodiversity	Development and maintenance of web portal
X/10	Global Biodiversity Outlook 4	Infrastructure setup for new web pages
X/16	Technology transfer	On-line database enhancements for gap analysis
X/17	Global Strategy for Plant Conservation	Technical support for translating the online toolkit
X/18	Green Wave	Technical advice for web portal migration
X/20	Rio Pavilion	Technical assistance for website infrastructure
X/21	Business and biodiversity	Support for website development and maintenance
X/22	Local authorities	Initial advice and technical support for new web portal
X/22	NBSAP	Database upgrade for regional and subnational BSAPs
X/29	Marine Biodiversity	Initial project analysis for an online tool on blue carbon
X/29	Marine biodiversity	Technical support for integrating the EBSA prototype
X/32	Sustainable use of biodiversity	Initial analysis and advice for a web portal on bushmeat
X/33	Climate change and biodiversity	Technical maintenance of adaptation database
X/36	Forest biodiversity	Technical advice for the TEMATEA module on forest
X/38	Invasive alien species	Advice for implementing the joint work programme to strengthen information services on invasive alien species
X/40	Traditional knowledge	Preparation of mailing list and automated reports
X/44	Incentive measures	Development of dynamic web pages with Google Maps

Table 4: Summary of CHM support to the operations of the CBD Secretariat

Operations of the CBD Secretariat	CHM Support
Parties	Database upgrade for Nagoya and KL protocols
Decisions	Online versions of COP 10 & MOP 5 decisions
Recommendations	Online versions of WGRI, SBSTTA & ICNP recommendations
Japan Biodiversity Fund	Database to manage activities and reporting
National Focal Points	Technical maintenance of NFP database
Meeting registration	Technical maintenance of registration database
Headline news and statements	Technical maintenance of database
Mail log	Technical maintenance of mail log database
Employment opportunities	Technical maintenance of database

*Annex II***DRAFT DECISION ELEMENTS RELATED TO THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM****A. Main elements from recommendation 4/1**

The main draft decision elements related to the clearing-house mechanism are contained in paragraph 10 of recommendation 4/1 adopted by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Review of Implementation of the Convention, and are reproduced below:

10. Welcomes the work programme for the clearing-house mechanism in support of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 (UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/4/3/Add.1) and agrees to:

(a) Keep the work programme for clearing-house mechanism under review in light of the need to contribute significantly to the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan and to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation, knowledge sharing and information exchange;

(b) Strengthen communication with, and build the capacity of, the national focal points for the clearing-house mechanism;

(c) Call on Parties to share information through national clearing-house mechanisms or other relevant mechanisms on results from monitoring of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and for projects funded through Articles 20 and 21;

11. Requests the Executive Secretary to:

(a) Establish a standard information-exchange mechanism for the clearing-house mechanism to interconnect the central and national clearing-house mechanisms;

(b) Continue to use automated translation tools to facilitate exchange of technical and scientific information, in line with Articles 17 and 18;

B. Additional elements proposed by the Executive Secretary

The Executive Secretary has proposed the following additional draft decision elements in response to paragraph 1 of decision IX/30 on the informal advisory committee, and to paragraph 5 (c) of decision X/15 on ways to promote free and open access to data and information for conservation purposes:

10bis. Decides to extend the mandate of the informal advisory committee, as defined by its operational guidelines, and to review it at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

10ter. Welcomes the recommendations made by the Conservation Commons in document UNEP/CBD/COP/11/INF/8 and calls upon Parties and other stakeholders to consider how they can most effectively address barriers to data access that are under their direct control with a view to contributing to Aichi Biodiversity Targets 1 and 19 in particular;

C. Other elements

At their latest meetings, both the Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice and the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Review of Implementation of the Convention have adopted various recommendations which contain elements related to the clearing-house mechanism. Table 5 below is a compilation of these elements with a view to identifying possible synergies and increasing cost-effectiveness. In this context, the development of the Clearing-House on Access and Benefit-sharing recommended by the Intergovernmental Committee on the Nagoya Protocol is a major request which should also be taken into account.

