*"The first multi-stakeholder expert meeting on elaboration of options for synergies among biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements"*

*Interlaken, Switzerland, 26-28 August 2014*

*Meeting report*

**Background and objectives of meeting**

Over the past decades, a number of biodiversity-related MEAs have been adopted, which can be difficult at times to implement in a coherent manner at national and international levels. As a result, there have been calls by MEA governing bodies as well as the UNEP Governing Council to explore possible synergies between such MEAs, with the specific aim of making their implementation more coherent, efficient and effective. This call was also reiterated by the Rio+20 Conference in paragraph 89 of its outcome document “The Future We Want”.. *“We recognize the significant contributions to sustainable development made by the multilateral environmental agreements. We acknowledge the work already undertaken to enhance synergies among the three Conventions in the chemicals and waste cluster [the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions]. We encourage parties to multilateral environmental agreements to consider further measures, in these and other clusters, as appropriate, to promote policy coherence at all relevant levels, improve efficiency, reduce unnecessary overlap and duplication, and enhance coordination and cooperation among MEAs, including the three Rio conventions, as well as with the United Nations system in the field”.*

Prior to Rio+20, the Governing Council of UNEP, in paragraphs 2 to 3 of Decision SS.XII/3 on International Environmental Governance (February 2012) instructed the UNEP Secretariat to undertake “activities to improve the effectiveness of and cooperation among multilateral environmental agreements, taking into account the autonomous decision-making authority of the conferences of the parties” and “explore the opportunities for further synergies in the administrative functions of the multilateral environmental agreement secretariats administered by the United Nations Environment Programme and to provide advice on such opportunities to the governing bodies of those multilateral environmental agreements”.

In the biodiversity cluster of MEAs[[1]](#footnote-1) there have already been significant efforts and initiatives aimed at improving their strategic alignment, not least the steps taken by MEA governing bodies to align their respective strategies with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. Other examples include the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG), the InforMEA portal, the group of the Chairs of Scientific Subsidiary Bodies and a number of MOUs and joint programmes of work. However there are still opportunities for building on this.

The UNEP project “*Improving* *the effectiveness of and cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions and exploring opportunities for further synergies”* aims to address the above-mentioned mandate from the UNEP Governing Council, and may also help States address the decisions on related issues by the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the biodiversity-related MEAs. It will explore options for further synergies at all levels of the major biodiversity-related MEAs, with a view to identifying options for making additional improvements in efficient and effective implementation of the MEAs through enhanced collaboration and cooperation. The ultimate output of this project will be a set of recommendations for the UNEP Executive Director to present to the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in 2016, responding directly to the UNEP Governing Council decision above. Based on the outcomes of this expert "Interlaken meeting", a paper outlining draft options for enhanced collaboration and coordination at the global level across the biodiversity-related MEAs will be made available for comment and stakeholder review, providing the basis for discussion at a second expert meeting in the first half of 2015.

According to the workshop agenda the main objectives of this expert meeting were to

* Review current experience and views relating to building synergies among biodiversity-related MEAs and
* Identify and explore further some of the most appropriate options for further building such synergies and the next steps to build on these options.

The workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule; therefore opinions expressed at the workshop are not attributed to individual participants.

**Day One- Tuesday 26th August**

*Objective: To review current experiences of past synergies and cooperation and to have an initial discussion on options for enhanced global synergies and cooperation for biodiversity MEAs.*

**1. Introduction and welcome remarks**

After the opening of the meeting by UNEP DELC, a warm welcome to participants was expressed by UNEP DELC, the host government, Switzerland and the European Union.

In opening remarks, it was recalled that over the past decades countries have successfully negotiated a high number of biodiversity-related conventions and agreements. The differing obligations under these instruments have posed significant challenges at times for their coherent and effective implementation. Countries have expressed concerns about the number of obligations, overloaded meeting and working agendas, the possible duplication of tasks emanating from different government bodies, burdensome reporting procedures and compliance and enforcement challenges. Despite these concerns, it was suggested that “all is not lost” yet. Any problematic trends in administrative burden and potentially overlapping tasks can be reversed and relevant aspects of international environmental governance can be reformed. The UN Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020 was seen a unique opportunity to achieve this.

It was recalled that the UNEP project as well as this expert meeting are a direct response to a call by the UNEP Governing Council and could also help the governing bodies of different MEAs to further foster synergies at global as well as regional and national levels.

The view was expressed that a lot has already been achieved but that, now that a lot of knowledge has been generated and exchanged, it is necessary to go a step further and to give these discussions and processes a further boost.

The host government Switzerland was thanked for choosing the beautiful venue in the city of Interlaken and expressed thanks to UNEP for convening the workshop as well as to the two other funders- EU and Finland. They expressed expectations that the meeting would achieve a good outcome and an inspiring set of options for enhancing synergies among biodiversity-related MEAs.

