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CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM
REGIONAL WORKSHOPS
First Meeting
Cartagena de Indias, Colombia
13 to 15 October 1997

REPORT OF THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM REGIONAL WORKSHOP
FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with Decision III/4 of the Conference of the Parties, the Clearing-House Mechanism Regional Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean, hosted by the Government of Colombia, was held in Cartagena de Indias, from 13 to 15 October 1997.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives of Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico and Peru, as well as representatives of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and observers from the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), US Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division, Central American Commission for the Environment and Development (CCAD), BirdLife International/BCIS. A full list of participants is attached as Annex I.

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the meeting

3. The meeting was opened at 09:00 on 13 October 1997 by the representative of the Secretariat, Mr. Marc Auer, Programme Officer of the Clearing-House Mechanism, who welcomed the participants on behalf of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Calestous Juma. In his welcoming address, read to the meeting, the Executive Secretary expressed his gratitude to the Government of Colombia for its offer to host the regional workshop and for its continued efforts to promote the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM or Clearing-House). He also thanked the Governments of Germany and Australia for their additional voluntary contributions. He noted that the meeting would lay the basis for further cooperation and synergy among those who are developing their national biodiversity information and cooperation capacities. The Executive Secretary recalled the importance of the first regional workshop of the Clearing-House Mechanism in the development of the CHM pilot-phase. He said the workshop will provide recommendations to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in May 1998.

4. Mr. Cristián Samper welcomed the participants on behalf of the Government of Colombia. He also expressed his satisfaction that the first regional workshop of the Clearing-House Mechanism was being held in Colombia, and his appreciation for the close cooperation between the Government of Colombia and the Secretariat of the Convention in the organization of the workshop. He read the statement of Mr. Fabio Arjona, Vice-Minister for the Environment. After thanking the Secretariat and the Governments of Germany and Australia, he stressed the need to discuss the relationship between the CHM and regional initiatives and the identification of elements particular to the region.

Agenda Item 2: Election of the Chairperson

5. Mr. Cristián Samper (Colombia) was elected Chairperson and Ms. Dalia Salabarría (Cuba) was elected Rapporteur of the meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

6. The provisional agenda as contained in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/RW/1/1 was adopted. The provisional organization of work, contained in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/RW/1/1/Add.1, was also adopted. The agenda is attached as Annex II and the list of documents for the workshop is attached as Annex III.

Agenda Item 4: Introduction and background

7. The Secretariat made a presentation on the state of the art of the CHM introducing document UNEP/CBD/CHM/RW/1/2. This background document was prepared by the Secretariat for the purpose of facilitating the First Regional Workshop on the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, recalling the recommendations and decisions related to the Clearing-House Mechanism. To further assist the regional workshops, the document restates the terms of reference of the Meeting, as formulated by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. These define national and regional scientific and technical information needs, priorities identified, modalities to deliver information and evaluation of national capacities for the implementation of the Convention. The regional workshops should also review experience in scientific and technical co-operation in support of the objectives of the Convention, in order to identify ways for the Clearing-House Mechanism to facilitate best such co-operation.

8. The representative of the Secretariat stressed the latest developments of the CHM pilot phase as of June 1997, with respect to the guidance provided by the Convention's bodies, partners and target group, concept and current status, regional workshops and prospects and expectations.

9. Ms. Beatriz Torres (SCBD) made a presentation on the CHM Technology Evaluation.

Agenda Item 5: Preliminary exchange of views

10. The delegations of Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Ecuador, Costa Rica and Jamaica made interventions. It was stated, *inter alia*, that the Clearing-House Mechanism was supposed to be more than an information system and should be clearly focused on the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention.

11. Participants also stressed that the CHM should facilitate and promote technical and scientific cooperation.

Agenda Item 6: Presentation of country experiences

12. The representatives of the following countries made presentations about the state of their Clearing-House Mechanism activities as well as about the implementation of the Convention: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico and Peru.

