



CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Distr.  
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/CHM/RW/3/3  
December 5 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

CLEARING HOUSE MECHANISM  
REGIONAL WORKSHOPS  
Third Meeting  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
3 to 5 December 1997

REPORT OF THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM  
REGIONAL WORKSHOP FOR ASIA

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with decision III/4 of the Conference of the Parties, the Clearing-House Mechanism Regional Workshop for Asia, hosted by the Government of Malaysia, was held in Kuala Lumpur, from 3 to 5 December 1997.
2. Delegates from China, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Nauru, Nepal, Niue, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore and Republic of Korea attended the meeting. A representative from Thailand was also present. Observers of CAB International, Wetlands International, University of Kebangsaan of Malaysia and National Biotechnology Directorate of Malaysia also attended the meeting. The list of participants is attached as Annex I.

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the meeting

3. The meeting was opened at 9 a.m. on 3 December 1997 by the representative of the Secretariat, Mr. Marc Auer, Programme Officer, Clearing-House Mechanism, on behalf of Mr. Calestous Juma, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In a statement read by Mr. Auer, the Executive Secretary expressed his gratitude to the Government of Malaysia for hosting the meeting and to the Republic of Korea for its additional financial support to guarantee the success of the CHM regional workshop for Asia. He noted that the meeting would lay the basis for further co-operation and synergy among those who are developing their national biodiversity information and co-operation capacities. The Executive Secretary recalled the importance of the regional workshops of the Clearing-House Mechanism in the development of the CHM pilot-phase and in the provision of recommendations to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in May 1998.

4. Mr. V. Danabalan, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Government of Malaysia. In his opening remarks he underscored the importance of the three objectives of the Convention and the need for the CHM to go beyond information exchange to address how to facilitate the transfer of technology. He also stressed the importance of the sustainability of the CHM in terms of its operation, resources and content.

Agenda Item 2: Election of the Chairperson

5. Mr. A. H. Zakri (Malaysia) was elected Chairperson and Mr. Yong-Ha Park (Republic of Korea) 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/3/1 was adopted by the participants. The provisional organization of work, contained in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/RW/3/1/Add.1, was also adopted with amendments. The agenda is herewith attached as Annex II, the list of documents for the workshop is also attached as Annex III. Mr. Ezra Talamahina (Niue) and Ms. R. Narangerel (Mongolia) were appointed by the Chairman as coordinators of Working Group 1 and Working Group 2 respectively. The agenda of the meeting 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/3/2. This background document was prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate the Regional Workshops on the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it recalls the SBSTTA recommendations and COP decisions constituting 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 experiences 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 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. Ms. Beatriz Torres made a presentation on the CHM Technology Evaluation.

## Agenda Item 5: Preliminary exchange of views

9. Delegates stressed that the CHM should play a key role in the national implementation of the three objectives of the Convention. They proposed that the CHM act as a broker by linking demand and supply of information and technology.

## Agenda Item 6: Presentation of country experiences

10. Representatives of the following countries made presentations about the state of their national Clearing-House Mechanism activities as well as the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity: China, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Nauru, Nepal, Niue, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore and Thailand. Most countries have already established networks of biodiversity information systems (which may include basic information systems, geographic information systems (GIS) and network management systems). World-Wide-Web sites and home pages have been developed for several countries, such as Japan, Republic of Korea, Lebanon and the Philippines. Some countries have also established Biodiversity Information Centres from which information on biodiversity is disseminated. Other forms of dissemination in addition to electronic means include the publication and distribution of information and technology via printed publications and materials, and CD-ROMs.

11. In implementing the CHM and National Focal Points (NFP) functions, several obstacles have been encountered. These include barriers in disseminating information due to the lack of infrastructure and facilities, identification of research priorities, lack of scientific information, inadequate capacity building in information management systems, lack of co-operation from technical and scientific personnel, limited expertise in rural-based agencies and specialists, etc. Inadequate selection of technologies, and financial and manpower constraints were also identified as obstacles.

Agenda Item 7: Presentation of regional experiences

12. Mr. H. Zam Zam (CAB International) made a presentation on the Global Network of Biosystematics of Invertebrates and Microorganisms.

13. Mr. Kamarudin Mat Salleh described Malaysia's Biodiversity Online Project, a bilateral project undertaken with Japan.

