



Convention on
Biological Diversity

Role of the CBD National Focal Point

Module A-2

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What you will learn in this module:

This module has been prepared as part of the effort to enhance the capacity of the National Focal Points (NFPs) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It is included in a series of training modules that have been designed to enhance the capacity of Parties to understand and assist with various aspects of implementation of the Convention.

The module introduces the Terms of Reference that were adopted at COP 8 and provides a brief description of the role of the NFP in practical terms. A detailed manual will be available through the online support portal at Convention's website located at www.cbd.int.

This module and others have been designed for both the target audience as well as others involved in the CBD process both at national level and within the global stakeholder community.

Modules on a variety of themes are being developed and will be delivered as workshops held during CBD meetings. As well, they are intended as short "stand-alone" training courses that the individual can download and study at their own pace.

1. What are National Focal Points and what do they do?

A focal point is the person or institution designated by a government to represent the Party between meetings of the Conference of the Parties in its routine dealings with the Secretariat in matters involving the Convention. These dealings include such activities as communications, dissemination of information, representation at meetings, responding to various request, collaboration with other stakeholder groups, monitoring, promoting and/or facilitating national implementation of the Convention.

At its eighth meeting, the Conference of the Parties formalized a terms of reference for national focal points. The terms of reference evolved partially as a result of the intercessional review of the implementation of the Convention that had taken place in 2005. However, it is mainly based on the established practices already in place within most Parties and their routine interactions with the Convention.

Between meetings of the COP, the Secretariat acts on behalf of the COP to perform its functions and prepare reports based on the feedback received in preparation for its next meetings. Therefore, the relationship between the focal points and the Secretariat is a key to the effective implementation of the Convention.

Each country that is a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity establishes a National Focal Point (NFP) for the Convention on Biological Diversity. Normally, the focal point is nominated by a higher authority within a government such as the environment ministry to act as liaison with the Convention, its organs and back through appropriate body(ies)/ministries and other groups within a Party.

In addition to the primary NFP, additional focal points may be nominated for specific functions, following decisions of the COP.

Several other types of focal points have been established by the COP and will be explained briefly in the next section.

In the absence of multiple focal points acting in various roles with respect to the CBD the national focal point, by default, assumes the entire role and responsibilities associated with the Convention.

The next few questions examine the various tasks of the NFP according to the guidance adopted by COP.

Terms of Reference – National Focal Points of the CBD¹

Recognizing that Parties determine the specific responsibilities of their national focal points, *notes* that the primary function of national focal points is to act as liaisons with the Secretariat on behalf of their Parties and in so doing, they are responsible for:

- (a) Receiving and disseminating information related to the Convention;
- (b) Ensuring that Parties are represented at meetings under the Convention;
- (c) Identifying experts to participate in ad hoc technical expert groups, assessment processes and other processes under the Convention;
- (d) Responding to other requests for input by Parties from the Conference of the Parties and the Secretariat;
- (e) Collaborating with national focal points in other countries to facilitate implementation of the Convention;
- (f) Monitoring, promoting and/or facilitating national implementation of the Convention;

2. What other focal points have been established by the COP?

As noted above in the terms of reference that elaborate the role of the national focal point, the Conference of the Parties acknowledges that Parties determine the specific roles of the national focal point.

As the Convention has evolved from setting policy to focusing upon implementation the COP has also called upon Parties to establish additional focal points to enhance the various priorities of the Convention as they are set.

Box 1

Example: the terms of reference for SBSTTA were elaborated at COP 8 as follows:

- (a) Developing links and facilitating information exchange, between the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and relevant regional and national agencies and experts;
- (b) Responding to requests for input from the Conference of the Parties and the Secretariat related to scientific, technical and technological issues;
- (c) Communicating and collaborating with focal points for the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in other countries to improve the effectiveness of the Subsidiary Body and to facilitate implementation of the Convention;
- (d) Collaborating with other national-level focal points for the Convention on Biological Diversity and focal points from other biodiversity-related conventions to facilitate implementation of the Convention at the national level.

Other focal points have also been called for by the COP for the CHM, ABS, GSPC and GTI. Details on the role of each of these can be found by visiting the Convention website located at www.biodiv.int and visiting the individual areas of interest.

