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STUDENT/TEACHER WEBSITE AND SCHOOL "TWINNING" PILOT PROJECT**I. Introduction**

1. The Student/Teacher Web site and School "Twinning" Pilot Project has been developed by the Secretariat in response to the programme elements contained in the annex to Decision VI/19, in particular programme element 1, action 1 (a) and (b), action 2 (a), programme element 2, operational objective 1, action 3 and programme element 3, actions 3, 4 and 6
2. Section II of this document outlines the background of the project, the identified needs to which it responds and the basis on which it was developed. Section III introduces the school twinning project, the components of the project, the respective roles of the partners, the NFPs and national experts, the progress of the project and the principal activities of the participants. Section IV briefly describes the expected outcomes, while Section V offers conclusions regarding the ramifications of the Pilot Project.

II. Project Background

3. The Secretariat identified the need to develop a student/teacher Web site on the CEPA Portal on the Web site of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at www.biodiv.org to feature educational material for students of different cultures, ages and education levels, and their teachers.
4. These pages are designed as a series of templates for education/public awareness pages of the National Focal Points, which may be developed in collaboration with their national education institutions and government authorities. Together, the CBD site and the national sites will form a global communication, education and public awareness network of biodiversity-related exchanges between communities, showcasing local initiatives and creating a database of educational material on biodiversity. The CBD is at the center of the network, recognized as the source of expertise and creating a standard of best practice.
5. McGill University in Montreal, Canada, was contacted as a potential partner for the development of this project. Indeed, it has the three areas of expertise required to ensure the success of the student/teacher

website: computer technology, education and environment studies. Exploratory conversations established McGill's interest in developing the site and a parallel Web-based education pilot project with, and on behalf of, the CBD. The CBD/McGill partnership is based on offering to McGill an opportunity for Honors or Graduate students in the three faculties to develop the Web site for course credit.

III. The "School Twinning" Project

6. The basic element of the site will be discussion fora between designated "twinned" schools. Three pairs of schools were identified. The first pairing is a First Nations school located in the northern part of the Province of Alberta, Canada, and an aboriginal school in Australia. The second pairing is between a school in Trinidad & Tobago and a "twin" in Palau, these being the two small island states that were the first and the fiftieth to ratify the Biosafety Protocol. The third proposed pairing is between a school in The Netherlands and one in Malaysia, host countries for COP-6 and COP-7.

Components of the Pilot Project

7. This project has two components:

- (a) The creation of a Web site devoted to elementary to completion-of-secondary-school level biodiversity education (the kids' page). The Internet offers many models of such Web sites, a particular case in point being the United Nations page for kids (UNCyberSchoolBus at <http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.html>)

This component of the project required a project manager with solid Web design expertise and with an understanding of pedagogical issues related to Web-based education and instruction. The desirable candidate's profile suggested to McGill University was a graduate student majoring in computer science and researching computer-based learning or intelligent computer assisted instruction.

- (b) The design of a communications project between or among schools. This project will make use of the kids' page and Internet-based communication tools (Internet Mail lists, reader news, chat, etc.). Well-articulated objectives were defined for this activity, enabling quantifiable final results (has awareness of biodiversity issues increased in participating schools, for instance). The Secretariat school visits initiative of May 2003 generated interesting feedback that served as the basis for discussion with McGill (see document UNEP/CBD/GEEPA/4/2/Add.2). Furthermore, the partnership of the Secretariat with the Roots and Shoots programme of the Jane Goodall Institute, which has extensive experience in education outreach programs, was a source of additional information and advice.

Agreement with McGill University

8. The Secretariat is responsible for designing the required outcomes, for initiating contacts through National Focal Points with the participating schools and teachers and for preparing much of the content in cooperation with McGill, local schools and in consultation with the Group of CEPA experts.

The Role of National Focal Points and national experts

9. Once the preliminary agreement between the Secretariat and McGill was concluded, the Secretariat requested the National Focal Points (NFPs) of the relevant Parties to nominate national education experts who would assist the project by working with their counterparts in the "twin" country to select equivalent schools in terms of age and education level, to assist in the development and monitoring of the format for the discussion forum and to serve as members of an Internet-based project governance body. IUCN was also invited to participate in this activity by designating one or two experts to oversee the development of source material compatible with the school curricula and project to be developed by each pair of schools.

10. In response to the request mentioned above, Canada nominated two experts and Palau has nominated one. The other participating NFPs are expected to nominate their specialists anytime soon. The deadline was the first week of September.