Agenda Item 7: Presentation of regional experiences

13. Representatives of the Interamerican Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) and the Central American Commission for the Environment (CCAD) made presentations on regional initiatives.

Agenda Item 8: Presentation of thematic experiences

14. The representative of Biodiversity Conservation Information System (BCIS) made a presentation on thematic experiences.

Agenda Item 9: Presentation on information content

15. Mr. Vanderlei Canhos (Brazil) made a presentation on information content.

Agenda Item 10: Presentation on information structure

16. Mr. Hesiquio Benítez (Mexico) spoke on information structure.

Agenda Item 11: Presentation on capacity building

17. Mr. Arturo Martínez (Argentina) spoke about capacity building.

Agenda Item 12: Presentation of the Global Environment Facility:
Support for the national implementation of the CHM

18. Mr. Gonzalo Castro, stressed the interest of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in financing projects for the implementation of the Convention and the development of the CHM. He presented a wide array of options to gain access to GEF funding. He also noted the need for regional perspectives and the importance of integrating CBD projects with initiatives of other international and regional treaties.

Agenda Item 13: Discussion of agenda items 9, 10 and 11

19. Participants discussed agenda items 9, 10 and 11 on October 14 and October 15.

Agenda Item 14: Presentation of results and recommendations of agenda items 9, 10 and 11

General recommendations

20. The Clearing-House Mechanism must be designed to promote and facilitate scientific and technical cooperation, and contribute to the implementation of all three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
21. Information systems are an important component of the Clearing-House Mechanism. In addition, it should provide other services, including implementation of the provisions of Article 12 of the Convention.
22. The implementation of the Clearing-House at the national level requires the strengthening of national capacities.
23. The Clearing-House should be needs-driven, and based on an assessment of needs for technical and scientific cooperation by potential user groups.
24. Benefits of the Clearing-House include better data for decision making, support faster access to existing knowledge, promote technical and scientific communication and avoid duplication of efforts, allow additional comparisons among existing data and generation of new information, and a more effective and efficient implementation of the Convention.
25. The implementation of the Clearing-House Mechanism will require, *inter alia*, access to metadata and databases, information technology, institutional strengthening, human resources and training.
26. Potential users of the Clearing-House Mechanism include national governments, research and training institutions, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and communications media.
27. Data used for the Clearing-House Mechanism needs to be organized, standardized and made available, in order to integrate, interpret and summarize them according to needs.
28. Ownership of all information made available through the Clearing-House Mechanism shall remain with the provider of the information. Restrictions to access may exist according to terms and conditions agreed upon with the provider.
29. Benefits should be shared with the providers of the information, especially information related to the use of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of local and indigenous communities, in accordance with Article 8(j) of the Convention.

30. Data quality and updating is an essential component of information management, and shall be the responsibility of the provider of the information at the national level.

31. Information exchange should take advantage of information technology including, *inter alia*, the use of the internet, CD-ROMs and diskettes.

32. Financial resources need to be made available to support the implementation of the CHM, through bilateral and multilateral funding institutions and other international donors. The GEF, as the interim financial mechanism, should maintain a range of funding options that are flexible and meet national needs in accordance with Decision III/4 of the Conference of the Parties and SBSTTA recommendations III/6.

Content

33. Contents of the Clearing-House should include information and technical and scientific cooperation provided by the Convention on Biological Diversity and Parties, and also among different users at the national level, and should be a two-way mechanism.

34. At the multilateral, regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels, the content of the Clearing-House should include the content of national strategies, programs and plans, and can also include, but not necessarily be restricted to:

a. Full text of the Convention

The importance for National Focal Points to make available the convention provisions and decisions in the native language (making an appeal so that all UN official languages will be in the Secretariat's page) and the interpretation (national and in non technical language) of resolutions and opportunities, is recognized.

b. Information on the Country Studies, National Strategies and Reports, including, *inter alia*, case studies and practices, to the COP. This information besides complying with COP mandates has the function of being highly informative at national level.

c. Opportunities for international, regional and multilateral cooperation.

d. National information on other international and regional treaties related to biological diversity of which the country is member. This information is useful at national level, because it identifies points of contact among different conventions and facilitates synergy between the country different commitments. The importance of establishing links among different conventions is recognized. Moreover, each party shall identify existing national focal points in each convention and shall identify the ratification procedures.

e. Case studies referring to activities related to the implementation of the Convention.