Agenda Item 8: Presentation of thematic experiences

14. Mr. Taej Mundkur (Wetlands International/Biodiversity Conservation Information System, BCIS) spoke about their thematic experiences.

Agenda Item 9, 10, 11: Presentation on information content, information structure and capacity building for the Clearing-House Mechanism

15. The Secretariat made a short summary of the recommendations and results of the Bonn Experts' Meeting on information content, information structure and capacity building for the Clearing-House Mechanism.

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

16. Mr. Avani Vaish (Global Environment Facility Secretariat) gave an overview of the evolution of the GEF. He stressed the importance of nominating CHM National Focal Points to secure financial assistance for the CHM projects. He also covered the procedures and steps of the enabling activities of the GEF in financing projects for the implementation of the Convention and the development of the CHM.

Agenda Item 13: Discussion of information content, information structure and capacity building

17. Working Group I discussed agenda item 9 (information content) and Working Group II discussed agenda item 10 (information structure). Both Working Groups discussed agenda item 11 (capacity building).

Agenda Item 14: Presentation of results and recommendations on information content, information structure and capacity building

General considerations and recommendations:

18. Taking into consideration the results of the First and Second Regional Workshops of the CHM, the Asian Group takes note of the reports of the CHM regional workshops for Latin America and the Caribbean and for Central and Eastern Europe. The Asian Group agrees in principle with most of the recommendations of the preceding regional workshops.

19. In its operation, the CHM should reflect decision III/4 of the COP of CBD, that of being clearly focused on the implementation of the Convention. It should therefore be in line with the three objectives of the Convention: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources.

20. In accordance with Decisions II/3 and III/4 of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention, the following priority actions for the Asian region are proposed by the Asian Group:

- a) Urge Contracting Parties of the region to nominate their Clearing-House Mechanism National Focal Points well before the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.
- b) Contracting Parties in the region should make every effort to make their Clearing-House Mechanism National Focal Points operational before the end of the pilot phase of the CHM. To this end additional financial and human resources may be needed.
- c) CHM Regional Focal Point(s) should be nominated and established before the end of the pilot phase. This issue could be addressed as an agenda item of the next CHM Regional Workshop in Asia.
- d) The preparation and submission of national, sub-regional and regional pilot projects to the Financial Mechanism of the Convention should be considered a priority by Asian Contracting Parties.
- e) The CBD Secretariat should be urged to provide more technical assistance and interact regularly with CHM Focal Points.

21. The CHM needs to identify and assess user needs at the national, regional and global levels; cross-sectoral considerations could also be taken into account.

22. Beyond the exchange of information, the Secretariat Focal Point of the CHM should play a role in identifying technologies that are required by Contracting Parties to fulfil their obligations under the Convention. It should facilitate the transfer of such technologies to the Contracting Party concerned and facilitate also the building of capacity in the recipient country to use the transferred technology. Additionally it should facilitate the further development of such technology in the recipient country where necessary and possible.

23. The Secretariat Focal Point of the CHM should also play a key role in brokering co-operative deals (financial and other arrangements) between source countries and Parties making use of genetic resources since such deals involve skills of technical, financial and legal nature.

24. The maintenance of information integrity will rely upon the information providers. The providers are thus encouraged to ensure data quality at the best possible level.

#### Information Content

25. Focal points should make available metadata, whenever possible. The contents of the CHM at the Secretariat's Focal Point could include the following information:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (summary information could also be provided as appropriate)
  - Full text document of the CBD
  - Protocols of the Convention
  - Ratification status
  - COP (meetings, documents)
  - SBSTTA (structure, members, meetings, documents)
  - Intersessional activities (calendar of events and documents)
  - Other Conventions, international agreements and initiatives, including the G7 Online Information Network
  - Glossary of terms
- National Focal Points
  - Directory with links
  - Services
  - Training
- Thematic Focal Points
  - Scientific
  - Technical
  - Technological
  - Socio-economic
  - Cross-sectoral approaches
- Financial Resources
  - List of developed country parties/donors

- Financial mechanisms: policy, strategy, programme
  - priorities and eligibility criteria
  - Enabling activities
  - Other funding sources
- Enabling Activities
- Guidelines (standards, information technology, etc.)
  - Scientific and Technical Education and Training
  - Technology Transfer
  - International programmes
  - Global Biodiversity Outlook
  - Incentive measures
  - Large scale research facilities free of charge.
- Help Desk

