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CONSULTATION WORKSHOP OF
BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS
ON THE POST-2020 GLOBAL
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NATIONAL REPORTING TO THE BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS AND THE RIO CONVENTIONS

Note by the Executive Secretary

INTRODUCTION

1. The present information document is submitted to the Consultation Workshop of Biodiversity-related Conventions on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, to provide context and background information on national reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio conventions, that may be relevant to the discussions.
2. Preparing separate reports on implementation of different, but related, international treaties may represent a burden on countries, particularly on countries with limited capacities and resources. This also results in possible duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in terms of the amount of time spent on reporting activities and associated costs, among other factors. Activities to address the harmonization of environmental reporting were initiated in 1998 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in collaboration with the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions, which commissioned the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) to undertake a [Feasibility Study for a Harmonised Information Management Infrastructure for Biodiversity-related Treaties](#). Relatedly, four pilot studies were carried out in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles. In 2002, at its sixth meeting, the Conference of the Parties welcomed the work of UNEP on the harmonization of environmental reporting and encouraged its continuation. Initiatives and activities have been ongoing since this time, albeit to varying degrees, and have been led primarily by UNEP-WCMC.
3. More recently, the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting, in paragraph 9 of decision [XIII/27](#), requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio conventions, and UNEP-WCMC, to explore options for enhancing synergy on national reporting among these conventions and to report to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation at its second meeting (see [CBD/SBI/2/12](#)). Additionally, in [decision XIII/24](#), the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to establish an informal advisory group on synergies to, inter alia, facilitate a process related to national reporting to the various biodiversity-related conventions, and report to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation at its second meeting (see [CBD/SBI/2/INF/14](#)).
4. Most recently, the Conference of the Parties considered this matter at its fourteenth meeting on the basis of [SBI recommendation 2/11](#) and, in paragraph 3(e) of [decision 14/27](#), requested the Executive Secretary to identify, in consultation with related convention secretariats, the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions and the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions and, on the basis of suggestions from the informal advisory group on synergies among the biodiversity-related conventions, concrete actions to advance synergies on reporting, inter alia, through: (a) common indicators, where appropriate; (b) reporting modules on shared issues; (c) interoperability of information management and reporting systems; (d) other options for increasing synergies in national reporting among the

biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio conventions; and assess the financial implications of such actions, and to report to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation at its third meeting. In addition, in section D of the annex to [decision 14/34](#), the Conference of the Parties requested that documentation prepared for the process for the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework provide a basis for discussing, inter alia, “means of enhancing coherence and cooperation among the biodiversity-related conventions, including options for enhancing synergies on national reporting among the biodiversity-related conventions, the Rio conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals”.

5. For ease of reference, all documentation referenced in this information document, in addition to other related information, has been consolidated on the CBD National Reports Portal at: <https://www.cbd.int/reports/harmonization.shtml>.

6. Section I below presents an overview of the reporting systems/mechanisms of the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio conventions. In section II, a brief analysis is made of the similarities and differences of these reporting systems/mechanisms. Section III captures key work undertaken so far in increasing synergies in reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio Conventions.

I. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL REPORTING SYSTEMS/MECHANISMS UNDER THE BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS AND THE RIO CONVENTIONS

7. Parties to the biodiversity-related conventions and Rio conventions are required to report on measures or actions taken to implement these conventions. As highlighted in the table below, there are significant differences among the main reporting requirements of these conventions which present important obstacles and challenges that must be overcome to advance work in this area. Other factors contributing to the complexity of the issue are expounded in the next sections.

Main reporting requirements of the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio conventions

MEA	How often?	Report style?	Types of information requested
CBD	4 years	Narrative and tick boxes	Measures to implement Convention and NBSAP, progress in the implementation of its Strategic Plan 2011-2020, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and contribution to SDGs
CMS	3 years	Narrative and tick boxes	Trends in conservation status of listed species, actions to implement convention
CITES (Annual Report (trade data))	Annual	Data table	Details of international trade in listed species
CITES (Biennial Report)	2 years	Mostly tick boxes with some narrative	Actions to implement convention, details of how convention is implemented (i.e. measures for compliance and enforcement and legislative and regulatory measures)