**2. After the welcoming remarks the two chairs of the meeting were introduced.**

The co-chairs also extended their deep thanks to the EU and the Swiss government for supporting the organization of the workshop and to UNEP for the high quality background documents prepared. The review of the synergies debate provided in these documents demonstrated that, not only is this a good and important time to further existing biodiversity synergies, but that a lot of ideas have already been discussed and that the building blocks to carry this further are already there.

The co-chairs elaborated on the objective of the meeting, to identify and explore some of the most promising and credible options, inviting governments to take action - not simply to put nice words on paper- but to help to reduce possible redundancies and to increase the effective use of resources and thereby to enhance the effective implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions on the ground. Recalling the Strategic Plan, its Achi Biodiversity Targets and the goals set for the 2020 vision, the co-chairs called upon participants to work towards the upcoming CBD COP 12 and CMS COP11, where the outcome of the workshop could help inform relevant discussions.

**3. Tour de table**

Theparticipants of the workshop introduced themselves and briefly outlined their expectations from the meeting.

Participants were generally in agreement that it was a good and important time to move the debate further and thus to convene the expert meeting. It was felt that, even though the issue has been discussed for over a decade, the debate now seems more focused. This was attributed to the positive examples of coordination and collaboration already taking place, including the work of the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) as well as the successful adoption and endorsement across conventions of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.

Participants praised the high quality of the background documents- they were generally seen as a good reminder of what had already happened, including past workshops on the topic. Participants hoped this meeting would have an impact in feeding current processes at the global level and by coming up with “something to sell to ministers and decision makers”. Participants hoped to develop some realistic and pragmatic options that would result in real gains for the effective implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions by further enhancing coordination and collaboration among them.

Participants were looking forward to hearing about the synergies experience within the chemicals and waste cluster and discussing the lessons learnt.

It was stressed that efforts to enhance synergies at the global level should always be seen as a "means to an end", namely supporting the coherent implementation of the biodiversity-related conventions at the national level.

Lastly, participants also highlighted the current SDG process as a good opportunity for fostering synergies among the biodiversity-related conventions that has not yet been fully explored.

**4. Context and orientation of the meeting**

The project team presented the UNEP project on “*Improving the effectiveness of and cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions and exploring opportunities for further synergies*”, briefly explaining the 4 different work packages as well as their interlinkages.

* Work package 1 addresses synergies at the global level. The final output of the project will be a draft paper containing recommendations that the Executive Director of UNEP will present to the next UNEA in 2016. The paper will draw upon two expert meetings – the current expert meeting in Interlaken as well as a second expert meeting in the first half of 2015 – and comprehensive engagement with key stakeholders in between those meetings.
* Work packages 2 and 3 address synergies at the national and regional level. Work package 3 is funded by the Swiss government, and has a specific focus on resource mobilization. The final output of the two work packages will be a *sourcebook of opportunities for enhancing cooperation and collaboration among the biodiversity-related conventions*. Building on a national-level questionnaire, a workshop held prior to CBD WGRI-5 in June 2014 in Montreal, Canada as well as engagement with key national stakeholders and experts, the sourcebook is currently being developed and a draft sourcebook will be presented at a half-day workshop in the margins of CBD COP 12 for discussion and final peer review. The sourcebook was described as a “start” and no quick win and therefore as a tool that will need to be further elaborated on.
* Work package 4 includes further support to States through support to NBSAPs and the NBSAP forum, and includes the communication and dissemination of the sourcebook. The intention is to develop an interactive tool from the sourcebook following its finalization after CBD COP 12, ensuring that the sourcebook stays a living document which further fosters exchange of experience between countries and regions.

The project team highlighted their intention to utilize upcoming processes for further outreach, including forthcoming Conferences of Parties (COPs). The project team expressed their thanks to the two rapporteurs of the meeting.

**5. Keynote Presentation 1: How can we build on experiences from existing efforts to enhance collaboration across biodiversity-related MEAs**

Starting with the Nordic Symposium held in 2010, a brief overview of efforts to enhance collaboration across biodiversity-related conventions was provided. In this context, the UNEP-WCMC 2012 publication on “Promoting synergies within the cluster of biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements” and its recommendations were highlighted as still current and useful.

Briefly outlining the context, the year 2010 was described as an alarm bell and the response- the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the post-2015 agenda- were mentioned as a great opportunity to further advance the synergies agenda. The speaker also highlighted that a lack of capacity is often named as a reason for the lack of action, whereby in fact the reverse is true: because of the lack of capacity, collaboration and synergies become even more important.

Four key areas were identified for enhancing collaboration across the biodiversity-related conventions:

1. The Science-Policy interface
2. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity
3. Capacity development and
4. National reporting

With regard to the **science-policy interface**, the important role of the scientific advisory bodies of the six biodiversity-related conventions, the Biodiversity Indicator Partnership (BIP) and IPBES were highlighted as great opportunities for continuing work on synergies. On **IPBES**, the importance of joint convention mandates was highlighted. There was a need for alignment of indicator development.

