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REVIEW OF THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

Note by the Executive Secretary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention provides for the establishment of “a clearing-house mechanism to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation”. Implementation of the clearing-house mechanism was initiated at the first meeting of the Conference of Parties and has been considered by every meeting since then. The clearing-house mechanism has been developed according to the advice and guidance of the Conference of the Parties, taking into account also two independent reviews and the advice and guidance of an Informal Advisory Committee. A *Clearing-house mechanism strategic plan* and the *Clearing-house mechanism’s longer-term programme of work* were adopted for the period 1999-2004.

The implementation of the strategic plan and longer-term work programme of the clearing-house mechanism was based on three goals: the promotion and facilitation of scientific and technical cooperation; the development of a global mechanism for exchanging and integrating information on biodiversity; and the development of the clearing-house mechanism network, through focal points and their partners. Important progress is being made towards all three goals, and lessons learned through this experience can inform the development of an updated strategic plan and programme of work.

In the light of progress made, the recommendations of the second independent review, and the goals, objectives and obstacles identified in the Strategic Plan of the Convention, future work could focus on strengthening the role of the clearing-house mechanism in scientific and technical cooperation. It is thus proposed that a revised clearing-house mechanism strategic plan be developed with such a focus for the period 2006–2010, and that the next in-depth review be conducted by the Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting.

* UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/1/1.

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention may wish to:

1. *Request* the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the informal advisory committee for the clearing-house mechanism, to finalize a revised draft of the second clearing-house mechanism strategic plan, taking into account the views of Parties, Governments and relevant organizations made at the first meeting of the Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention.
2. *Recommend* that the Conference of the Parties:
 - (a) *Adopt* the new strategic plan of the clearing-house mechanism, and its programme of work to 2010;
 - (b) *Decide* to institute an in-depth review and assessment of the clearing-house mechanism, for consideration at its tenth meeting. 1/

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present note was drafted by the Executive Secretary to assist with the review of the clearing-house mechanism. Section II contains a brief review of the development of the clearing-house mechanism and summarizes guidance received to date. Section III addresses the implementation of the three primary objectives of the clearing-house mechanism as set out in the first clearing-house mechanism strategic plan: (information exchange, network development and technical and scientific cooperation), while section IV, drawing upon the previous sections, analyses the effectiveness and impacts of the clearing-house mechanism and identifies lessons learned that might inform the development of a revised clearing-house mechanism strategic plan.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF, AND GUIDANCE TO, THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

2. At its first meeting, the Conference of the Parties initiated the process of establishing the clearing-house mechanism as provided for in paragraph 3 of Article 18 (decision I/3, para. 1). Over the course of its development, the clearing-house mechanism has received guidance through the decisions of the Conference of the Parties (including the adoption of a strategic plan for the clearing-house mechanism), an informal advisory committee established for the clearing-house mechanism, and the results of two independent reviews. This guidance, and its influence on the evolution of the clearing-house mechanism, is reviewed in this section.

3. The Conference of the Parties, at its second meeting, decided that the clearing-house mechanism should be developed starting with a pilot phase for the period 1996-1997, 2/ which was later extended to 1998. The Secretariat was identified as the focal point for the clearing-house mechanism. An informal advisory committee, constituted and coordinated by the Executive Secretary was established at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to guide and integrate the development of the pilot phase activities and help ensure that all Parties could participate in the pilot phase of the clearing-house mechanism. 3/

1/ This is consistent with the proposals in the note by the Executive Secretary on review of processes under the Convention (UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/1/3) concerning the multi-year programme of work.

2/ See paragraph 4-6, decision II/3.

3/ See: paragraph 1 of decision III/4.

4. During its pilot phase, the clearing-house mechanism focused on areas of activities related to the promotion of international technical and scientific cooperation, particularly with regard to information-sharing and exchange and network development. These activities aimed to support and assist future initiatives and projects in the establishment of national clearing-house mechanisms. As a result, a variety of mechanisms were put into place to assist Parties in developing and establishing their own clearing-house mechanism related activities 4/.