¹ From Decision 8/5

3. What information related to the Convention do focal points receive and disseminate?

As the primary communication channel through which information related to the Convention is disseminated, the focal point is the main recipient of communications from the Secretariat on behalf of their Party. This includes transmission of the decisions of the Conference of the Parties as well as and various Notifications. The role of the focal point is to ensure the relevant Ministry, department, agency, or other group receives the relevant information and follows-up where necessary when a request for feedback has been received.

A notification is a communication from the Secretariat that usually requires some sort of response or follows up from the Party through the NFP. These notifications could be requests for information or feedback from the Parties with respect to a decision taken by the COP.

The focal point determines where to forward the notification for action within their country and monitor the process to ensure a reply is issued. Often, requests for feedback may need to be sent to more than one ministry or stakeholder group within a Party for a complete and accurate response.

Box 2

Example: A notification is sent to the National Focal Point by the Secretariat summarized as follows with respect to an in-depth review in preparation for COP 9:

Subject: **Additional Information for In-depth Review of Implementation of Programme of Work on Agricultural Biodiversity**

Submission on a voluntary basis, of any information in addition to those included the third national report are considered useful for the in-depth review. The submission can include national experience in the implementation of the programme of work as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme of work, if such information is available.

Action required by 31 December 2006

Role of the Focal Point – transmit this notification to the relevant ministries and/or regulatory bodies active at the national level as well as any special interest groups with respect to Agricultural Biodiversity to solicit input to this process. Gather and coordinate receipt of any replies and prepare a consolidated response **by the deadline** to ensure national experience is accurately reflected during the in-depth review.

4. How do focal points ensure that Parties are represented at meetings under the Convention?

For intergovernmental meetings, that are meetings of the COP, SBSTTA and open-ended Working Groups of the Convention, the delegates will be formally representing the government (For expert groups and workshops, see the next question). Each country will have its own procedures that need to be followed. Usually, the person(s) designated as national focal point would be included in the national delegation selected to attend the meetings of the Conference of the Parties as these meetings deal with overall policy. As well, the focal point is instrumental in advising on the composition of the delegation.

Consideration may be given to the following when selection the delegation:

- The type and level of expertise required in the subject area, including the various ministries that may need to be represented according to national policy
- The various issues on the agenda of the meeting and the relative priority accorded them

- The need for gender balance and for representation from local and indigenous populations and other groups

For other meetings the participants may vary according to topic. Therefore, an important function of the national focal point would be to help identify suitable participants based on available expertise. For example, meetings of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Matters (SBSTTA) requires participation by suitably qualified individuals who are expert in the matters to be considered. They may include representatives of the scientific community.

Regardless of the type of meeting being held, the Secretariat will “notify” the Parties in advance of each meeting through an invitation, as well as disseminate information for the meeting such as documentation and information for Participants. In the case where some financial support may be available it is vital that a Party’s response nominating their delegate(s) is received by the Secretariat within the timeframe noted in the invitation. Financial resources are usually very limited and are often distributed on a “first come first served” basis.

Box 3

Example: A notification is sent to the National Focal Point by the Secretariat summarized as follows with respect to the eleventh meeting of SBSTTA:

Subject: **Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice**

I am pleased to inform you that the eleventh meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-11) and the second meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Protected Areas (WG-PA 2) will be held back-to-back in Montreal, Canada, respectively from 28 November to 2 December 2005 and from 5 to 9 December 2005 at the Conference Center of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Please find attached herewith the provisional agenda for the SBSTTA-11 meeting, the document “Information for Participants” and the pre-registration form for both meetings. Action required by Saturday 15 October 2005

Role of the Focal Point – In this case the national focal point (and, where designated, the SBSTTA focal point) would normally confer with the relevant ministry with regard to the participant(s) who will be designated to represent the party at this meeting. It is important to ensure that the pre-registration process is completed **by the deadline** especially where funding is provided. Often, financial resources are limited and are allocated on a “first come, first served” basis. Documentation for CBD organized meetings is sent to the relevant focal point(s) and is also available on the CBD website. Therefore, an early response with respect to registration will help the focal point ensure the delegate(s) receive all other relevant information pertaining to the meeting.