With regard to the **ongoing NBSAP revision processes and NBSAP implementation**, the GEF-6 Biodiversity Strategy was highlighted as an important achievement, providing funding opportunities for synergies among the biodiversity-related conventions. The important support role of the UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related MEAs was acknowledged and it was thought that the developing sourcebook of opportunities for enhancing cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions at the national and regional level would prove very helpful. Lastly, the creation of an improved biodiversity calendar was suggested.

With regard to **capacity development** it was acknowledged that a wide range of capacity development initiatives exist and that there is a need to streamline activities. The important role of IPBES in capacity development was stressed, and it was questioned how much the Clearing House Mechanism might be able to foster synergies.

On **national reporting**, it was pointed out that reporting is often the only compliance mechanism available. Nevertheless, and in particular with regard to reporting to the CBD, there is a widely acknowledged frustration about the amount of work that goes into a report because of the lack of feedback received by countries. Serious discussions about reporting are deemed highly necessary.

On a last note, it was acknowledged that a lot is already going on to enhance the coherent implementation of the conventions and **the BLG** plays an important role in that regard. At the same time it was highlighted that governments are not informed in a timely manner about the BLG’s work program and meetings.

**Discussion**

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised amongst others:

* Appreciation of the key practical issues outlined in the presentation
* Support for the four key areas identified for enhancing synergies among the biodiversity-related conventions
* Importance of **IPBES** and the corresponding emerging options for MEA Secretariats to streamline their interaction with the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel
* Need for strong cooperation frameworks with **UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related MEAs**- this could ensure that national level processes feed into regional and sub-regional processes
* All biodiversity-related conventions should foster and support national-level processes to respond to the Aichi Targets and in particular the identification of **national targets and indicators.**
* All biodiversity-related conventions should identify strategic entry points to establish **tools for mainstreaming**
* Recalling the failure to reach the 2010 biodiversity target, the importance of raising sufficient **financial resources** as well as proper communication was highlighted
* Fostering the sharing of best practices will be important in order to build upon the new momentum.
* **Responses eventually need to be at the country level** in order to ensure coherent and effective implementation

**6. Key note presentation 2: What can we learn from the experience of the Chemicals and Waste cluster of MEAs?**

The speaker gave a compelling account of efforts to enhance collaboration among the three conventions of the chemicals and waste cluster (the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions).

Participants heard that the process to enhance synergies across these conventions was launched " top-town" by the Secretariats. However, the parties took over and it became a **country driven process-** through an Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation. This had three co-chairs, each representing one of the three conventions, and a group of 15 members from each convention.

As the **guiding two questions** that should be addressed in any “synergies-process” the following questions were presented to the workshop participants:

1. Who should drive the synergies process, and
2. What is the role of the Secretariats and their host organizations

With regard to the elements of a synergies process, the speaker pointed out that **prioritization is the absolute key**, because of the need to identify and communicate clear benefits. For the chemicals cluster, discussions focused very much on resource savings, with the aim of redirecting the resources saved towards national implementation. In that regard the aim was to achieve access to GEF funding for all conventions and not just one. Administrative synergies were also a high priority due to the fact that the three Secretariats were already housed in the same building. It was ensured, however, that the process did not encroach on the legal autonomy of the three conventions, the funding sources or the specific objectives of the three conventions. The often expressed fear was that, because of the fact that the process was donor-country-driven, all funding would go to synergies activities.

After outlining the processes as well as some of the challenges faced, the speaker moved on to outline the achievements [as well as what has remained status quo:

The three Secretariats have been merged and the work is organized in a matrix, 60-70 people are working as the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Secretariats. The work is thus undertaken by one entity in a matrix on technical assistance, administration (e.g. organization of meetings) etc. The budget preparation for meetings is thus also done in a joint fashion, despite the fact of different funding sources. It was highlighted that joint decision making has not taken place yet; however, two extra-ordinary COPs as well as back-to-back COPs have taken place. The last COPs took place in 2013. In total 6 meetings took place: one Ex-COP and 3 ordinary COPs. In that context, it was once again highlighted that the decision making is still done by each of the COPs, in order not to touch upon their legal and political autonomy.

The speaker acknowledged that it is a very challenging and tricky task to organize and manoeuvre three COPs at the same time, allowing each one to make decisions as well as to come together in the joint working groups.

Participants were informed that a number of **evaluations and reviews of this synergies process** have been conducted. In 2017, a review will be published that examines to what extent the synergies process has led to coherent and enhanced implementation at the national level.

With regard to **scientific cooperation,** the speaker pointed to the next triple COP in 2015, for which the organization of a science forum is planned.

In elaborating on one key outstanding issue- **national reporting** (and the objective to streamline reporting and to ease the burden of parties)- the speaker highlighted significant challenges in identifying how to achieve this objective. It is proving difficult to identify potential options that would have a clear value and would not water down existing reporting obligations.

In discussing **financing**, the speaker highlighted one of the key lessons learnt: that you can get "so much more done" if you finance national focal points. A special program for institutional strengthening was established last year, supporting parties in integrative implementation.

In the concluding remarks, the speaker expressed the view that good starting points for synergies between conventions are **joint technical programs and joint information management**. The speaker highlighted the importance of "speaking with one voice" to become more credible and to have a louder political voice.