5. The Conference of the Parties, monitored progress in the implementation of the pilot phase of the clearing-house mechanism at its third and fourth meetings, and in response to its request at the fourth meeting, 5/ an independent review was carried out to evaluate the pilot phase. The report of independent review was considered by the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting (UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/2). It stressed a number of priorities for action to raise the profile and awareness of the clearing-house mechanism and to increase its effectiveness. These priorities were reflected in the first strategic plan and the longer-term programme of work for the clearing-house mechanism for the period from 1999-2004, which were supported and endorsed by the Conference of the Parties in paragraph 2 of decision V/14. This decision also set out the functions of the informal advisory committee of the clearing-house mechanism.

6. The first clearing-house mechanism strategic plan and its longer-term programme of work set out three primary goals: cooperation (the promotion and facilitation of scientific and technical cooperation); information exchange (the development of a global mechanism for exchanging and integrating information on biodiversity); and network development (the development of the focal points of the clearing-house mechanism and their partners).

7. The Conference of the Parties, at its sixth meeting, requested the Executive Secretary to commission a second review of the clearing-house mechanism. This review was to assess the current and potential role of the clearing-house mechanism in promoting technical and scientific cooperation, including its role in facilitating the transfer of technology and know-how, and capacity-building, to support implementation of the Convention at the national level.

8. The resulting document (UNEP/CBD/COP/7/INF/12), submitted to the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties placed much emphasis on the need for activities by clearing-house mechanisms at the national and regional levels, particularly with regard to cooperation and involvement in biodiversity-related activities. Specifically, the review reiterated the need for Parties to establish clearing-house mechanism national focal points, and suggested that those Parties with significantly developed clearing-house mechanisms could partner with other Parties to assist them in the further development of their clearing-house mechanisms. The review also argued for increased communication among national clearing-house mechanisms, particularly through workshops and informal meetings.

9. In further recommendations, Parties were encouraged to develop an organizational structure for their clearing-house mechanisms to ensure their effective development and use, to develop clearing-house mechanism websites at the national level and to use metadata to be registered with the Convention's clearing-house mechanism in order to provide a gateway to national websites and to facilitate the interoperability of information resources.

10. Within the context of the programme areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention, the report stressed the need for Parties to ensure that their national clearing-house mechanisms become involved in biodiversity-related projects. Parallel to this recommendation, the report argued that there exists a need for greater collaboration between national clearing-house mechanisms and the scientific and technical communities at the national level. This would involve the development of joint project proposals on

4/ See UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/2
5/ See paragraph 10 (k) of decision IV/2.

capacity-building, technology transfer and sharing of experience and best practices. Another recommendation in line with the above called for participation in international initiatives by national clearing-house mechanisms

11. Finally, recommendations related to funding, at the national and international level, were also an important component of the report, and reflected the view that a clearing-house mechanism requires sustainable and adequate funding to implement effective activities in support of the Convention.

12. Upon completion of the period covered by the clearing-house mechanism strategic plan, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the informal advisory committee, to update the plan to 2009 for consideration by its eighth meeting (decision VII/23, para. 7(a)). A revised and updated clearing-house mechanism strategic plan is being prepared, in the light of the second review and decision VII/23 and a draft is available for the information of the Working Group (UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/1/INF/11). The final draft will be prepared for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its eighth meeting, taking into account comments from the Working Group.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THREE OBJECTIVES OF THE FIRST CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM STRATEGIC PLAN: INFORMATION EXCHANGE, NETWORK DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

13. This section considers the implementation of the three primary objectives of the clearing-house mechanism, examining in turn activities supporting information exchange, network development and technical and scientific cooperation.

A. *Information exchange*

14. The Conference of the Parties has consistently cited information exchange and dissemination as essential activities of the clearing-house mechanism in support of technical and scientific cooperation. ^{6/}

15. In response to decisions of the Conference of the Parties, and in the light of the two reviews of the clearing-house mechanism, a range of different information exchange and dissemination tools and services have been developed and implemented with a view to facilitating technical and scientific cooperation. These tools and services encompass an adherence to and use of common formats, protocols and standards and different Internet and web-based systems. Attention has also been given to regions with inequitable access to information and web-based technologies; information dissemination systems, including more traditional systems, were designed using tools requiring less overhead, training and investment.

16. These information exchange and dissemination systems have been used extensively by the Secretariat, and by Parties and other Governments, in support of activities to implement the Convention:

(a) Of the 150 Parties and other Governments that have established clearing-house mechanism national focal points, 139 use email as the primary means of communication with the Secretariat.