Project Progress

11. In the meantime, the overall design of the CEPA Portal is proceeding as part of the Secretariat's Web Enhancement Project (see document UNEP/CBD/GEEPA/4/2/Add.1). The generic design of the project, the proposed process and outcomes have been completed by the CBD/McGill team. Additionally, the rapid implementation of the CBD/Roots&Shoots project generated some excellent background material for publishing on the CEPA Portal.

12. Despite the delays created by the failure of some of the NFPs to promptly designate the experts who will nominate and work with the participating schools it is still the goal of the Secretariat that an early phase of the activities between the "twinned schools" will be completed prior to the seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-7) early next year and that there will be enough feedback and early results to enable the Secretariat to demonstrate actual discussions on the Internet and the first stages of the projects under development by each pair of schools.

13. The pilot school-twinning project will not be completed in time for COP-7. In fact it is conceived as a constantly evolving process with the addition of new participating Parties, schools and topics. In a second phase, the Secretariat also recommends that the program management be diversified in the same way that the roster of participants is increased. Thus universities in other countries with similar attributes as those of McGill – or possibly different attributes more suited to the cultural and/or academic environment of individual countries – would assume co-management of future pairs of "twins", and so expand the program's influence beyond the primary and secondary school-level, building environmental education and curriculum development knowledge and capacity at the university level.

Principal activities of the participating schools

14. In order to derive maximum experience from the project, it was decided that each pair of twinned schools should represent a different level of schooling. Thus, one pair at the senior level of secondary education, one pair at the upper end of primary or the lowest class of secondary, and the third, two classes at the lower primary level.

15. Once the participating schools and classes have been selected by the respective national education expert(s), the responsible teacher will present the project to the class. Broadly speaking, the project will then proceed in the following phases:

1. Each pair of schools exchanges surveys of their respective countries: climate, fauna, flora, agriculture, natural resources, population and main environmental/biodiversity issues;
2. With the assistance of their teachers, they identify common ground;
3. Each pair of schools agrees to a project that relates to problematic biodiversity issues that apply to both countries (e.g. taxonomy, traditional medicines, coastlands, fish and seafood, forests, coral reefs) and agrees to a division of work. They work independently, but in consultation through the discussion forum established for that purpose and hosted by the CEPA Portal.

16. During the project development process, the CBD Secretariat will offer monitoring and guidance from relevant programme officers.

17. Once each school has completed the component(s) of the project for which it is responsible, the two parts will be combined as a joint paper that proposes solutions and/or actions that can be carried out by individuals, community groups/NGOs or which require additional government intervention.

18. Level 1 (the youngest) pair of schools will carry out a limited version of the above activities, with emphasis in their proposed solutions on what the individual can do.

19. It is proposed that the resultant projects be submitted to a special committee of the National Focal Points and the Secretariat programme experts for analysis and comment. After revision, the final version of each level of the project will be submitted to the CEPA Group of experts for their comments and suggestions for post-project stage implementation, and subsequently presented at SBSTTA, posted on the CEPA Portal and publicized to all Parties as models. In addition, the NFPs will be urged to consider ways and means to implement the recommendations of the completed project, and, as feasible, to offer interested students a role to play in the implementation.

IV. Expected Outcomes

Short-term Outcomes

20. While the pairs of twinned schools will each develop an agreed-to joint project, they and the teachers responsible for the selected classes will all benefit from the information contained on the pages of the Student/Teacher Web site and will be encouraged to contribute additional source material and information to enrich the Web site for all visitors, not only the members of the discussion forum.

Long-term Outcomes

21. The long-term outcome is to create and maintain a Web site for Teachers and Students, which appeals to and nourishes different ages with varying degrees of complexity, and promotes best practices in biodiversity education. Activities hosted on the Web site, such as the School-twinning pilot project will foster education initiatives and offer the Parties a number of templates which they may adopt, adapt or use as benchmarks for their own education activities. Taking into account and publishing relevant CEPA activities of the Parties, the Web site will be informative, reliable and will spread knowledge and understanding of biodiversity and sustainable development, promote the goals and objectives of the Convention, and establish the CBD as the key actor in biological diversity communication, education and public awareness.

V. Conclusion

22. The Secretariat believes that this project is an opportunity for SCBD to meet the three Operational Objectives of Element 1 of the Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) Work Programme, and that it offers extensive ramifications to be shared with the consultative working group of CEPA experts, as well as the National Focal Points.