MEA	How often?	Report style?	Types of information requested
Ramsar Convention (National Reports)	3 years (same periodicity as COPs)	Mostly tick boxes	Actions to implement convention and its Strategic Plan
WHC (state of conservation reporting (reactive monitoring))	On an ad hoc basis (in case of specific threats to the site)	Narrative	Status and trends of biodiversity at listed sites, actions to implement convention at those sites
WHC (Periodic Reporting)	6 years	Mostly tick boxes with some narrative	Status and trends of biodiversity at listed sites, actions to implement convention at those sites
ITPGRFA	5 years	Narrative and tick boxes	Details of implementation of and legislation for the convention
IPPC (National Reporting Obligations (NROs))	Annual	Short narrative answers, lists	<p>Details of the minimum amount of official phytosanitary information available that can be used to ensure safe trade, safeguard food security and protect the environment from plant pests.</p> <p>(There are numerous National Reporting Obligations or “NROs” and, since 2014, each year has been dedicated to reporting on a different NRO.)</p>
IWC (Scientific Progress Reports)	Annual	Data table	Scientific information available with respect to whales and whaling, including the results of research.

MEA	How often?	Report style?	Types of information requested
UNFCCC (National Communications and Biennial Update Reports)	<p>Non-Annex I Parties (mostly comprising developing countries) are required to submit their first National Communication (NC) within three years of entering the Convention, and every four years thereafter; and submit biennial update reports (BURs) every two years.</p> <p>Annex I Parties, including those that are also Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, shall submit their National Communications (NCs) to the secretariat every four years; and submit biennial update reports (BURs) every two years.</p>	<p>Narrative, data table</p>	<p>Details on national GHG inventories and actions taken to address climate change.</p> <p>Non-Annex I Parties are encouraged to also provide information on their national circumstances, and specific needs and concerns arising from climate change.</p>
UNCCD (National Reports)	<p>Four years</p>	<p>Data table, tick boxes, short narrative answers</p>	<p>Since 2018, details on implementation of the 2018-2030 Strategic Framework.</p>

Source: This table is updated from table 4 in the [Sourcebook of Opportunities for Enhancing Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions at National and Regional Levels](#) (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015).

II. BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONG THE REPORTING SYSTEMS UNDER THESE CONVENTIONS

8. Since activities to harmonize environmental reporting were initiated in 1998, a number of pilot projects have been carried out and numerous reports produced. For the purposes of discussion on the similarities and differences among the reporting systems, the document [“Promoting synergies within the cluster of biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements”](#), prepared by UNEP-WCMC in 2012, may be particularly useful. Other potentially useful documents are highlighted in section III. As previously indicated, all documents have been consolidated at: <https://www.cbd.int/reports/harmonization.shtml>.

9. Chapter 6 of the above document summarizes key observations on national reporting under the then six biodiversity-related conventions. Details on the various approaches that had been tested to date, or were currently being tested, to streamline or harmonize national reporting are also provided. Through these

initiatives, key global obstacles were identified and included the fact that respective reporting systems have evolved over time and independently from one another, different reporting cycles and terminology were being used, as well as the fact that not all countries were Parties to all of the conventions in question and therefore might not be willing to support harmonization efforts. Key national obstacles identified were difficulties in obtaining required data and information, lack of coordination and cooperation among national focal points and, in the case of developing countries, insufficient human, financial and technical capacities and resources to adequately address data and information management issues, as well as the lack of coordination at the institutional level.

10. The testing of various approaches also identified general, national and global preconditions for implementing a joint reporting system. General preconditions stress that Parties need to perceive national reporting, not solely as a standalone activity, but also as a means through which information related to implementation of the conventions can be managed, and activities planned and prioritized, as well as a way to share information and experiences. As the national level, it was determined that establishment of regular cooperation among the national focal points to the conventions, central biodiversity databases or clearing-house mechanisms, as well as broad engagement of stakeholders (including indigenous peoples and local communities and the private sector) in activities related to data and information management, were essential. At the global level, it is important that the conventions clearly identify the types of information required from Parties. In addition, they could consider sharing information needs with other conventions to avoid overlapping information requests, and also consider making information available electronically, in a form that is easily accessible by the other conventions. Other global preconditions include the need to harmonize terminology and establish joint information management systems. Examples that could be explored in the latter regard are: the forest reporting portal established by the Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests; the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (InforMEA); and the harmonized reporting system developed by the Human Rights Treaty System, whereby a joint core report is accompanied by the respective convention reports.