**Discussion**

The discussion that followed this presentation reflected on what had been learnt from experiences in the chemicals cluster; and explored the beginning of a country-driven process relating to the biodiversity cluster, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the different actors.

For the sake of confidence building, the **assignment of clear roles** by the Parties for of all players, including of the Secretariats and of UNEP, was seen as crucial in order to ensure future commitment and action and to address the fear of losing influence and importance.

In that context, it was also mentioned that so far the expert meeting discussions had not yet addressed the **role of civil society, including NGOs,** which should play a key role in any synergies process.

The general opinion was that **neither the co-location of the Secretariats of the six biodiversity-related conventions nor the suggestion of merging these conventions into one convention would be a feasible option. I**nstead, **a successful synergies process would require** **practical solutions to ensure that the process at the global level supports synergies at the national level**. In that regard, it was also pointed out that Parties were interested in best practices and training and that this is where the GEF and other funding mechanism have a crucial role.

With regard to national reporting, the discussion briefly touched upon the benefits of having a **common online reporting system** as well as shared guidance on implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.

**BLG** was discussed,and whether the current structure and modus operandi could be improved, for example, by enhancing the participation of Parties (potentially through country- representatives observers).

**7. MEA Secretariat panel**

A panel consisting of representatives from the 6 biodiversity-related Conventions were invited to respond to the discussions so far, to highlight existing work to enhance co-operation and coordination across the Conventions and to set out their ideas on how synergies could be further enhanced. The following key points emerged from comments made by the MEA Secretariat representatives:

Broadly, the MEA Secretariats appreciated being invited to participate in the meeting and to discuss with others existing and future efforts to improve visibility and awareness of biodiversity synergies at all relevant levels.

Convention governing bodies, including COPs, have urged that activities are done in harmony with related activities and decisions by the other biodiversity-related conventions. **All Secretariats therefore have the mandates to enhance synergies**

**Enhancing collaboration among the biodiversity-related conventions should be seen as a 'win-win' situation, with clear prioritisation of what to focus on and of the benefits of doing so**; and with pragmatic solutions.

**Collaboration is not a matter of costs, but of efficiency**. At the same time, one representative pointed out that there is a need to be clear about the limitations of a synergy process and to avoid opportunity costs. He/she was of the view that the relocation of Secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions would be a net loss at a time when urgent responses to halt biodiversity loss are needed.

**Secretariats’ representatives shared the view that efforts to enhance synergies at global level should be with the objective of supporting and facilitating the work of national focal points in order to have better outcomes for conservation and sustainable use.**

**A lot of cooperation and collaboration among the biodiversity-related conventions is already ongoing**, and, there was scope for Convention Secretariats to better showcase this work. The effective work of the BLG is just one aspect of ongoing work, among many. In that regard it was pointed out that information on the two past BLG meetings will be included in a document on "cooperation" for CBD COP12.

**All Conventions have endorsed the UN system-wide Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and aligned their strategic plans and other strategies with this**. This was seen as a great success and, along with development and implementation of NBSAPs, a key element to further enhance cooperation and synergies across the Conventions. There are already good examples at national level of convention priorities (other than those of CBD) being integrated into NBSAPs.

Taking into account that the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity is very broad, one representative highlighted that ownership needs to be taken for specific topics. **For the sake of synergies, individual Conventions need to focus on their comparative advantages**

Through the BLG there has also been promising work to ensure that **the GEF** takes into account the objectives of other Conventions (not just the CBD)

**Cooperation needs to take place not only across the biodiversity-related Conventions but with many others.** Secretariat representatives mentioned some specific priorities for engagement (e.g. WHC -engagement with other cultural initiatives or programs such as Biosphere Reserves and GeoParks; CITES-the International Tropical Timber Organization, the World Customs Organization, and Interpol). **There are also shared priorities for wider engagement** including engagement with the SDG process and UNDAF process; UNDP; FAO and the World Bank. **Mainstreaming across sectors is a shared priority**

**Several Secretariat representatives highlighted possibilities for additional synergies related to capacity building**. One representative in particular highlighted the usefulness of organizing joint capacity building workshops. This representative informed participants about a recently-held tandem workshop for focal points of the International Treaty and the CBD/ Nagoya Protocol, highlighting that it was made conditional for each pair of national focal points to apply and attend together. It was found that some of the focal points had their first (formal) interaction at this meeting. This concept could be used as a model for the organization of further joint workshops by conventions.

In considering **'low hanging fruits',** one Secretariat representative suggested that reporting was one of these (with a specific proposal for alignment of reporting around the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and Aichi Targets); whilst another highlighted options at the programmatic level and site-specific activities as key.

**In addition, the Secretariats introduced some more specific examples of existing collaboration:**

MoUs between the different biodiversity-related conventions were identified as an important and useful mechanism to enhance collaboration at the global level.