35. In order to promote scientific and technical co-operation at the national and regional level, common needs and priorities from other parties should be clearly identified. Examples at the regional level include shared ecosystems, migratory species and invasive species. Also information about markets, biological collections, maps and satellite images, clean technologies, training opportunities and funding sources.

36. The content of the Clearing-House at the national level may include, but not necessarily be limited to the following items, depending on national priorities and capacities:

a) National Legislation, i.e.;

- Biodiversity conservation
- Sustainable use
- Access to genetic resources
- Access to transfer of technology
- Patents
- Biosafety
- Environmental legislation (list of threatened species, both national and international)
- Incentive measures
- Threatened and endangered species
- Intellectual property rights

b) Biodiversity Information and Practices:

- Components of biological diversity, including:
- Described genes and genomes
- Species and communities at different levels, spatial (nation, state) and temporal
- Ecosystems and habitats
- Data-monitoring activities
- In-situ conservation (National Protected Areas, Priority Areas)
- Ex-situ conservation (plants, animals, micro-organisms)
- Sustainable use of biological resources
- Incentive measures
- Transgenic species
- Introduced species

c) Information on indigenous and local communities knowledge, innovations and practices

d) Technological Information

- Technology (available, required)

e) Direct and Indirect Threats:

- f) Directory of Institutions and experts
 - Researchers
 - Scientific collections
 - Research Institutes
- g) Economic Valuation of biodiversity and incentives for its sustainable use
- h) Markets and trade of goods and services related to biodiversity
- i) Environmental impact assessment and management
- j) Services including, training, surveys, technology experts or other specialties

Structure

37. The need for a clear structure shall be identified to promote scientific, technical and technological cooperation within the CHM. Further, it is proposed that a common structure based on agreed elements be used by the CHM National Focal Points (NFPs) and the Secretariat of the Convention. This would create a shared CHM-identity among the national CHMs. The CHM National Focal Points should be linked with the National Focal Points of the Convention. These CHM National Focal Points should also serve as Focal Points for regional and other similar initiatives related to the activities of the CHM.

38. On a general scale two distinct "roles" can be identified emphasizing the tasks of information structuring (content) of:

- (a) the Secretariat and
- (b) the CHM National Focal Points.

39. The Secretariat should be responsible for summarizing and facilitating information at the global level, while the NFPs should focus on information at the national level.

40. The Secretariat should assist in linking the unconnected CHM National Focal Points to the world wide web.

41. National Focal Points of the CHM should facilitate access to information, conduct surveys of information needs and information providers at the national and local levels, produce directories that promote better communication, avoid duplication of efforts and promote scientific and technical cooperation.

42. National Advisory Committees could be established to assist the National Focal Points in establishing needs and priorities, as well as to monitor the impact of the Clearing-House Mechanism on the implementation of the Convention at the national level.

43. The following options can be taken into account when establishing the CHM National Focal Point:

- (a) A single organization with an Advisory Committee;
- (b) A Commission or a Steering Committee;
- (c) A Network of Organizations.

44. The role of the Clearing-House Mechanism may be transactional between information providers and users.

45. In order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences in the development of the CHM it is proposed to establish a CHM-NFP e-mail group including the currently 169 NFPs, moderated by the Secretariat.