26. The contents of the CHM at the National Focal Point level could include the following information:

- Country profile
- International activities
- Translation of COP and SBSTTA documents and resolutions to the language of the country
- Interpretation (national and non-technical language) of all resolutions and opportunities
- National strategy, action plans, activities, and evaluations
- National Legislation, i.e.
  - Biodiversity conservation
  - Sustainable use
  - Access to genetic resources
  - Intellectual property regimes
  - Access to transfer of technology
  - Patents
  - Biosafety
  - Environmental legislation
  - Incentive measures
- International agreements
- Scientific information, i.a. Components of biological diversity, including:
  - Described genes and genomes
  - Species and communities
  - Ecosystems and habitats
  - Data monitoring activities
  - In-situ conservation
  - Ex-situ conservation (plants, animals, micro-organisms)
  - Sustainable use of biological resources
  - Incentive measures
  - Directory of scientific resources (institutions, agencies, NGOs, human resources, etc.)

- Technological Information
  - Technology (available, required)
  - Indigenous/traditional knowledge, technology, and innovation
- Research Results
  - Technical, scientific, socio-economic
- Services
  - Training, surveying, specialized and/or technological expertise
- Help Desk

27. The contents could also be structured using other approaches (e.g. pressure/state/response).

28. Thematic Focal Points could provide information on special topics, including the following priority issues of the CBD:

- Coastal and marine biodiversity
- Terrestrial biodiversity
- Biosafety
- Access to genetic resources
- Intellectual property rights
- Technology transfer and development
- Threatened species
- Traditional and indigenous knowledge
- Agricultural biodiversity
- Inland waters

29. One element of content of all focal points should be a directory of meta-databases that are of global interest and relevant to the CBD.

#### Information Structure

30. Five types of focal points are recommended:

- Secretariat Focal Point
- National Focal Points
- Regional Focal Points
- Sub-regional Focal Point
- Thematic Focal Points

31. A gradual process is recommended in the development of the above mentioned focal points. Priority should be given to develop the National Focal Point to the CHM, acknowledging that it will be necessary at a later stage to develop Sub-Regional and Regional Focal Points to the CHM. Activities of the Regional Focal Points include training and joint research. The Regional Focal Point should also deal with commonalties in the region.

32. There is a need for the Financial Mechanism of the Convention to support efforts to develop both National and Regional CHM Focal Points. Existing regional institutions, as potential candidates to undertake the role as Regional CHM Focal Points, shall be explored to avoid the costs of creating a new Regional CHM Focal Point.



33. It may be desirable that the CHM National Focal Point be in the same institution designated as the CBD Focal Point. It was noted that the multiplicity of Focal Points may create co-ordination problems for some countries.

34. Thematic Focal Points at the national, regional or sub-regional levels could be designated by the relevant National Focal Points, regional or sub-regional groups. It is recommended to the Conference of the Parties at its next meeting to establish criteria and guidelines for the selection of global Thematic Focal Points and the role of such global Thematic Focal Points.

35. The CHM should play an important role in facilitating the repatriation of information to the country of origin. The meeting recommends that funding and capacity be made available to facilitate the repatriation of the information. Also computerized information should be made available by those institutions maintaining out-of-area information.

36. It was deemed necessary that the CHM National Focal Point should have access to the Internet and e-mail, to CD-ROM and fax facilities.

37. The need for trans-regional transfer of information was noted.

38. Further discussion of custodianship and responsibility of information and data made available through the CHM was deemed necessary.

39. Besides the designated national language the use of the English language to facilitate the exchange of information between the CHM Focal Points was recommended.

40. Consistency and compatibility could be promoted through:

- exchange of experiences (via e.g. listservers, workshops, etc.)
- sharing of locally developed software
- encouraging evolution of standards
- developing the capacity to browse multiple sites

41. The organization of CBD information in the CHM could use a common format where the orderly sequence of the Articles of the text of the Convention could be followed; an alternative format could follow the sequence of the three objectives of the Convention.

#### Capacity Building

42. Enabling Contracting Parties to participate in the CBD Clearing-House Mechanism is of utmost importance.

43. The following objectives may guide the further development of the CHM:

- (a) Development of Clearing-House Mechanism National Focal Points (including CHM start-up kit);
- (b) Review of existing CHMs ("Good Practice"); and
- (c) Harmonization/compatibility among Focal Points.