^{6/} See paragraphs 5 (a) (ii) and (ii), and 5 (b) of decision II/3; paragraphs 7, 9 and 11 of decision III/4; paragraphs 5 (a), 7, 9 (a) and 9 (c), 10 (a), (d)-(e), and (g)-(h) of decision IV/2; paragraphs (g) and (j) of annex I and paragraphs (e) (ii) and (h) of annex II to decision V/14; paragraph 5 of decision VI/18; and paragraphs 3 (c), 5 and 7 (d)-(f) of decision VII/23. A large number of requests by the Conference of the Parties on the clearing-house mechanism and information exchange and dissemination is found throughout decisions related to the programme areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention.

(b) A review of users during the first quarter of 2005 (1 January 2005 to 31 March 2005) indicates almost 600,000 visits to the Convention website, from all continents).

(c) Over 15,500 copies of the English language and almost 7,500 of the Spanish language document containing decisions adopted by the seventh Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/7/21) were downloaded. ^{7/}

(d) Currently, the clearing-house mechanism administers 38 unique listservs developed to facilitate communication and dissemination and exchange of information, and hosts 9 electronic forums dedicated to increasing involvement of Parties, other Governments and stakeholders in work related to the programme areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention.

17. Many Parties and other Governments are helping to facilitate information exchange and dissemination by adhering to and using common formats, protocols and standards, particularly those recommended by the clearing-house mechanism. Some Parties are playing a very active role in supporting information exchange. The clearing-house mechanism of Bulgaria, for example, developed a metadata registry tool to assist with efforts to make information held by clearing-house mechanism national focal points more easily accessible and shared. ^{8/}

18. In addition, the clearing-house mechanism has developed a number of databases to facilitate information exchange and dissemination and contribute to overcoming the obstacles identified in the Strategic Plan of the Convention, particularly the inefficient dissemination of information on the international and national level. ^{9/} For example, the clearing-house mechanism developed a database on available information resources to assist Parties in developing and using indicators.

19. In conclusion, the quantifiable data available strongly indicate that the information exchange and dissemination activities of the clearing-house mechanism are assisting Parties to implement activities in support of the Convention. Furthermore, qualitative measures suggest that the provision of information exchange and dissemination services is essential to implementing activities under the Convention, particularly in light of the Strategic Plan of the Convention.

20. However, as identified by the second review of the clearing-house mechanism, one of the primary obstacles preventing more effective use of information resources is the lack of capacity of many Parties in developing regions. There is also a lack of investment at the national level to further develop clearing-house mechanism activities on information exchange and dissemination. Efforts by the clearing-house mechanism to build capacity are discussed in section C below.

B. Network development

21. Similar to the information exchange and dissemination systems developed by the clearing-house mechanism, network development has been a core activity aiming to assist Parties, other Governments and stakeholders with implementation of activities in support of the Convention. Indeed, the development of networks is essential to technical and scientific collaboration.

^{7/} These numbers are tempered by the fact that over 70% of users appear to be from North America and Western Europe. It is difficult to determine with a very high degree of accuracy exactly who is accessing the website. The problem in ascertaining the origin of Web requests is due to the way information is routed through the Internet when using Web protocols. A simple example of this difficulty is the case of an Internet user in Africa who has an America OnLine (AOL) account. In this case, it is likely that the system will consider a requested from such user as originating in the United States because of AOL's Internet domain name aol.com.

^{8/} See: <http://metatool.biodiversity.bg/>

^{9/} See paragraph 3(c) of Appendix, decision VI/26.

22. The global clearing-house mechanism network is the primary network for issues related to the Convention and technical and scientific cooperation. It has grown to include 150 clearing-house mechanisms, which have been developed in response to two decisions of the Conference of the Parties requesting Parties to designate and establish national clearing-house mechanisms. ^{10/} However, only 68 of those clearing-house mechanisms have developed websites.