Ongoing examples of cooperation between WHC and the Ramsar Convention include overlapping sites which, for example, enable joint monitoring activities. There has been thematic cooperation between WHC and the CITES Secretariat when several species threatened by poaching are found on natural or mixed heritage sites. A joint work programme between CBD and WHC links cultural diversity and biodiversity

A general communication unit has been created between AEWA and CMS with very positive results.

A successful joint preparatory meeting for CBD COP 12, CMS COP 11 and Ramsar COP 12, with participation by CITES, was organized by SPREP at the beginning of August 2014 in Fiji.

**Discussion**

During the discussion which followed the panel, concern was expressed by some participants that MEA representatives presented an overly-positive impression of synergies across MEAs. W**hilst existing efforts were applauded, it was still felt that more could be done.** In urging a "reality check", these participants highlighted the low number of revised NBSAPs and 5th national reports to the CBD; and noted that if NBSAPs were not prepared in a synergistic way, their impact would be limited.

There was some critical analysis of the functioning of the **CBD as the “biodiversity framework convention**”, as opposed to other Conventions with very specific mandates (e.g. CITES and its regulation of international wildlife trade).

In discussing capacity building, participants stressed the fact that **capacity building workshops mostly target the implementation of only one convention, despite the significant success of the few joint capacity building workshops that have already taken place** and their potential impact on national coordination. Once again, it was highlighted that **UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related conventions could play an important role in supporting the organization of joint capacity building workshops.**

**8. SUMMARY OF DAY ONE DISCUSSIONS**

In summarising the discussions of the day, the rapporteurs highlighted the following points:

* The future role of the Environment Management Group (EMG) - given that the Aichi Biodiversity Target Task Force will take over the work of the EMG Issue Management Group on Biodiversity, what is the future role of the EMG in relation to biodiversity?.
* The importance of the NBSAP process and of NBSAPs as a tool for synergistic implementation across all the biodiversity-related Conventions
* The need for improved guidance on synergies at the national level
* Further alignment of the strategic plans of the biodiversity-related conventions
* The importance of capacity building and awareness raising
* National reporting as potential low hanging fruit, despite a decade of discussion without much change
* The structure and modus operandi of the BLG
* Resource mobilization as an important driver to foster synergies and at the same time as one of the biggest incentives to synergize

The rapporteurs found that the discussions mostly revolved around the need for “substantive synergies” and that many promising activities were already happening, although not necessarily among all 6 conventions. Instead, it was noted that activities often happen in tandem between 2 or 3 conventions. It was concluded that, at the end of the day, the measure of success for synergistic activities should be the support provided to implementation at the national level.

Prior to closing Day One, the co-chairs presented 6 suggested topics for the break-out groups on day 2:

1. Science-Policy Interface
2. Reporting, monitoring, indicators
3. Information management, awareness raising
4. Programmatic co-operation: Aichi Targets, Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, NBSAPs
5. Capacity-building, funding, resource efficiency
6. Institutional support including BLG, UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related conventions, etc

An evening reception hosted by the Swiss Government was enjoyed by all.

**DAY 2 - Wednesday 27th August**

*Objective: To develop draft options and recommendations further enhancing synergies across biodiversity-related MEAs.*

**9. 'Wrap up' of Day One**

After the opening of the meeting by the chairs, the floor was opened for interventions and comments that had been left pending from the discussion on day one. The representatives of the Secretariats had further opportunity to respond to any questions or comments which addressed their role in the synergies process.

Several comments dealt with the **particularities of the biodiversity cluster.** With regard to the different historical backgrounds of the conventions, their different mandates and convention cultures, their perceived strengths and weaknesses, the different locations of the Secretariats as well as the fact that not all conventions have the same Parties, it was concluded that lessons can be learnt from the synergies process in the chemical and waste cluster, but that the path will be very different. Participants dealt with the question of **hierarchy between the biodiversity-related conventions** and what it means if the CBD is considered an umbrella or framework convention. The opinion was shared by some that, in an ideal world, there would probably be only one convention with a number of protocols under it, but that this is not the world that we live in. Nevertheless, this remained an issue to be discussed.

Several comments dealt with the **role of the BLG**. While some participants criticised the fact that the group is only composed of the Heads of the Secretariats, with little connection to Parties, others pointed out that the work of the BLG is extremely important and useful to enhance collaboration among the biodiversity-related conventions and that the BLG operates in full compliance with its mandate provided by the COPs (starting with a decision by the CBD COP).

A number of participants stressed the importance of the **implementation of the Strategic Plan and the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets**, suggesting that this is where the debate should be focused. A key question was "How can the 6 convention Secretariats support the implementation of the Strategic Plan at the national level and collectively at the global level to achieve the objective of reducing the loss of biodiversity?"

Participants discussed **how to best report against the Aichi Biodiversity Targets**. It was observed that most of the 6 conventions had no process yet to aggregate data on this from national reports. In that regard, one suggestion was for a voluntary basic reporting system pertinent to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets which only contains the most crucial elements for each of the conventions.