Table 5: CHM-related requests from latest recommendations

Recommendation & CBD Programme	Text
SBSTTA 16	
XVI/2 - § 3 GBO-4	<i>Urges</i> Parties and <i>invites</i> other Governments and relevant organizations, including indigenous and local communities, to make available data, information and case studies, for possible inclusion in the fourth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, including by using appropriate indicator frameworks, drawing on, <i>inter alia</i> , the flexible framework and the indicative list of indicators identified in the annex to SBSTTA recommendation XV/1, on the status and trends of and threats to biological diversity, drivers of biodiversity loss and the measures to address them, and progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, by providing such information in their fifth national reports or through earlier submissions, making use, as appropriate, of the material already available on the Biodiversity Indicator Partnership web pages.
XVI/2 - § 7 (b) GBO-4	Keep the work plan, communication strategy and financial plan for the development of the fourth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook under review in consultation with the SBSTTA Bureau in order to make adjustments as appropriate and necessary and to report on progress through the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on a periodic basis.
XVI/4 - § 11 Marine biodiversity (EBSA)	<i>Requests</i> the Executive Secretary to further develop, subject to availability of financial resources, the prototype repository and information-sharing mechanism into a fully functional repository and information sharing mechanism so that it can fully serve the purpose called for in paragraph 39 of decision X/29, in collaboration with Parties, other Governments, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-IOC), in particular the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC), Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative, and other competent organizations, noting the need to have a clear distinction between the repository containing the information included on the basis of endorsements by the Conference of the Parties as called for in paragraph 42 of decision X/29 and other information entered in the information sharing mechanism, and report on progress to a meeting of the Subsidiary Body prior to twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.
XVI/6 - § 8 (a) Marine biodiversity (EBSA)	Develop a web-based information-sharing system linking existing information sources on marine spatial planning on the web.
XVI/7 - § 12 (b) Forest biodiversity	Compile information relevant to the application of REDD+ safeguards for biodiversity, and make it available through the UNFCCC REDD web platform, the clearing-house mechanism, and workshops, prior to the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting.

Table 5: CHM-related requests from latest recommendations (*continued*)

Recommendation & CBD Programme	Text
SBSTTA 16	
XVI/8 - § 7 (a) Climate change	Identify relevant workshops and activities under the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and disseminate such information through the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention and other means with a view to enhancing knowledge sharing on ecosystem based approaches.
XVI/8 - § 7 (b) Climate change	Continue discussions on the relevant activities presented in document UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/16/9 for further consideration and implementation as appropriate and based on their financial feasibility, and to explore options to enhance the interoperability of databases managed by the two Secretariats to enhance cooperation on ecosystem based approaches, especially in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change.
XVI/8 - § 9 Climate change	<i>Further requests</i> the Executive Secretary, through the clearing-house mechanism and in collaboration with relevant organizations, to build awareness and capacity among organizations and programmes engaging in climate-change modelling and studies of ongoing biodiversity modelling, scenario, and data management initiatives, including DIVERSITAS, the Biodiversity Observations Network of the Group on Earth Observations and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, among others.
XVI/9 - § 14 (a) Climate change (Geoengineering)	Compile information reported by Parties referred to in paragraph 8 above, and make it available through the clearing-house mechanism.
XVI/12 - § 11 Marine biodiversity (EBSA)	<i>Requests</i> the Executive Secretary to further develop, subject to availability of financial resources, the prototype repository and information-sharing mechanism into a fully functional repository and information sharing mechanism so that it can fully serve the purpose called for in paragraph 39 of decision X/29, in collaboration with Parties, other Governments, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-IOC), in particular the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC), Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative, and other competent organizations, noting the need to have a clear distinction between the repository containing the information included on the basis of endorsements by the Conference of the Parties as called for in paragraph 42 of decision X/29 and other information entered in the information sharing mechanism, and report on progress to a meeting of the Subsidiary Body prior to twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.
XVI/14 - § 12 (a) Incentive measures	Compile the submissions received pursuant to paragraph 4 (d) above, make them available through the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, and prepare a synthesis report on obstacles encountered in implementing identified options for eliminating, phasing out or reforming incentives that are harmful for biodiversity, for consideration by the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice at a meeting prior to the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Table 5: CHM-related requests from latest recommendations (*continued*)

Recommendation & CBD Programme	Text
WG-RI 4	
4/1 - § 8 Aichi Biodiversity Targets	<i>Recalling</i> decision IX/8, paragraph 16 (a), <i>reiterates</i> the request to the Executive Secretary in cooperation with partner organizations to facilitate the continued exchange of best practices and lessons learned from the preparation, updating and revision of national biodiversity strategies and action plans, through appropriate forums and mechanisms such as the clearing-house mechanism and, subject to availability of resources, strengthened cooperation with regional and subregional processes, south-south and triangular cooperation and voluntary peer review.
4/1 - § 17 United Nations Decade on Biodiversity	<i>Requests</i> the Executive Secretary to promote the implementation of the strategy for the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, within the programme of work of communication, education and public awareness (CEPA), based on the availability of resources and maintain the Decade's web portal to highlight all activities.
4/4 - § 7 Biodiversity for development	<i>Invites</i> Parties, the United Nations Development Programme and other relevant organizations to make available through the clearing-house mechanism, as appropriate, best practices on integrating biodiversity into poverty eradication and development.
4/6 - § 16 (c) Cooperation with other conventions	To make available through the clearing house mechanism, the lessons learned related to cooperation and synergy at national level, including from the implementation of the GEF pilot project on facilitating national reporting to the Rio conventions.
4/7 - § 5 (b) Business and biodiversity	To compile information on best practices that incorporates all three objectives of the Convention and those of its two Protocols and facilitate the engagement of businesses, governments and other stakeholders in adopting such practices through various means including the Global Platform for Business and Biodiversity website, newsletters and specific, targeted workshops.