23. The Conference of the Parties has repeatedly recognized the need for the establishment of networks, particularly in support of the programme areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention. With regard to the clearing-house mechanism, the Conference of the Parties and the clearing-house mechanism strategic plan placed strong emphasis on the development and establishment of networks as priorities for action. The Conference of the Parties, for example, explicitly requested the establishment of or cooperation with networks in 10 separate decisions. ^{11/}

24. Efforts by the clearing-house mechanism to develop and establish networks have centered on recommending common formats, protocols and standards for use with information networks, establishing cooperative initiatives with existing networks to foster technical and scientific cooperation, and creating electronic collaborative environments for Parties, other Governments, experts and stakeholders to share information and communicate more effectively. Two examples of these efforts are described below:

(a) Two electronic forums dedicated to the 2010 target were established, one in support of the task force on indicators and the other to review draft documents for the integration of goals and sub-targets into the programmes of work (inland water biodiversity and marine and coastal biodiversity). Up to 107 experts participated in the forum on the task force on indicators, and 33 experts participated in the forum on review of draft documents;

(b) In response to paragraph 5 of decision VII/12 on sustainable use, the clearing-house mechanism created a communication and collaborative network tool that enables users to comment directly on, and discuss, draft documents and reports. It was used to gather further comments and proposals on issues pertaining to the use of terms for sustainable use, adaptive management, monitoring and indicators. It was also used to establish the Island Biodiversity Electronic Forum, which gathered information to assist in the development of a programme of work on island biodiversity pursuant to decision VII/31.

25. The effectiveness of the clearing-house mechanism in facilitating network development is difficult to quantify; however, continued and increasing requests from the Conference of the Parties, in decisions on programme areas other than the clearing-house mechanism, for the establishment and use of networks and for cooperation with existing networks suggests it has been successful.

26. Paragraph 12 of decision VII/16 G, on participating mechanisms for indigenous and local communities, for example, made the role of the clearing-house mechanism in assisting Parties and stakeholders in the establishment and use of networks very explicit:

(a) Publish information through the clearing-house mechanism toolkit on formats, protocols, and standards for use by indigenous and local communities and assist in the further development of communication networks;

(b) Make available through the thematic focal point electronic forums and other communication tools to promote the further development of communications networks by indigenous and local communities;

^{10/} See: paragraph 15, decision III/4, paragraph 1, decision VI/18.

^{11/} See: paragraphs 4(h), 5(a), 5(c), decision II/3, paragraphs 9(d), 10(b), 10(d), 10(k)(ii), decision IV/2, paragraph 7(d), 7(e), decision V/14, paragraph 5, decision VI/18.

(c) Publish information on network architecture and custodianship of data through the clearing-house mechanism toolkit to assist indigenous and local communities in the further development of communication networks by indigenous and local communities;

(d) Identify other traditional, alternative and non-electronic communication tools to ensure full and effective participation in the communication network by indigenous and local communities.

27. In conclusion, past decisions by the Conference of the Parties and clearing-house mechanism activities seem to suggest that the clearing-house mechanism has an important role to play in assisting Parties and stakeholders in the development and use of networks. Parties, other Governments and stakeholders, however, continue to encounter obstacles, primarily lack of capacity and funding, preventing their full and effective participation in the development and use of networks. Indeed, the second review of the clearing-house mechanism explicitly points to funding as one of the pre-requisites for national participation in the development of the global clearing-house mechanism network. Furthermore, it proposes concrete steps to ensure the development of the clearing-house mechanism at the national, regional and international levels.

28. The second review also identifies the need for workshops on capacity-building, particularly with regard to introducing technologies required for the development of, and participation in, regional and international networks. This mirrors recommendations from regional meetings on the clearing-house mechanism, as well as decisions of the Conference of the Parties.

C. Technical and scientific cooperation

29. The effectiveness of initiatives undertaken by the clearing-house mechanism should be appraised against the successes it has had in assisting Parties to build capacity at the national and regional levels and in fostering an environment conducive to technical and scientific cooperation. It could also be argued that the enhancement of capacities is inextricably linked to the creation of an environment that promotes technical and scientific cooperation.

30. The clearing-house mechanism has been quite effective in terms of facilitating the transfer of technologies and scientific and technical cooperation related to clearing-house mechanisms. Efforts to build capacity in francophone Africa by the Belgian clearing-house mechanism and the Convention clearing-house mechanism are a case in point. To date, the clearing-house mechanism has organized two subregional workshops in Africa, namely in Burkina Faso and Burundi, to assist Parties in the use and development of Web-based technologies. In addition, it has organized 11 training courses in Belgium to introduce new web-based technologies to the African region. In all, 23 Parties and organizations have participated in these workshops resulting in over 75 persons receiving technical training in new information and web-based technologies.

