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MEETING OF THE INFORMAL ADVISORY
COMMITTEE TO THE CLEARING-HOUSE
MECHANISM OF THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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PROGRESS REPORT AND UPDATES ON THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its decision [XI/2](#), paragraph 11, the Conference of the Parties welcomed the work programme for the clearing-house mechanism in support of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 ([UNEP/CBD/COP/11/31](#)) and agreed to keep this work programme under review. Subsequently, in decisions [XII/2 B](#), [XIII/23](#), the Conference of the Parties made a number of requests concerning the clearing-house mechanism.
2. The present document provides a brief progress report summarizing the main activities carried out by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity since the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which was held in November 2018.¹ Section II provides updates related to implementation of the web strategy and the central clearing-house mechanism; section III describes progress regarding support for national clearing-house mechanisms, and section IV outlines relevant partnerships and collaborative initiatives.
3. The Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism is invited to review the progress report and, as appropriate, provide the Executive Secretary with advice for further improving the central clearing-house mechanism, the web strategy as well as support and partnerships for strengthening national clearing-house mechanisms.

II. UPDATES RELATED TO THE CENTRAL CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

A. Update on implementation of the web strategy

4. Pursuant to the request in decision XIII/23, paragraph 15(i), the Secretariat developed a two-phased approach and roadmap to implement the web strategy for the Convention and its Protocols.² During the first phase, which ended at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat embarked on the design of a new CBD website, a preview of which was presented at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Since then, the design of the homepage and several subpages has been completed, and a brand book for the website is being finalized, to be used to adapt the new design to any CBD-related portals, including all three clearing-houses and the numerous CBD portals. The next steps are: (a) identifying proper Drupal website hosting solutions, in-house or by a private Drupal

¹ A progress report on the Secretariat's activities implemented during the period until November 2018 was issued for the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties as information document [CBD/COP/14/INF/4](#).

² The list of phase 1 and phase 2 activities and deliverables are listed in the updated web strategy contained in document [CBD/SBI/2/INF/16](#).

website hosting service and (b) migration of content from the current website to the new website. The new website is expected to be more graphic and visually attractive, dynamic and user-friendly.

5. In line with paragraph 4(c) of decision [14/25](#), the Secretariat will update and further implement the web strategy for the Convention and its Protocols with priority actions to be taken before 2020 on the basis of decisions emanating from the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the third meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing and the ninth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

6. The Secretariat is also implementing the joint modalities of operation for the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, the Biosafety Clearing-House and the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House adopted by the Conference of the Parties in decision 14/25. It has also continued to integrate and streamline the web infrastructure, including the back-end and the common formats, to foster coherence across all three clearing-houses and other platforms hosted by the Secretariat, improve content management and ensure that information common or relevant to the various platforms can be submitted and accessed centrally to avoid duplication of effort.

B. Update on the online reporting tool

7. Pursuant to decision XII/2 B, paragraph 18(a), and decision [XIII/27](#), paragraph 2(b), the Secretariat developed and launched an online reporting tool, which is accessible through the clearing-house mechanism at <https://chm.cbd.int>. To date, 60 countries have used the online reporting tool to submit their sixth national reports, out of the total of 88 countries that have submitted their reports.

8. Since the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat has further developed the online reporting tool, taking into account the feedback from Parties that have used the tool to submit their sixth national report, and the requests contained in decision 14/27. The online reporting tool now includes the following enhancements:

(a) Ability of Governments to share draft records without a login to the SCBD system. This feature also supports link expiration and link revoking;

(b) Ability to automatically publish the sub-NR6 records (national targets and assessments) when the NR6 is published;

(c) Ability to perform “soft saves” of drafts: the system saves a copy of the draft every 10 minutes in the background when in “edit” mode. This feature helps in recovering information lost during editing. The draft copies are deleted once the record is published;

(d) Ability of users to see information in all languages submitted in a same view. This same feature can be used to generate portable document format (PDF) files for all languages together or separately;

(e) An integrated, easy-to-use PDF viewer, including an option to see thumbnails of pages, and a “find” feature, among other things;

(f) Options to generate PDFs from draft records;

(g) A new optional section I for countries that have national targets but wish to report against Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

C. Update on interoperability

9. Pursuant to decision XII/2 B, paragraphs 18(b) and 18(c), the Executive Secretary has continued to develop and implement an application programming interface (API) to enable interoperability with national clearing-house mechanisms and with external databases and systems of relevant partners. In particular, interoperability has been maintained with InforMEA to allow relevant information on the Convention on Biological Diversity to be globally searchable on the InforMEA website (www.informea.org). However, there has been a technical issue with the decisions of the fourteenth

meeting of the Conference of the Parties not being searchable on InforMEA website owing to the changes that were introduced in the numbering of decisions. This will be corrected in June 2019.

