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CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM FOR TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

Note by the Interim Secretariat

1. Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention on Biological Diversity states that "the Conference of the Parties, at its first meeting, shall determine how to establish a clearing-house mechanism to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation".

2. At the first session of the Intergovernmental Committee, the question of a clearing-house mechanism was discussed in Working Group II in the context of transfer of technology relevant to conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the Interim Secretariat be asked "to identify existing clearing-house mechanisms and existing mechanisms for information exchange and report on their experience" before the second session of the Committee (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/2, annex III, para. 43 (a)).

3. Further recommendations on the kind of clearing-house mechanism needed under the Convention were expressed at the Open-ended Intergovernmental Meeting of Scientific Experts, the report of which states that a clearing-house mechanism should develop "in the form of an electronic data network that would utilize existing institutions, allow for universal access and have a decentralized and completely transparent structure" (see UNEP/CBD/IC/2/11, para. 30 (d)).

4. In order to respond to the Working Group's recommendation referred to in paragraph 2 above, the Interim Secretariat:

(a) Is preparing a catalogue of existing databases of relevance to the Convention in order to respond to another related recommendation of Working Group II at the Committee's first session, namely, "to catalogue existing databases of relevance to the Convention on Biological Diversity and identify their gaps and linkages" (UNEP/CBD/IC/2/2, annex III, para. 43 (b));

(b) Is searching databases such as United Nations Databases and Information Services and through electronic mail for existing organizations operating clearing-house mechanisms for technical and scientific cooperation;

(c) Has sent a list of questions (annex I) to 16 organizations or organizational units (annex II) which the above-mentioned search has so far identified as operating clearing-house mechanisms for information exchange relevant to technical and scientific cooperation. The questions invited information on the main aspects of their service and on their experience.

5. The purpose of the present note is to present to the Committee a summary of the information received from the clearing-houses surveyed (annex III) and to outline the further work that may be required to assist the Conference of the Parties to establish a clearing-house mechanism. The clearing-houses surveyed are:

(a) Center for the Analysis and Dissemination of Demonstrated Energy Technologies (CADDET);

(b) The UNEP Clearing-house for Technical Cooperation;

(c) The Industry and Environment Programme Activity Centre (IE/PAC) of UNEP;

(d) The INFOTERRA Programme Activity Centre of UNEP;

(e) International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA);

(f) Special Programs for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR).

6. From the responses received, it would appear that key elements of a successful clearing-house mechanism for promoting and facilitating scientific and technical cooperation are:

(a) Quality of the sources of information;

(b) Reliability of communications;

(c) Development of an information network by organizing national focal points and/or national teams at the national level; and

(d) Trust of client countries and technology donors for the development of sound projects.

7. Of the six clearing-houses, only one receives private financial support; the rest depend on governmental or international financial support either from regional or global international organizations.

8. The information gathered to date would suggest that there is a need for the present survey to be further elaborated with a view to: providing the Conference of the Parties with:

(a) A more extensive review of experiences of clearing-house mechanisms, including the identification of experience useful to fulfil the objectives of the clearing-house mechanism under this Convention;

(b) Some considerations on how to deal with needs and priorities in the establishment of mechanisms to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation;

(c) Options for dealing with specific issues or technologies, as appropriate, e.g., biotechnology, development of transfer agreements, capacity-building, etc.

9. The Committee is invited to provide guidance on this further work.

Annex I

LIST OF QUESTIONS SENT TO CLEARING-HOUSES

Description of the clearing-house

1. Name of the Organization.

2. Date of the establishment of the service.

3. What is the geographical scope of the clearing-house mechanism (e.g. regional, national, etc.)?

4. Can you list the main countries and/or organizations requesting your service?

5. What is the number of your specialist staff? Indicate their specialized fields.

6. What is the number of your supporting staff?

7. What is the size of your budget and the source of funding?

Objectives and services of the clearing-house

8. What are the objectives of the clearing-house?

9. What are the main subjects requested that you receive as a clearing-house ?

10. How do you receive clients' requests and how do you contact them?

11. How do you service your clients (directly or through a regional and/or subregional organization)?

12. What is the information service being offered? If you have a computerized service, what is the software being used in your database? Can you describe your data-link arrangement (fax, e-mail, etc.)?