46. The following recommendations could guarantee access to information for non-web-connected NFPs:

- (a) Establish facilitator roles for non-web-connected NFPs by those NFPs who have access to Internet and additional space on their server for this kind of bilateral collaboration. This also would help to create CHM identity among the parties. It is recommended that the Secretariat explore with the GEF modalities to enable non-web-connected NFPs to submit their information to the facilitating NFP.
- (b) Explore ways and means to present CBD-related requests submitted via various "traditional" media, e.g. e-mail, telephone, fax, letter, to the Secretariat, NFPs or the relevant institutions.
- (c) Present the "CHM" on a CD-ROM.
- (d) Provide a list of CBD-related CD-ROMs which are relevant to the different articles and thematic areas identified by the Convention.

47. To improve synergy with regard to information exchange with other CBD-related conventions (e.g. CMS, CITES, RAMSAR, Convention on Desertification, Climate Change, WTO), between CHM and other information management initiatives (e.g. MAB-UNESCO, UNDP-SNDP, UNEPnet, OECD, G7), the avoidance of duplication of efforts is recommended.

Capacity Building

48. In order to promote and facilitate co-operation between Parties, for implementing the Convention, capacity building in areas concerning its three objectives is needed. In this sense Article 12 of the Convention provides guidance on how to promote and facilitate the development of human resources and institutional enhancement, taking into account the needs of developing countries.

49. In addition, the CHM in compliance with Article 18 (3), should not only enhance capacity in data management, but also assist Parties to

prioritize country-driven areas of research, education and training. This increasing scientific, technical and technological capacity shall promote both North-South and South-South cooperation.

50. As it is implied in Article 12 (c), financial support by the Financial Mechanism of the Convention is required in order to implement both the human resource development and the institutional strengthening.

51. Cooperation in capacity building shall include, but not be limited to:

A. Human Resource Development

- I. Information Technologies and Management for promoting and facilitating cooperation in:
 - a) Biodiversity data and information management including data search capabilities;
 - b) Information exchange capabilities;
 - c) New communication technologies;
 - d) Tool-kit development and test phase, and training for using the tool kit;
 - e) Non-electronic communication technologies;
 - f) Information on policy and management issues relevant to the implementation of the Convention.
- II. Other capacity building needs for promoting and facilitating cooperation in:
 - a) Developing national strategies, plans and programs for the three objectives of the Convention;
 - b) Improving existing capacity by sharing experiences of country-driven projects and case studies on conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits;
 - c) Developing joint research programs and training in policy research, and joint ventures for the developing of technologies according to Article 18;
 - d) Enhancing NFPs capacity to facilitate the identification of needs, weaknesses and strengths of users and providers.

B. Institutional Strengthening

- I. Information Technologies and Management
 - a) Internet connectivity: hardware and software
 - b) Compatibility and harmonization of formats and standards
 - c) Compatibility of software
 - d) Internet support to other countries without Internet capabilities
 - e) Development of an Internet home page

f) Adequate computer and server capabilities.

II. Relationships

- a) Technical and scientific cooperation within regions
- b) Accessibility of information outside the country and repatriation of information
- c) Sharing of experiences
- d) International encouragement and support for the development of the national Clearing-House Mechanism
- e) Learning and feedback experience
- f) Contact with the Secretariat to ensure the CHM is developing in line with current decisions of the COP
- g) Building of a Biodiversity network with other CHM Focal Points
- h) Information centres

III. Other Institutional Strengthening Needed

- a) Permanent base to operate from
- b) Publishing Capacity
- c) Organizational structure including specialized staff and financial resources (e.g. meeting facilitator)

Agenda Item 15: Finalisation of the report and recommendations

52. The meeting invited the Secretariat to draft the final report.

Agenda Item 16: Adoption of the report

53. On 15 October 1997, the participants considered the draft final report. Amendments were considered and agreed. The draft final report was adopted.

Agenda Item 17: Other matters

54. Delegates also recommended that regional initiatives should be considered in future regional CHM meetings.

Agenda Item 18: Closure of the meeting

55. The Chairperson closed the meeting at 9:10 p.m. on 15 October 1997. The delegates thanked the local organizing committee of the meeting and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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