10. Integration with national databases and systems using the clearing-house mechanism's API has also continued. For example, the European Union continues to use the API and has provided feedback and improvement suggestions that have since been approved by the Informal Advisory Committee to the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House. Additionally, India and Spain are working on integration, with the primary focus on internationally recognized certificates of compliance (IRCC).

III. UPDATE ON NATIONAL CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISMS

A. Support to national clearing-house mechanisms

11. In its decisions [X/15](#), XI/2, XII/2 B, XIII/23, the Conference of the Parties encouraged Parties to continue to take the necessary steps to establish, strengthen, and ensure the sustainability of national clearing-house mechanisms to provide effective information services to facilitate the implementation of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

12. Most recently, in decision 14/25, the Conference of the Parties invited Parties and other Governments that do not have national clearing-house mechanisms and those wishing to redesign existing ones to use the Bioland tool developed by the Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary was requested to continue to support the efforts of Parties to establish, sustain, and further develop their national clearing-house mechanisms, including through ongoing development and promotion of the Bioland tool and facilitating and organizing training, in collaboration with Parties and relevant organizations, to assist Parties in developing or strengthening their national clearing-house mechanisms.

13. The Secretariat, with advice from the Informal Advisory Committee's Subcommittee on Bioland,³ has continued to develop the Bioland tool. The first meeting of the Subcommittee was held over Skype on 13 September 2018 discussed the following items:

- (a) New and planned features of the Bioland tool, including:
 - (i) Migration to the Secretariat's infrastructure to allow scalability of the platform;
 - (ii) Introduction of additional "contributor" role based on the lessons learned from the European Portal Tool Kit (PTK) platform rollout;
 - (iii) Improvement to the user-visible configuration of complex layouts (such as home pages);
- (b) National clearing-house mechanism workflows in several countries, including Canada and Burundi, and at the level of the European Union, and potential Bioland features to support such a workflow; the discussion included the approaches to determine whether a need is best satisfied by Bioland or by an existing commercial tool, such as Dropbox, or Google Drive;
- (c) Mr. Shulman shared the positive experience of Canada with the Bioland tool;
- (d) An in-depth discussion on further building out the interoperability features of Bioland to integrate better with the Data Analysis and Reporting Tool (DART), the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) and the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House (ABS-CH) and to provide deep (country-specific) links to the resources of other partners, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species;
- (e) Future work of the Subcommittee, including:
 - (i) Testing of the Bioland platform once version 3 is close to public availability;
 - (ii) The best way for the members of the Subcommittee to see and provide feedback on ongoing Bioland development, including issues raised by Parties that already adopted Bioland.

³ The Bioland subcommittee members are: Han de Koeijer, Charles Shulman, Sheila Vergara, Slavisa Popovic, Hemamali Herath and Jerry Harrison.

14. Version 3 of the Bioland tool has been completed and migrated to the CBD infrastructure.⁴ It is currently undergoing final testing by a few selected Parties and the Bioland Subcommittee. It is expected to be fully available by the time the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism meets. The features included in the new release are the following:

- (a) Update to the latest version of Drupal and extension modules with improved security, multilingual coverage, and improved administration features;
- (b) Usability clean-up on multiple content types, focusing on a more natural sequence of the fields and hiding/disabling the fields that were found to be not useful;
- (c) Usability clean-up of administration interface, including drop-down administration menus;
- (d) Introduction of the “Contributor” role and associated content creation/approval workflow;
- (e) Improved documentation, including the start of the online manual and contextual manual links;
- (f) Migration of complex-layout interface to a new engine (Layout Builder) that significantly improved user experience;
- (g) Significant internal improvements to allow for easier rollout and management of multiple Bioland instances;
- (h) Internal improvements to support interoperability features planned for post-v3 development;
- (i) More than 30 other technical features, bug fixes and improvements.

15. The Secretariat has also continued to support a number of countries, including Canada, France and the Netherlands, in migrating their existing national clearing-house mechanism websites into Bioland or in using the tool to develop new websites. For example, Canada has been supported, and its clearing-house mechanism is now fully running on Bioland. In the course of 2019, the Secretariat will continue to provide technical support for the migration of a number of national clearing-house mechanisms from the European Portal Tool Kit (PTK) to the new Bioland tool and provide training, in collaboration with Parties and relevant organizations.