44. The Secretariat, advised by the Informal Advisory Committee, which was endorsed by Decision III/4 of the Conference of the Parties, could promote the CHM to CBD Parties, to raise awareness and encourage the development of national CHMs.

#### Assessment

45. A CHM-NFP needs-assessment for the Start-up Kit should be conducted. A needs-analysis could include one or more of the following:

- inventory of existing sites
- technical questionnaire
- structured interviews
- workshops

#### Development of a Tool-Kit

46. The development of a prototype has been recommended to be tested at regional CHM workshops and expert meetings and to be made available to Parties who may wish to test it. Within any country the development may be supervised by a steering group and implemented by a working group with appropriate expertise.

47. The content of such a tool-kit could comprise the following:

- World Wide Web authoring tools, including public domain or commercial products to develop a web site
- standard 'front-end' pages
- common material (link to official Convention site, etc.)
- standard format for national reports
- tutorial

48. Parties may require support acquiring computer equipment (including Web-server) and Internet connectivity.

#### Training

49. Adequate training on current information management, including software and hardware should be considered.

50. Training could be provided in country or in the form of "Training of the Trainers". The objective is to raise the level of expertise not only for those delegated to implement the national CHM but also their colleagues.

51. Also a choice of training methods would need to be made, or even a combination of methods, depending on the circumstances and needs.

52. In addition to the basic training second-level advanced training is needed, among other topics, on the application of database-Web and GIS-Web inter-connectivity.

53. Training could be provided by an organization(s) that meets specified criteria, such as:

- In-country training on the Internet should be provided, including the WWW
- understanding CBD and CHM issues
- training experience in closely related areas
- ability to provide support services (including distance learning).

54. It is proposed that the Secretariat facilitate modalities to support those Parties without full Internet access, preparing and disseminating updated information on CD-ROM or diskettes to them, either periodically (e.g. quarterly) or as required, and facilitating that those Parties could also disseminate appropriate information. Support would be needed for:

- publishing (paper, CD-ROM, etc.)
- distribution
- external WWW host (CBD-CHM)
- email, newsgroups, bulletin boards
- external publisher
- data management and databasing

55. The Secretariat would keep the tool-kit up to date.

56. The use of the CHM will be facilitated if priority is given to ease of use, through intuitive interfaces, appropriate indexing and search capabilities and minimal number of layers of information.

57. Significant efforts should be made on initial promotion (nationally and internationally) to raise awareness in order to encourage national focal points to plan the development of their CHMs.

58. It is also important to encourage and monitor feedback from users of the CHM to ensure that it meets their needs. This will prove very useful in setting priorities. Some kind of question-and-answer forum could also be useful.

59. Follow-up on user feedback is very important. This will also involve maintaining contact with the Secretariat to ensure that the CHM is developing in line with current decisions of the Conference of Parties and other players.

Proposed Action Plan

60. Accordingly, the following action plan could be drawn up:

a) Phase I (to be completed as soon as possible): The Secretariat, with the assistance of the Informal Advisory Committee, should determine user needs. This may be expedited through the regional workshops already scheduled (Decision III/4). Only marginal costs for this activity are envisaged.

b) Phase II (to be completed in 1998): Develop prototype of Start-up Kit.

c) Phase III (to be completed by the end of the pilot-phase): Implementation of Start-up Kit (build on existing infrastructure).

Agenda Item 15: Finalization of the report and recommendations

60. The Draft Final Report was finalized with the amendments made by the participants.

Agenda Item 16: Adoption of the report

61. On 5 December 1997, the participants considered the draft final report. Amendments were considered and agreed. The draft final report was adopted.

Agenda Item 17: Other matters

62. The chairperson appealed for the prompt nomination of the National CHM Focal Points in the Asian region. He also asked for the consideration of nominations to host the next CHM Regional Workshop in Asia in 1998, in addition to the provision of additional voluntary contributions. The Chairperson expressed his appreciation expressed his gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea for its generous financial support. He said that the findings of this workshop would be reported to the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Finally, he expressed his appreciation for the diligent work of the participants, the CBD Secretariat and the Local Organizing Committee.

Agenda Item 18: Closure of the meeting

63. The Chairperson closed the meeting at 4 p.m. on 5 December 1997.

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