Participants also debated **the role of UNEP** in the synergies process. A number of participants stressed the important role for UNEP at the regional level and the valuable role played by regional focal points for the biodiversity-related conventions, but that their role and capacity needed to be strengthened. The need for closer collaboration between sub regional focal points of AEWA and UNEP regional networks was mentioned as an example. Participants were broadly of the opinion that UNEP should play a key role in awareness raising activities – not just with regard to the general public but also vis-à-vis fellow UN organizations.

Participants expressed the need to ensure the role of all resource networks was recognised, including **the role of NGOs in** these collaborative efforts. It was further suggested that all biodiversity-related policy work is very much fashioned by NGOs. For example, the formal link between Ramsar and 5 NGOs was discussed.

With regard to cooperation in the area of biodiversity, it was noted that **IPBES** had already established a strategic cooperation mechanism between itself and four UN bodies (UNEP, FAO, UNESCO and UNDP) and that IPBES should therefore be used to strengthen the synergies process.

In **discussing "who should drive the synergies process?",** the question was raised " who owns the Convention– the Parties or the Secretariat?" It was broadly agreed that the conventions are ‘owned’ by the Parties and that the Parties need to be more active and take more ownership. However, other comments acknowledged that the Secretariats in collaboration with different partners also have a life of their own (to a certain extent) and, since they do not belong to particular governments, can act impartially. Others stated that the conventions belong to the citizens of the world, stressing the important role of civil society.

In summing up, the chairs presented some **key principles that emerged from this discussion:**

* synergies are for the Parties
* a country-driven process is needed
* form follows function
* a practical approach is important
* there should be inter-linkages between the national and the global levels: global level activities should support national level implementation
* mainstreaming is needed
* prioritization is needed

**10. Break out group discussions**

Based on the proposed themes for the break-out groups, the chairs divided the participants into three groups. Each group discussed two themes at a time, in two sessions, so that each topic was discussed by two groups. Groups were asked to appoint a rapporteur who should report back to plenary and were asked to present concrete ideas for the draft options paper – the intended outcome of this meeting.

Key points from the discussions on different themes were as follows:

**i.The science-policy interface**

* Importance of the availability of information for national stakeholders
* Harmonization of databases hosted by different conventions
* The role of the different scientific bodies under the conventions and in particular the role of the CSAB:
  + Need to identify specific areas in which the CSAB could be strengthened
  + Enhancement of CSAB’s participation in IPBES, for example by having CSAB as a platform to discuss priorities and feed into IPBES, recognizing as well the respective roles of convention governing bodies and secretariats
  + Need to agree on a non-bureaucratic and timely process on how the conventions can feed into IPBES processes in the future, for example through the CSAB
* Other opportunities provided through the quickly-developing IPBES
  + Prospect of common reports and assessments that will provide a comprehensive overall picture and thus guide the implementation of all the biodiversity-related conventions
  + Need for capacity development at the national level to ensure national-level input is provided
  + Potential for the use of IPBES products to be addressed in the synergies discussion

It was generally concluded that IPBES can provide a framework for enhancing the collaboration among the biodiversity-related conventions.

* Improvement of the CBD Clearing House Mechanism by improving the linkage to science and incorporating best practices for the sharing of experiences

**ii. Reporting**, **monitoring and indicators**

* Reporting is not necessarily 'low hanging fruit'. All Conventions have some very specific reporting requirements, at times written into their Convention text, e.g. CITES has two reporting requirements : i) a trade report every year and ii) an implementation report between meetings of the CoP (which occur every three years) s
* Ultimately, it is the Parties which adopt the reporting frameworks in the COPs. Therefore it has to be through Parties and COP decisions that harmonization can be achieved
* Alignment of the Conventions with the Strategic Plan and the Aichi Targets should bring new opportunities for harmonisation of reporting e.g. a module of shared reporting across the Conventions on the achievement of the Strategic Plan and the Aichi Targets could be developed. The following elements were considered key for such an approach
  + Link to the reporting of NBSAPs to support the development of NBSAPs and national level indicators that reflect all the biodiversity-related conventions – with regard to indicator development, the BIP and the SDG indicator process should be taken into account
  + Link to ongoing initiatives in countries, e.g. assessment of the baseline situation of the environment, State of the Environment report etc
  + The timescale, given that all conventions have different reporting cycles
* Need for an analysis to contribute to the development of this system, which looks at the reporting requirements of the different Convention in relation to what information is needed at global level for monitoring progress towards the Strategic Plan and the Aichi Targets
* Such a shared report on the Aichi Targets could also be a pragmatic approach to a ‘minimum’ report form Parties who currently are not reporting at all due to limited resources.
* Opportunities provided through online reporting systems, taking into account countries with limited resources and in particular limited internet access
* Potential to replicate the very successful periodic (every 6 years) regional WHC reporting, in particular due to the fact that the national reporting under WHC is combined with capacity building activities and workshops that bring together countries at regional level to discuss the implementation of the convention
* Need for capacity building on use of new technology and citizen science to aid reporting at the national level