5. How do focal points Identify experts to participate in ad hoc technical expert groups, assessment processes and other processes under the Convention?

Other types of meetings organized by the Convention may require specialized expertise. Ad hoc technical expert groups comprise experts selected by the Executive Secretary from among those nominated by Parties. Such expert groups are usually quite small, so every party does not expect to contribute an expert to each Group.

Within any Party there may be a plethora of specialized knowledge in a given area. In these cases, the role of the NFP is to help select the “best expert” to ensure the highest quality of expertise is made available to the meeting. In this case, the expert is selected based on his or her professional background. While nominated by a government, they participate in the meetings in their own capacities as experts and do not represent their government. It is important that national focal points provide full curricula vitae (resumes) of the nominated experts to allow for an effective and objective selection process.

The Executive Secretary, usually in consultation with the SBSTTA Bureau or COP Bureau, selects experts taking into account the range of expertise needed as well as geographical and gender balance.

Box 4

Example: A notification is sent to the National Focal Point by the Secretariat summarized as follows with respect to the Regional Synergy Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean on the Biological Diversity of Dry and Sub-humid Lands and Agricultural Biodiversity:

Subject: **Regional Synergy Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean on the Biological Diversity of Dry and Sub-humid Lands and Agricultural Biodiversity**

I am pleased to invite you to nominate, at your earliest convenience but no later than 30 September 2006, multiple experts from your country who can be called upon to participate in a regional synergy workshop to build synergies between the three Rio conventions when implementing the programmes of work on the biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands and agricultural biodiversity. I am pleased to inform you that the Government of the Netherlands has provided financial resources for this workshop.

Action required by 30 September 2006

Role of the Focal Point – In this case, the notification is sent to the national focal points in the region and taking into the account the criteria outlined above would confer within the Party to nominate suitable candidates for participation in the workshop. Replying by the deadline will ensure the participants selected will receive all other relevant information with respect to the workshop.

6. What other types of requests for input by Parties from the Conference of the Parties and the Secretariat do focal points need to respond to?

National Reports: As of 2006, COP has requested 4 National Reports. The detailed information contained in national reports is vital to the COP in formulating policy through its decisions. The information contained in national reports has also assisted in setting global biodiversity priorities. They have been used as source information for the Global Biodiversity Outlook and other publications. Therefore, they are a vital tool in setting policy and measuring the success of the implementation of the Convention. In fact, the financial mechanism of the Convention, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has provided financial assistance to developing country Parties through its implementing agencies to ensure that clear, accurate information concerning a Party's national state of Biodiversity is prepared. Separate modules are under preparation to elaborate national reporting in more detail.

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP): The NBSAP is the cornerstone of a Party's plan with respect to its own Biodiversity. It should set out a strategy that takes into account its own national environmental issues, priorities and goals. Alongside this strategy there should be an action plan that articulates the steps needed to achieve the goals set out in the strategy that by definition will also encompass the three objectives of the Convention. A regular review of the NBSAP is important to ensure adjustments are made as needed, and the action plan is revised as necessary. Separate training modules are under preparation to elaborate the NBSAP process in more detail.

In fact, the preparation of the NBSAP is the only legally binding commitment under the Convention.

Article 6 of the Convention stipulates...

“Each Contracting Party shall, in accordance with its particular conditions and capabilities:

(a) Develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, inter alia, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the Contracting Party concerned; and

(b) Integrate, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies.”

Box 5

Role of the focal point – For both National Reporting and the NBSAP process, the focal point plays a vital role in the coordination of input for these reports. Regardless of who prepares the report(s) it is important that the reports are prepared through a comprehensive, consultative process that involves as many stakeholder groups as possible. **To ensure an accurate global picture of the global state of biodiversity is presented to COP it is vital that these reports are prepared and submitted within the respective deadlines.** This information is also used in international publications such as the Global Biodiversity Outlook.