13. Do you have further comments?

Experience of the clearing-house mechanism

14. From your experience what are the key factors that contribute to making a clearing-house mechanism a success?

15. How do you go about providing the following clearing -house services to clients?

    a. Identifying constraints in technology transfer in developing and developed countries (please give examples);

    b. Providing the necessary services to enable developing countries to decide upon the acquisition of appropriate technologies, including biotechnology;

    c. Holding consultations with the private sector so as to explore potential markets for technology application;

    d. Facilitating the negotiation of agreements that would be fair and acceptable to all parties, on the establishment of joint ventures between developed and developing countries;

e. Providing support for research and development at public sector institutions in developing countries, including support for training and for collaborative research with public and private sector laboratories in industrialized countries;

f. Assisting contracting parties in the preparation of strategies on national technologies and planning so as to enable a most efficient use of local and external resources;

g. Patenting discoveries in biodiversity and, as appropriate, license use;

h. Acting as a focal point for individual countries on relevant issues such as:

(i) patents and transferable technologies (being part of the public domain);

(ii) technologies that could be transferred through negotiations;

(iii) technologies considered to be non-negotiable secrets;

(iv) introduction of genetically modified organisms in the environment;

i. Assisting developing countries to prioritize the mobilization of financial support and other resources to programmes and projects.

j. Other services that are not listed here.

Annex II

ORGANIZATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL UNITS OPERATING CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISMS TO WHICH THE QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT

1. African Biodiversity Institute.
2. Agrecol Information Center and Network.
3. Agriculture and Timber Division, ECE/FAO.
4. Center for the Analysis and Dissemination of Demonstrated Energy Technologies (CADDET).
5. Clearing-house for Technical Cooperation, UNEP.
6. Database Manager, Desertification Information System (DESIS), UNEP.
7. Fertilizer Advisory, Development and Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (FADINAP).
8. Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS/PAC), UNEP.
9. Globefish (FAO).
10. Industry and Environment Programme Activity Centre (IE/PAC, UNEP).
11. Information Network on New and Renewable Energy resources and Technologies for Asia and the Pacific (INNERTAP).
12. INFOTERRA Programme Activity Centre, UNEP.
13. International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA).
14. JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology, South Africa.
15. Nature Reserve Authority, Israel.
16. Special Programs for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR).

Annex III

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION RECEIVED

A. Center for the Analysis and Dissemination of Demonstrated Energy Technologies (CADDET)

CADDET
Swentiboldstraat 21
6137 AE SITTARD,
P.O.Box 17, 6130 AA
The Netherlands
Fax: 46-510389

1. Geographical scope

International - principally within participating countries (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America) but no restrictions are imposed on information access to requests for information from any country.

2. Technical scope

Exchange of information on new energy saving technologies, that have been demonstrated in industry, buildings, utilities and agriculture, with the aim of duplicating these technologies through international transfer of knowledge.

3. Target groups/countries

Fifteen countries participate, each through an appointed organization - National Teams. These are often based within national energy agencies. Information requests are also received from individuals, organizations and governmental departments in non-participating countries. The precise services provided by CADDET are determined by the participating countries at two levels. On the working level there are National Teams whilst an Executive Committee approves the ongoing strategy and individual workplans.

The focus is on sharing information across participating countries, although several of those countries may use CADDET information when providing assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

4. Key factors for success

The enthusiasm of the National Team to support the CADDET organization with information, but also to make optimum use of information within their own countries.

5. Annual budget

Roughly US$ 1,000,000 funded by country contributions.

B. Clearing-house for Technical Cooperation, UNEP

UNEP
P.O. Box 30552
Fax (254-2) 226886
e-mail: Rohrmann@unep.no

1. Geographical scope

Global.

2. Technical scope

Strengthening the capacity of developing countries to promote sustainable development by supporting policy planning and institution building, enabling the developing countries to set adequate priority environmental considerations. Other UNEP project activities supported through the Clearing-house for Technical Cooperation, includes promotion of cleaner production, a workshop on environment and sustainable development in portuguese speaking countries, project on the sustainable management of the neem tree, and a four-year project for environmental law institutions in Africa. The Clearing-house for Technical Cooperation, occasionally, acts as a broker or mediator between developing countries and donor countries willing to support activities addressing identified needs.

3. Target groups/countries

Overall, the Clearing-house for Technical Cooperation has been providing assistance to more than 50 countries drawn from all regions. For example in 1993, activities were planned or being undertaken in Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea-Cronakry, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Philippines, Panama, Rwanda and Vietnam.

4. Key factors for success

The clearing-house should play an active and catalytic role to assist countries to secure the resources they need, both financial and technical, to solve problems. The clearing-house must have a quick response service and should have funds available for programme activities up-front. Modern communication equipment is crucial in order to respond to clients' needs and networking with donors and other institutions in order to obtain inputs on programme priorities and review of documentation.