31. This transfer of technology and efforts to develop technical and scientific cooperation has given the region the expertise to develop more effective clearing-house mechanisms, and related websites (14 websites have been established and are operational and 7 are under development). Furthermore, efforts are being made to expand this partnership programme to anglophone and lusophone Africa and Asia. Additional workshops are planned in Africa in 2005.

32. The Government of the Netherlands has also made generous funding available to assist least developed countries and/or small island developing states to develop their clearing-house mechanism national focal point websites based on the Dutch model, where applicable.

33. Other efforts toward implementation include the organization of technical workshops to transfer technologies developed by the clearing-house mechanism. For example, the European Community and Convention clearing-house mechanism organized a technical hands-on workshop in Bucharest, Romania

in 2005 on the development of regional clearing-house mechanisms. Technical experts from Fienšel Romania, the developers of the European Community clearing-house mechanism toolkit, gave expert instruction on the setting-up of Web servers and development of websites.

34. Other examples of disseminating expertise and transfer of technologies include the Bulgarian clearing-house mechanism development of a metadata registry tool for use by the clearing-house mechanism global network, the German and Colombian clearing-house mechanisms partnership programme, and the efforts by the clearing-house mechanism, the Global Invasive Species Programme and the Global Invasive Species Information Network to develop an interoperable global network on invasive species.

35. Equally important has been the role of the clearing-house mechanism in the technical development of the Biosafety Clearing-House in line with Article 20, paragraph 1, of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. It recommended the technical and architectural framework that was eventually implemented in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House and it continues to support the framework's technical functioning and enhancements. In addition, the clearing-house mechanism was responsible for: the technical architecture of the Biosafety Clearing-House pilot phase; protocols and standards supporting interoperability among disparate and distributed databases; and the design, modules, and first version of the Biosafety Clearing-House Toolkit.

36. The clearing-house mechanism also has sought partners among international organizations to more effectively implement its programme of work, particularly with regard to the building of capacity. The informal advisory committee of the clearing-house mechanism has been instrumental in offering advice to the Executive Secretary on facilitating cooperation with other relevant international and regional information networks and initiatives, in line with paragraph 7 (c) of decision V/14. The note by the Executive Secretary on clearing-house mechanism activities during the inter-sessional period, prepared for the seventh meeting of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/7/17/Add.1) offers a good summary of activities of the clearing-house mechanism in cooperation with international organizations and international thematic focal points.

37. On a broader level, the clearing-house mechanism has also initiated activities to facilitate cooperation among the three Rio and other environmental conventions. For example, projects resulting from recommendations of the informal meeting on interoperability of Information among the three Rio and other environmental conventions, which was held in Montreal from 2 to 3 November 2004, are being implemented and are currently under testing.

38. Perhaps indicative of the success that these activities and others have had in assisting Parties, other Governments and stakeholders to implement the Convention is the recommendation made in the last three clearing-house mechanism regional meetings and workshop ^{12/} to encourage developing countries to organize technical workshops on new information and Web-based technologies and to contribute to these workshops by sharing their technical expertise and knowledge.

39. While the clearing-house mechanism has successfully facilitated technology transfer and scientific and technical cooperation related to the clearing-house mechanism, its efforts to facilitate technology transfer and cooperation related to other issues, including the thematic programmes of work and cross-cutting issues of the Convention, have not reached their full potential. This was reflected in the second review of the clearing-house mechanism (UNEP/CBD/COP/7/INF/12), which pointed to a number of priority actions with regard to technical and scientific cooperation. For example, the review recommended that the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention continue to facilitate the establishment of international thematic focal points. As well, it also recommended that it encourage

^{12/} See the final reports for Asia and GRULAC regional meetings and the technical workshop in Romania.

greater cooperation with relevant international organizations with a view to organizing more training workshops on web-based technologies, metadata and other related activities.

40. The review also recommended a far greater degree of involvement by national clearing-house mechanisms in developing cooperative activities with international organizations to enhance the activities and projects of the clearing-house mechanism. Also of interest was the recommendation for national clearing-house mechanisms to assist with the establishment of regional clearing-house mechanism steering committees to oversee the development of regional clearing-house mechanisms.

41. Briefly stated, the recommendations implicitly support the current emphasis of the clearing-house mechanism on facilitating activities to enhance national capacities, assist with implementation of the Convention, and organize workshops to transfer expertise and technological know-how. It argues that the clearing-house mechanism should increase these efforts by increasing cooperative programmes with its partners and relevant organizations.