16. With support from Han de Koeijer (Belgium), the Secretariat conducted a training workshop on the national clearing-house mechanism in Riyadh from 14 to 18 April 2019. It was attended by 18 participants from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member States (Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia) and one participant from France. The workshop had several practical sessions during which participants tested the latest version of the Bioland tool and provided feedback on its usability and other issues related to the Arabic content and implementation of the user interface. The agenda, presentations and report of the workshop are available online.⁵

17. Over the next few months, the Secretariat plans to focus on the following:

- (a) Finalizing, deploying and maintaining version 3 of the Bioland tool on the CBD infrastructure;
- (b) Promoting the use the Bioland tool and supporting several Parties in the development or improvement of their national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (c) Further developing the online manual on the Bioland tool;
- (d) Developing and making available e-learning modules to support the adoption of the Bioland tool;
- (e) Organizing and delivering training workshops on the Bioland tool (subject to availability of funding);

⁴ The latest version can be visualized at <https://demo.chm-cbd.net/>

⁵ See <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/CHMWS-2019-01>

(f) Managing the national clearing-house mechanism helpdesk to provide countries and stakeholders with information and advice upon request.

B. Award for national clearing-house mechanisms

18. In decision XII/2 B, paragraph 15, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to propose and manage, in collaboration with the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism, a process to grant, at the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth meetings of the Conference of the Parties an award to the Parties that made the most significant progress in the establishment or further development of their national clearing-house mechanisms.

19. The second round of clearing-house mechanism awards took place during the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, on 25 November 2018. In the lead-up to the award, the Secretariat, through Notification 2018-010, invited Parties to complete a questionnaire about the status of their national clearing-house mechanisms as well as the plans to improve them; a total of 31 submissions were received. A jury, which met in Cambridge, United Kingdom, on 27 and 28 September 2018, carefully reviewed all the applications and selected the following recipients on the basis of the [assessment criteria](#) developed during the first round:

(a) Existing national clearing-house mechanism:

- Burundi - Gold Award
- Colombia - Silver Award
- Morocco - Bronze Award

(b) New national clearing-house mechanism:

- Indonesia - Gold Award
- Sri Lanka - Silver Award
- Guinea-Bissau - Bronze Award

(c) In addition, certificates of achievement were presented to Canada, Guatemala, Honduras and Malaysia.

20. At the end of the process, the Secretariat, on the advice of the Chair of the Informal Advisory Committee, contacted the jury members to solicit their views about the process. In response, the jury members provided the following main comments and advice:

(a) In view of the anticipated adoption and use of the Bioland tool by many Parties to host their national clearing-house mechanisms, the criteria for assessing national clearing-house mechanisms and determining the award recipients should be reviewed;

(b) The two days allotted to the jury to conclude the evaluation process was barely sufficient. If a larger number of Parties apply for an award for the final round, more time may be required;

(c) Consider more “yes/no” type of questions to enable an initial scoring by the Secretariat of the entries prior to the jury meeting.

21. Other specific comments provided by the jury members are contained in annex I.

IV. COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS ON OTHER RELEVANT INITIATIVES

22. The Secretariat continued its active participation in the InforMEA project, ensuring the correct harvesting of CBD data by the InforMEA systems. The Secretariat was also represented at the ninth meeting of the Steering Committee of the Multilateral Environmental Agreement Information and Knowledge Management (MEA-IKM) Initiative, held in Montreux, Switzerland, from 5 to 8 June 2018 and took part in various InforMEA Working Group meetings. A representative of the Secretariat is scheduled to attend the tenth Steering Committee meeting in Montreux from 11 to 14 June 2019.

23. The Secretariat has also been following progress of the DART project though there has been limited participation in the implementation of the project itself. The Secretariat has participated in the

project's design and prototype phases, ensuring that DART complies with the requirements for interoperability with Bioland and other similar external systems. A further update on the DART project will be provided orally following the tenth meeting of the MEA-IKM Steering Committee.

24. In February 2019, the Secretariat joined a new collaborative project with Belgium, France and eight French-speaking African countries — Benin, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger and Togo — as well as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) to use the CBD clearing-house mechanism infrastructure and network to strengthen biodiversity data acquisition and data sharing. The project is aimed at supporting participating countries in using the Bioland tool to develop a platform for the national clearing-house mechanism (in a worldwide harmonized format) and connect with the GBIF Integrated Publishing Toolkit (IPT) to strengthen biodiversity data acquisition and data sharing using the clearing-house mechanism infrastructure and network. It will be implemented from 1 June 2019 to 31 May 2020.

V. CONCLUSION

25. The present report has provided an overview of the progress made in the implementation of the web strategy for the Convention and its Protocols as well as updates on the implementation of the online reporting tool, interoperability with national clearing-house mechanisms and with external databases and systems of relevant partners and support for national clearing-house mechanisms.

26. With regard to implementation of the web strategy, the design of the homepage and several subpages of the new CBD website has been completed, and hosting solutions for the website are being finalized, after which migration of content from the current website to the new website will start. The Secretariat is also implementing the joint modalities of operation for the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, the Biosafety Clearing-House and the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its last meeting. It has also continued to integrate and streamline the new web infrastructure to foster coherence across all clearing-houses and other platforms hosted by the Secretariat, improve content management and ensure that information common or relevant to the various platforms can be submitted and accessed centrally to avoid duplication of effort.