Other requests for input from the Parties are normally the result of decisions taken by consensus during meetings of the COP. The information requested is vital to ensure an accurate analysis of the global environmental situation and is often a request for information at the national level in a prescribed format such as a National Report. This information is then collated by the Secretariat and forms the basis of many analytical studies that are disseminated in multitudes of ways such as:

- Complication of Regional/Global Environmental Data
- Thematic papers prepared by the Secretariat for meetings
- Information for Global publications such as the Global Biodiversity Outlook
- Setting of priorities
- Other research conducted by the academic community

Box 6

Example: A notification is sent to the National Focal Point (and SBSTTA focal point) by the Secretariat requesting Case Studies and Lessons Learned on Land use Options that Promote Biodiversity Conservation and Income Generation within Dry and Sub-humid Lands:

Role of the focal point – In this regard, the focal point would disseminate this request to the relevant stakeholder groups and coordinate a reply to the Secretariat within the deadline.

7. How should focal points collaborate with their counterparts in other countries to facilitate implementation of the conventions?

Collaboration relates to coordinated activities with multiple sources including the Secretariat, other focal points, relevant organizations or groups, and others identified either within the relevant party or with other Parties, perhaps within a region.

Collaboration among focal points is important in establishing “best practices” and overcoming the obstacles thus far identified in implementing the Convention. A positive side effect of collaboration is that strong Regional support on issues related to the Convention paves the way for successful negotiation during meetings of the COP and increased exposure to other Parties experiences with implementation.

Box 7

Example: Regional meetings are normally held prior to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties. By participating in these regional meetings national issues can be aired with regard to priorities and often potential solutions can be identified that have proven successful for other Parties. These meetings also provide an opportunity to identify issues common to the region as a whole that can be presented as matters requiring COP's attention.

Role of the focal point - it is the role of the focal point to raise issues relevant to their party at the regional level prior to COP meetings and to ensure ongoing collaboration with other stakeholder groups within the regional/international community to help establish and maintain other support networks.

8. What is the role of focal points in Monitoring, promoting and/or facilitating national implementation of the Convention?

In many cases the designated NFP is located in a high commission or embassy away from the seat of government. Therefore, in practical terms it is not feasible for one person to assume all of the important duties described in the module. For successful implementation of the Convention it is necessary to focus on how a Party will monitor, promote and facilitate its implementation of the Convention.

Monitoring implementation of the Convention from the national perspective implies that a resource has been dedicated to ensuring the flow of information to/from COP via the CBD Secretariat occurs in a timely fashion. This suggests a wider network of individuals is involved in the process. As demonstrated in the examples above, information is requested on a variety of themes that will normally involve input from many sectors within a Party. To ensure all areas have been handled effectively it is desirable to have a monitoring system set up to track the flow of information.

Promoting and/or facilitating implementation of the CBD at national level should be coordinated by the NFP. It should also be monitored through the system established as outlined above.

COP 8 prepared a detailed work programme for “Communication, Education and Public Awareness” for Parties to help reach all stakeholder groups. Regional workshops are held from time to time to present this programme of work in detail and this material is accessible through the CBD website.

In addition to the CEPA work programme all Parties are encouraged to promote awareness of the Convention through annual activities held every May 22nd on International Day for Biodiversity (IBD). Each year a specific theme is chosen and a tool kit is prepared to assist Parties in this regard. It is the role of the NFP to ensure IBD day activities are held in their country.

Conclusion

This overview of the role of the national focal point is intended to help clarify the importance of each Party's contribution toward the implementation of the Convention. A detailed manual is available to augment this module and may be accessed electronically at: [www.cbd.int]. The manual provides many detailed references to the information highlighted in this module as well as links to other relevant information.

It is important to realize that the successful achievement of the 2010 target to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biological diversity cannot be achieved by one person working alone in the role of NFP. The achievement of the 2010 target will require a well coordinated effort of all policy makers, stakeholder groups, implementing agencies and others working together.

List of Acronyms

ABS	Access and Benefit Sharing
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHM	Clearing-House Mechanism
COP	Conference of the Parties (to the CBD)
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GSPC	Global Strategy for Plant Conservation
GTI	Global Taxonomy Initiative
IUCN	World Conservation Union
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body for Scientific Technical and Technological Advice
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