iii. **Information management and awareness raising**

* Potential establishment of only one global biodiversity day to raise awareness for all the biodiversity-related conventions instead of every convention (or topic) having its own day; better-coordinated use of already-established UN and other days which address various aspects of biodiversity
* InforMEA was highlighted as a useful tool, however, as a recent regional workshop demonstrated, many stakeholders are not aware of it or do not know if and how it can facilitate their work. Therefore a need was detected to better promote tools like InforMEA and to further develop it to meet user needs
* Better coordination of information requests from national focal points by the Convention Secretariats
* Joint preparatory COP meetings as a tool to raise awareness of the benefits to be gained from enhanced collaboration among the biodiversity-related conventions
* Challenges for countries with scarce resources with regard to new technologies
* Upscaling of the UN Decade on Biodiversity through a global campaign
* Different conventions should become champions on different issues. As an example of an already established championship, the collaborative work of the BLG with SCBD leading its input through the TST and input to the SDG process was highlighted

**iv.** **Programmatic co-operation: Aichi Targets, Strategic Plan, NBSAPs**

* Importance, historic significance and impact of the alignment of strategic plans of the different conventions with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020
* Opportunities provided by NBSAP revision processes and subsequent implementation at the national level in order to enhance coherent implementation of the conventions and foster mainstreaming of biodiversity across sectors; the need for strong global messages in order to fully build upon the opportunities provided
* Integration of convention objectives into NBSAPs as good strategic entry points for funding
* Importance of UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related conventions as well as other regional networks in ensuring collaboration among the conventions at the regional level
* Importance of Regional Strategic Plans in particular with regard to transboundary issues
* Importance of cooperation with sub-regional organizations, e.g. SPREP or the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity
* Use of the momentum created through the coming into force of the Nagoya Protocol to enhance collaboration with the International Treaty
* Preparation for negotiations on the new Strategic Plan (potential outreach to UNCCD and importance of highlighting the importance of collaboration prominently in any new guidance material)
* Importance of the UNDAF process having a collective message from the BLG regarding biodiversity funding

**v.** **Capacity-building, funding, resource efficiency**

* Possible means for achieving a more integrated approach to capacity building across all conventions, e.g. a centralized service across all MEAs
* Where consistent with its mandate, the potential for a UNEP-led approach in bringing together certain capacity building activities related to the different conventions (e.g. environmental rule of law), the potential for other UN bodies (e.g. UNDP, FAO, UNESCO, etc.) within their respective mandates to lead an approach for bringing together certain capacity building activities related to different conventions and the use of InforMEA and perhaps other mechanisms and processes to help identify potential joint activities
* Importance of enhancing collaboration with different resource networks
* Replication of successful joint capacity development workshops at the global, the regional and the sub-regional level and acknowledgement that often third institutions play a leading role, e.g. joint indicator development workshop under the BIP initiative in 2013 in Cameroon (CMS, CITES, CBD), the recent joint workshop between the CBD and the International Treaty on ABS and the Fiji preparatory for upcoming COPs
* Creation of a joint convention calendar to facilitate keeping track of events as well as a strategic planning tool
* Development of a series of joint capacity building activities, e.g. on the NBSAP review process or resource mobilization
* Responsibility of governments as well as the Secretariats to address the IPBES call for a proposal on capacity building
* Cooperation across Secretariats on funding issues
  + Collaboration on new resources, e.g. the UNDP adaption programme
  + Building on BLG work with the GEF, e.g. by strengthening action at national level to use GEF funding for integrated approaches, and also for sub-regional activities and by enhancing the coordination of the supportive decisions from the Conventions’ COPs
* Funding for synergistic activities and the potential role of the NBSAP Forum
* How synergistic approaches can facilitate making the link between biodiversity conservation and poverty eradication and thus facilitate access to funding opportunities
* The correlation between more synergistic implementation and costs
* Synergies with the UNFCCC, in particular with regard to REDD+ and correspondent funding opportunities

**vi**. **Institutional support including BLG, UNEP and regional focal points**

* Transparency of the BLG
* Potential involvement of country representatives in the BLG, e.g. as observers
* More information on how the BLG has responded to the CBD COP11 mandate which requested the CBD Secretariat to put forward proposals to strengthen the BLG
* Possible replication of the BLG at the regional level
* Joint regional pre-COP meetings jointly organized by the conventions
* Further strengthening of the relationship between the Conventions and UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related conventions due to their crucial role in highlighting regional needs and facilitating support for national level processes
* Secure funding for the UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related conventions

**Day 3- Thursday 28th August**

*Objective: to refine the draft options and to agree on a process for delivering agreed options and recommendations*

**11. Presentation on InforMEA**

After the opening of the session by the chairs, a UNEP representative delivered a brief presentation on the information portal called InforMEA, which was followed by a question and answer session.

The speaker gave a quick elaboration of the development of InforMEA (noting that InforMEA is in fact a by-product of information and knowledge management efforts at the UN level) its link to the BLG and the leading role of CITES and the platform’s key functions. The next step will be to try to harvest national reports and to create a key word search function. This would support efforts at the country level to bring together different pieces of information.

