Dear Madam/Sir:

This is a follow-up to an earlier message from the CBD Secretariat that announced an “Expert workshop on enhancing biodiversity data and observing systems in support of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020” to be held just prior to SBSTTA 17 on 12 October (http://www.cbd.int/doc/notifications/2013/ntf-2013-062-sbstta17-en.pdf). As indicated in that message, the workshop will bring together experts from the Group on Earth Observations Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON) and those engaged in implementing the Convention at the national level. In this note, we will provide a bit more background to help participants prepare for the workshop, including some “thinking points” to stimulate thought and discussion prior to meeting.

What is GEO BON? GEO BON is a developing network with participants from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), DIVERSITAS, European Space Agency (ESA), U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a variety of universities, and many other organizations focused on enhancing and integrating biodiversity observations to better monitor change. GEO BON can help countries develop or enhance their observation systems by offering expertise and tools that improve data gathering and access, and its application for monitoring change. GEO BON works with biodiversity at the ecosystem, species, and genetic levels, and with ecosystem services, to improve delivery of biodiversity information and services to users. This information can be used to develop indicators that, for example, measure progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets or corresponding national biodiversity targets. Additional information can be found at http://www.earthobservations.org/geobon.shtml.

We are organizing this workshop with these key goals in mind:

a. Identifying ways to improve collection and use of observations by Parties in monitoring and reporting progress in implementing NBSAPs and thereby achieving progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

b. Raising awareness of available tools, products and approaches and of the organisations and networks such as GEO BON that can support delivery of improved biodiversity observations and their use.

We invite participants to share their experience with using systematic observations--including observations from remote sensing--for monitoring change in biodiversity and for landscape level planning. Of particular interest are the obstacles encountered — these might include lack of capacity or resources to make observations, lack of access to existing observational data, or limited technical capacities to utilize the information. We hope this will begin a dialogue that
will help us ensure that GEO BON is developing products and tools that facilitate nations in meeting their reporting obligations under the CBD.

The workshop will be structured with the above goals in mind, using a combination of short presentations and facilitated discussion. Below are some of the questions we hope to discuss at the workshop. These are important topics and we hope that participants come to the workshop prepared to talk about them; because they are wide-ranging it may be worth considering discussing these with colleagues in your own or other agencies prior to the workshop. Such preparation will greatly improve the value of the discussion and thus our ability to continue helping enhance the observation systems and how they are used and applied.

1) How have the availability of and access to observations supported the implementation and monitoring of your NBSAP?
2) What further data are needed for monitoring and reporting – in very specific terms?
3) Is the data missing (i.e., never collected), or inaccessible (e.g., not shared by the organization that collected it)? Why—what are the obstacles?
4) What arguments would convince decision makers of the need to make more data available and accessible?
5) What is the current state of the biodiversity observing system in your country?
   o What does it do well?
   o What are its limitations and why?
   o What are the obstacles to addressing those limitations?
6) What other national partners need to be engaged in data provision (including national statistical agencies)?

We would be especially pleased, and would find it very helpful as we prepare, to hear your thoughts prior to the workshop. These can be sent via email to any of the workshop organizing team listed below.

Looking forward to seeing you at the workshop!

Best wishes,
The Workshop Organizing Team

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