11. Chapter 6 also identifies options for further synergies in reporting, including the development of indicators for harmonized reporting, the establishment of a technical cross-convention working group on harmonized reporting, and improved collaboration with the biodiversity-related conventions, at the national level, for implementing the NBSAP process, as called for under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.

12. A detailed study undertaken in 2016 by UNEP-WCMC and NatureConsult with the support of Switzerland entitled “Elements for a modular reporting against the Aichi Biodiversity Targets” ([UNEP/CBD/COP/13/INF/24](#)) found that a modular approach to reporting could foster synergies at the national, regional and global levels by highlighting interlinkages between different processes, taking advantage of similarities and overlaps in the information submitted through separate reporting processes, and by organizing the activities and information required into a series of modules of relevance to several processes, so as to avoid having to reproduce the same information in several reports. Following a detailed review of the reporting processes and guidelines/formats of all the biodiversity-related conventions, the study noted that national reports of all the biodiversity-related conventions will contribute information to assessment of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. In addition, the study noted that applying a modular reporting approach could be useful when developing a post-2020 global framework for biodiversity and reporting on biodiversity-related parts of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

III. KEY WORK UNDERTAKEN IN RELATION TO HARMONIZING REPORTING AND INCREASING SYNERGIES IN REPORTING AMONG THE BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS AND THE RIO CONVENTIONS

13. Various United Nations bodies, regional bodies and national governments have been engaged to a greater or lesser extent in activities to streamline or harmonize national reports over the last two decades.

In 2012, the [progress report on the contribution of the United Nations system to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020](#), prepared by the United Nations Environment Management Group, recognized the need to advance work on joint implementation reporting. The Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions and the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions have consistently drawn attention to the need to strengthen efforts in this area. In addition, in 2017, the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions at its twelfth meeting noted the role the Sustainable Development Goals could play in facilitating reporting, and reducing the reporting burden, by necessitating the alignment of national plans (and their cross-referencing in plans).

14. In 2016, UNEP released a report entitled [“Piloting Integrated Processes and Approaches to Facilitate National Reporting to Rio Conventions \(FNR_Rio\)”](#). The report presents conclusions on a pilot project, carried out at the request of the Secretariat of the Global Environment Facility and executed by UNEP-WCMC, which tested nationally driven processes and approaches for harmonizing reporting, with particular attention given to data collection and information management to support national planning and decision-making. Six countries (Liberia, Eritrea, Mauritius, Afghanistan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Palau) participated in this pilot project and the secretariats of the Rio conventions were also involved.

15. Possible options for enhancing synergy on national reporting among the biodiversity-related conventions and the Rio conventions are further explored in section III of the note by the Executive Secretary ([SBI/2/12](#)) for the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation. They include: common sets of indicators, where appropriate; common reporting modules on shared issues; the interoperability of information management and reporting systems; and harmonization of tools for national reporting. In section IV, it is noted that, while the implementation of various options could reduce resource requirements, common reporting deadlines will call for greater financial and technical investment from the Global Environment Facility and the implementing agencies during the reporting period, rather than over staggered periods, as is currently the case.

16. [Regional initiatives](#) have also been carried out by Australia (in collaboration with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme), the Caribbean Community and the European Environment Agency/-Belgian Clearing-House Mechanism, including the development and pilot use of the consolidated reporting frameworks by countries in relevant regions for reporting to different conventions. Moreover, in 2016, the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment commissioned a [study on elements for a modular reporting against the Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#).

17. The Data and Reporting Tool (DART) being developed as part of the [InforMEA](#) Initiative, is aimed at create collective national working spaces that will help organize, share and maintain documentation in the context of national reports. The use of the same working space by several reporters is expected to foster communication and cooperation at the national level and to facilitate the reuse of information in the spirit of “enter once, reuse several times”. Integrating national biodiversity information in one place may also be of value in the context of analysing information related to multilateral environmental agreements against the Sustainable Development Goals and ultimately demonstrating the contribution of multilateral environmental agreements towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As DART is hosted on InforMEA, it will draw on the InforMEA infrastructure, which is supported by many participating multilateral environmental agreements and institutions, and its approach to connecting data sources.