The speaker also presented the current system of keeping track of the different topics on which data might be harvested and outlined that the aim is eventually automatic harvesting.

Lastly, participants were informed that a new design of the platform will be coming in the next few weeks and that e-learning courses will soon be launched, starting with an e-learning course on CMS which will be launched at the upcoming CMS COP 11 in November 2014.

During the discussion that followed, one participant asked how the platform deals with the fact that legal terms are interpreted in different ways under the conventions. The same participant enquired whether there has been a peer review process for the categorization which has been undertaken. In response, participants were informed that key terms were not interpreted in any way. Instead information is regularly linked to the key decisions which provide the legal interpretation agreed upon under each convention body.

Furthermore, in addressing questions regarding the scope of the platform, it was noted that keeping the platform manageable and thus ensuring that data is always up to date is one of the most important priorities. The scope is thus limited by the resources available.

The representative of the WHC also took the opportunity to inform participants that the World Heritage Centre plans to link different information systems, in particular with regard to World Heritage sites. To make the opportunities for synergies more concrete, the database will soon indicate where WHC sites overlap with Ramsar sites.

**12. Discussion of draft paper- "Options for enhanced cooperation and synergies at the global level across biodiversity-related MEAs"**

In the last session, the chairs and representatives of UNEP DELC presented the first draft "Options paper". This paper, containing draft potential options for enhanced cooperation and synergies across biodiversity-related MEAs, had been compiled the evening before based on the discussions and ideas that had emerged during the previous two days and, in particular, from the break out groups. It was stressed that the document was only a first draft and that the aim of this session was to capture initial comments on it and to ensure that all key options identified at the meeting were reflected in the paper. It was also stressed that the document would not be a consensus document of the workshop participants but, in line with the intended output of the meeting, a paper of draft options emerging from the discussion which should feed into and inform relevant discussions at UNEA-2 and meetings of convention governing bodies.

Discussion of this paper included the following points:

* Some ideas from the breakout groups had not been included in the paper, and it was agreed they would be added to the revised draft. This included the option of complementary regional biodiversity strategies and action plans to address transbounday issues; capacity building for national reporting (such as the WHC approach); immediate (and simple) opportunities to enhance collaboration on capacity building; support for collaboration on capacity building through inforMEA ; and collaboration across the communications officers of the MEA Secretariats.
* It was agreed that the document needed a preamble to provide some background and to introduce where this paper had come from; also to highlight key processes such as the SDGs and UNDAFs and to highlight NBSAPs as an essential element for a ensuring a coherent approach to the implementation of biodiversity-related conventions.
* More explanation was needed on options related to voluntary peer review of NBSAPs
* Presentation of some options (e.g. harmonisation of reporting) needed to reflect the urgency of the need for progress on this
* Presentation of options related to the science-policy interface should refer to other science-policy processes in addition to IPBES (or the whole option should be made more specific to IPBES). Draft IPBES-related options should also include the potential for collaboration to lead joint, and direct approaches to IPBES through CSAB, where appropriate (rather than separately and only through COPs), and for cooperation in relation to the observer role of Secretariats in IPBES
* The paper currently focused mainly on Secretariats, UNEP and (to some extent) Parties- but there was a need to highlight the role of other resource networks, including organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, development cooperation agencies, IUCN and NGOs. Regional cooperation amongst these networks was highlighted as particularly important (related to the proposal to strengthen the role of UNEP regional focal points for biodiversity-related conventions)
* In further developing the paper, it was urged that existing mechanisms should be taken into account and that the paper propose only draft options that would be additional to, or strengthen these, to add genuine value

The next steps were discussed and agreed as followed

1. Integration of the comments raised in plenary into the draft options paper
2. Circulation of the draft options paper to workshop participants for comment. The draft then agreed would be seen as a 'non-consensus' paper of potential options for further development through the following process.
3. Sharing of the draft options paper with key stakeholders and in particular government representatives at CBD COP 12 and other meetings
4. Based on the broad outreach activities and the comments received, further development of the draft options paper by December 2014.
5. Though the final outcome would be recommendations by the UNEP ED to UNEA-2 it was hoped that the anticipated options paper would also be a useful contribution, to be used by Parties as they saw fit, for Convention COPs and other intergovernmental discussions

**Concluding remarks**

During their concluding remarks, the chairs of the meeting thanked all the workshop participants for their hard work during the meeting and for the thoughtful, lively and useful discussions. They reflected on the final session of the meeting, which included some rich debate on the options paper and looked forward to being back in touch with workshop participants to further develop options to enhance collaboration and synergy across the global biodiversity-related Conventions. They thanked the government of Switzerland for their generous funding and hosting of the meeting, as well as the other funders- Finland and the EU, and UNEP for convening this successful event.

1. For this workshop, "the biodiversity cluster" was defined as the six major biodiversity-related MEAs: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS); the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA); the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and; the World Heritage Convention (WHC). It was announced during the meeting that another convention, the International Plant Protection Convention, had recently been added as a member of the Biodiversity Liaison Group which comprises the other conventions mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)