5. Annual budget

The clearing-house for Technical Cooperation depends entirely on voluntary contributions and has a yearly budget of some US$ 1.5 million.

C. Industry and Environment Programme Activity Centre (IE/PAC), UNEP

39-43 Quai Andre Citroen
75739 Paris, CEDEX 15, France
Fax: 33 (1) 40 58 88 74

1. Geographical scope

The Cleaner Production Programme and International Cleaner Production Information Clearing-house (ICPIC) provide information to users worldwide.

2. Technical scope

(a) Define and encourage the incorporation of environmental criteria in industrial development;

(b) Help formulate policies and strategies for sustainable industrial development and facilitate their implementation;

(c) Promote preventive environmental protection through cleaner production and other proactive approaches; and

(d) Stimulate the exchange of information on environmentally sound forms of industrial development.

3. Target groups/countries

Requests for information and assistance are received from around the world. They come from governments, international organizations, industries, academia, non-government organizations, individuals, lending institutions, the media.

4. Key factors for success

(a) Identify your users and what they need;

(b) Keep it simple; start small;

(c) Be flexible and adapt; and

(d) Continually evaluate the system.

5. Annual budget

The budget for 1993 for the Cleaner Production Programme was approximately US$ 1,099,000 and UNEP has received monetary and in-kind support from the following:

(a) Governments and regional economic integration organizations: Australia, Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, European Union;

(b) Organizations: United Nations Centre for Science and Technology for Development (UNSCTD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, International Chamber of Commerce, World Bank.

D. INFOTERRA Programme Activity Centre, UNEP

INFOTERRA/PAC
UNEP
P.O. Box 30552
Nairobi, Kenya
Fax (254-2) 624269/226886

1. Geographical scope

Global.

2. Technical scope

Ranging from information relating to the control of lead pollution or acid rain to the best means of recycling soft drinks containers or the safe disposal of industrial wasters. Over 85 per cent of enquiries are responded to with substantive information.

3. Target groups/countries

Practically all countries and many organizations dealing with environmental issues. This network consists of 155 national focal points (NFPs), a programme activity centre (PAC), and 10 regional service centres (RSCs), to facilitate and promote the exchange of environmental information between countries. Infoterra database is distributed to all national focal points on diskette as Micro CDS/ISIS database in hard copy format as the International Directory of Sources. Focal points with PC can search the database for referral information while those without PC have to search the directory manually. In general, the responses to enquiries are sent by the most appropriate and cost-effective media.

4. Key factors to success

Having high quality information sources who are willing and able to answer queries as quickly as possible.

5. Budget

US$ 2.3 million for the biennium 1994-1995.

E. International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA).

260 Emerson Hall,
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-1902
Fax: 1-607-255-1215
E-mail: Kvrl @cornell.edu

1. Geographical scope

Worldwide with offices in Japan, North America, Europe and Africa, will be establishing offices in Asia and Latin America.

2. Technical scope

Facilitate the acquisition and transfer of agricultural biotechnology applications from the industrial countries, particularly proprietary technology from the private sector, for the benefit of the developing world.

3. Target groups/countries

ISAAA focuses on 10 countries (Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Egypt, Zimbabwe and Kenya).

4. Key factors for success

(a) Trust of client countries and technology donors for the development of sound projects.

(b) Need- and priority-driven (not technology-driven).

F. Special Programs for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR)

The Spaar Secretariat
The World Bank
1818H Street N.W.
Washington D.C. 20433
USA
Fax: (202) 473-8231

1. Geographical scope

SPAAR was established to serve as a forum to foster collaboration in sub-Saharan Africa between donor organizations and African agricultural research systems.

2. Technical scope

(a) Provide guidelines for strengthening national agricultural research.

(b) Strengthen African agricultural research systems in the public and private sectors and, through them, develop and test relevant technologies in support of sustainable agricultural development.

(c) Increase the effectiveness of donor assistance to African agricultural research systems through better coordination of existing resources; avoidance of duplication of effort; exchange of information on past, current, and future activities; and encouragement of collaborative initiatives in addressing particular problems in agricultural research.

3. Target groups/countries

(a) Creating and maintaining a regional focus on research so that the programmes and results can be shared between countries; and

(b) Establishing better linkages between international agricultural research centres and their national counterparts, and between African agricultural research institutions and developed country institutions.