42. In decision VII/29, the Conference of the Parties, at its seventh meeting, adopted a programme of work on technology transfer and technological and scientific cooperation. As a key mechanism for facilitating exchange of information on technologies, technology transfer and scientific and technical cooperation, the clearing-house mechanism has an important role to play in the implementation of the programme of work. This note should be reflected in the revision and updating of the clearing-house mechanism strategic plan.

IV. ANALYSIS AND LESSONS LEARNED

43. The for-going review suggests that while the clearing-house mechanism has been able to reach its potential with regard to activities related to information exchange and network development, it now needs to re-focus more strongly its efforts related to the promotion and facilitation of technical and scientific cooperation. The constraints and obstacles preventing the clearing-house mechanism from realizing fully its programme of work related to technical and scientific cooperation are varied but inextricably linked. Among these obstacles and constraints, lack of technical and human capacity by many developing country Parties and regions is perhaps the most pressing.

44. In recognition of the important role the clearing-house mechanism can and does play in the implementation of the Convention, greater emphasis should now be placed on activities that explicitly raise capacity at the national level. The aim is to allow Parties to more effectively implement the Convention, particularly with regard to activities related to the 2010 target, technology transfer, and other programme areas and cross-cutting issues. This is in line with the objectives of the programme of work on technology transfer and technological and scientific cooperation.

45. Furthermore, in response to recommendations concerning national capacity-building with regard to new information and Web-based technologies, the clearing-house mechanism, in collaboration with donor countries, national clearing-house mechanisms and other partners, should organize and/or facilitate technical hands-on workshops to transfer expertise and enhance technical know-how in developing countries.

46. In addition, the clearing-house mechanism should continue to support efforts to implement the Convention's programme of work on communication, education and public awareness, particularly within the context of its communications plan, as well as the programme of work on technology transfer and technological and scientific cooperation. The need to identify ways and means to further support these and other programmes of work should be reflected in the revised strategic plan of the clearing-house mechanism.

47. Given the discussion above, it is essential that the global network of clearing-house mechanisms receive sustained support and funding, in order to develop initiatives and programmes on the promotion

and facilitation of technical and scientific cooperation and so succeed in assisting Parties to more effectively implement the Convention. It is also essential that Parties support efforts to transfer expertise and technologies through capacity-building activities such as technical workshops and hands-on training.

48. The above-mentioned priorities accord with the conclusions of the second independent review of the clearing-house mechanism, ^{13/} which stressed that the lack of technical capacity at the national level was one of the most pressing problems for most developing countries and regions. This, and the need for sustainable funding, was also stressed in each of the regional meetings on the clearing-house mechanism. The second review accordingly emphasized the need for clearing-house mechanism activities at the national and regional levels, particularly with regard to integrating technical and scientific cooperation into the programmes of work and cross-cutting issues of the Convention.

49. Another development shaping the direction of the new clearing-house mechanism strategic plan is the adoption by the Conference of the Parties at its sixth meeting of the Strategic Plan for the Convention (decision VI/26). The Convention's Strategic Plan includes a list of obstacles to the effective implementation of the Convention. The clearing-house mechanism can play an important role in contributing to the removal of several of these obstacles, such as, lack of transfer of technology and expertise; existing scientific and traditional knowledge not fully utilized; dissemination of information on international and national level not efficient; lack of engagement of the scientific community; and lack of public education and awareness at all levels.

50. The Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the informal advisory committee, to update the strategic plan of the clearing-house mechanism to 2009 for consideration by the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Working Group may wish to recommend that the priorities outlined in the previous paragraphs be taken into account during the revision and updating of the clearing-house mechanism strategic plan.

51. According to the multi-year programme of work of the Convention, and the proposals in the note by the Executive Secretary on review of processes under the Convention (UNEP/CBD/WG-RI/1/3), the next in-depth review of the clearing-house mechanism will take place at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2010. This would usefully coincide with the review of implementation of the related programme of work on technology transfer and cooperation. In view of this schedule, the Working Group may wish to consider recommending that the revised clearing-house mechanism strategic plan run until 2010, rather than 2009. This would have the added advantage of aligning the time periods of the clearing-house mechanism strategic plan with the overall Strategic Plan of the Convention.

^{13/} See UNEP/CBD/COP/7/INF/12.