27. Several countries have used the online reporting tool to submit their sixth national report, and several improvements have been made to the tool, taking into account the feedback from Parties and the requests contained in decision 14/27.

28. The Secretariat also continues to implement the API to enable interoperability with national clearing-house mechanisms and with external databases and systems of relevant partners, including interoperability with InforMEA to allow relevant information on the Convention on Biological Diversity to be globally searchable on the InforMEA website (www.informea.org).

29. With regard to the national clearing-houses, the Bioland tool, designed to facilitate the establishment and development of national clearing-house mechanisms, has been upgraded. Additionally, the Secretariat has continued to support a number of countries, including Canada, France and the Netherlands, in migrating their existing national clearing-house mechanism websites to Bioland or using the tool to develop new websites.

30. Finally, a number of fruitful collaborations are ongoing with various information and knowledge management initiatives, including InforMEA and the latest collaborative project with Belgium, France and eight French-speaking African countries as well as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) to use the CBD clearing-house mechanism infrastructure and network to strengthen biodiversity data acquisition and data sharing.

31. The next steps will build upon the above results to make further progress towards the achievement of the mission, goals and objective of the clearing-house mechanism and the web strategy. The Secretariat will place emphasis on the following priority tasks:

- (a) Finalization and launch of the new CBD website;
- (b) Further design, development and implementation of the common clearing-house platform;

- (c) Completion of the migration of the Biosafety Clearing-House to the common clearing-house platform;
- (d) Integrate information available on the CBD website (www.cbd.int), ABS-CH and the BCH into the Bioland tool through the use of the APIs;
- (e) Further design and development of a unified search solution;
- (f) Deployment and maintenance of Version 3 of the Bioland tool on the CBD infrastructure;
- (g) Promotion of the Bioland tool and provision of technical support to enable Parties to adopt and use the tool to develop or improve their national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (h) Development and provision of technical training support to facilitate the adoption and use of the Bioland tool, including further development of the online manual on the Bioland tool, design and delivery of e-learning modules on the Bioland tool, organization of training workshops on the Bioland tool (subject to availability of funding), and provision of helpdesk services on national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (i) Launch of the process for the third round of clearing-house mechanism awards;
- (j) Enhancement of collaboration and interoperability with various information and knowledge management initiatives.

Annex

DETAILED FEEDBACK ON THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM AWARDS PROCESS

Responses to the questions provided by jury members are provided below:

1. Are the criteria sufficient? Why or why not? If not, what changes do you suggest?
 - I would say they are sufficient. I would strongly advocate not to include more criteria. I would also suggest that we are transparent in the notification about the number of points (or at least the nominal split) awarded to each category so that applicants are aware of how much emphasis is placed and where. This would also avoid the need for the jury to then decide for itself.
2. Did you feel you had sufficient time and support to consider the applications effectively and fairly?
 - Yes, we did have sufficient time. The approach was significantly improved from the first round, offering jury members time to collectively agree on the basic facts.
 - Not quite, I had to enlist the assistance of other staff in the office to consider the applications on time but the interaction with other members of the jury highlighted the key areas for evaluation and provided the necessary cadence by which to conduct the evaluation.
3. Are there any recommendations you wish to make with regard to the process for the third and final round?
 - Convening the jury in person was massively beneficial and I would recommend this approach again. The support from the Secretariat was wonderful, and ensuring that all documentation from each application is well organized and that blank templates of the scoring sheet are available ensures that the jury can focus on its assessment.
4. Do you have any other comments?

A section in the questionnaire on:

 - Challenges in the establishment, maintenance, population and updating of the national clearing-house mechanism.
 - What the Parties expect their national clearing-house mechanism to be (in terms of improving their capacity for compliance with the agreements at the meeting of the Conference of the Parties, reporting requirements, etc.).

- It would be good to have the Bioland in an easier-to-use (less need for intervention and assistance from IT personnel) and easy-to-update platform and for Bioland to better support national-level species and protected areas databases.

Content

Biodiversity in the country – I would have preferred that this would raise the quality of information if the criteria was for “organized” information on biodiversity in the country and more points if the information was in a structured database and more if the database was globally interoperable.

Online services

- The online database is related to my comment in Content: 1 above.
- Maps should be key – not one of the options under “modern services”.

Layout

- Second bullet, suggestion: “space allocation” after “Design”.
- Third bullet: Can we add “ease of” before the word “navigation”?

Content management

Mention of a “contributor network” (note: the establishment of a national clearing-house mechanism includes the establishment of a community of contributors, thus a contributor network).
