



Convention on Biological Diversity

Distr.
GENERAL

CBD/ABS/CH-IAC/2017/1/2
29 September 2017

ENGLISH ONLY

INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING CLEARING-HOUSE

Third meeting

Montreal, Canada, 14-16 November 2017

Items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the provisional agenda*

REPORT ON PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING CLEARING-HOUSE

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Article 14 of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization establishes an Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House as part of the clearing-house mechanism under Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
2. At its first meeting the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol established an informal advisory committee to assist the Executive Secretary with the implementation of the ABS Clearing-House and to provide technical guidance with respect to the resolution of technical and practical issues arising from the ongoing development of the ABS Clearing-House.
3. At its second meeting the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol expressed appreciation for the work done and decided that the Informal Advisory Committee would continue its work and hold at least one meeting during this intersessional period, as well as informal online discussions as needed, and report on the outcomes of its work to the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its third meeting (decision NP-2/2, para. 7).
4. Pursuant to the above decision, a meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee will be held in Montreal, Canada, from 14 to 16 November 2017.
5. Section II of the present document provides an overview of progress made in the implementation and administration of the ABS Clearing-House with regard to a number of issues. Section III provides information on the internationally recognized certificates of compliance (IRCCs) made available in the ABS Clearing-House. Section IV proposes a way forward regarding joint modalities of operation to enhance integration of the ABS Clearing-House as part of the clearing-house mechanism. Section V addresses the elements and sources of information for reviewing the implementation and operation of the ABS Clearing-House as part of the first assessment and review of the effectiveness of the Protocol. Finally, section VI examines priority activities for future implementation and administration of the ABS Clearing-House.

* CBD/ABS/CH-IAC/2017/1/1.

II. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING CLEARING-HOUSE

6. This section takes stock of progress made by the Secretariat of the Convention in the implementation and administration of the ABS Clearing-House since the report on progress presented to the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/3).

7. Work in this regard has been carried out on the basis of (a) the indicative list of goals and priorities for future development, contained in CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/INF/3 and agreed to by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in decision NP-2/2, paragraphs 2 and 3; (b) the modalities of operation; (c) feedback received, in particular that of Parties, and; (d) technical guidance provided by the Informal Advisory Committee to the ABS Clearing-House.

8. The following provides an overview of progress regarding the implementation and administration of the ABS Clearing-House based on the agreed indicative list of goals and priorities.

A. Population and increased use of the ABS Clearing-House (Goal 1)

9. The importance of increasing the relevant content and use of the ABS Clearing-House was stressed by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in decision NP-2/2, paragraph 2. Numerous decisions adopted at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol also urge Parties to make their national information available in accordance with the Protocol.¹ These decisions underscore the crucial relationship between Parties' information-sharing obligations through the ABS Clearing-House and the successful implementation of the Protocol. They also highlight the need for Parties to be aware of the role of the ABS Clearing-House and to have the capacity to use and populate it with the required information.

10. In order to increase engagement with the ABS Clearing-House, the Secretariat has been carrying out a number of capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.

1. Outreach and engagement

Proactive outreach and engagement campaign

11. The outreach and engagement campaign provides cost effective, proactive, personalized (by email and phone) and consistent follow-up to support Parties in understanding and complying with their information-sharing obligations under Article 14 of the Protocol. The outreach conducted is tailored to specific needs of countries and current progress in the implementation of the Protocol. Part of the goal of this campaign is to build a relationship and rapport with ABS national focal points (NFP) and publishing authorities (PAs) and to encourage a sense of active responsiveness and participation from NFPs.

12. In addition, the campaign provides another avenue to gather feedback and other information from users on their experience with the ABS Clearing-House and, more generally, in implementing the Protocol. This campaign has been received well by the Parties contacted and has been a cost-effective way of increasing engagement and awareness and building capacity for the ABS Clearing-House.

13. Between 1 January 2017 and 14 September 2017, a total of 28,316 users visited the ABS Clearing-House, out of which 11,091 were new users (36.86 per cent). Approximately 70 per cent of all visits to the ABS Clearing-House come from the following 10 countries: Japan; France; Canada; Germany; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Republic of Korea; United States of America; Netherlands; Belgium; and Switzerland.

14. As of 14 September 2017, the Executive Secretary had received 91 designations of publishing authorities, 77 of which came from Parties to the Protocol.

¹ Decisions NP-2/1, NP-2/2, NP-2/3, NP-2/4, NP-2/8, NP-2/9, NP-2/10 and COP-XIII/1.

15. As of 14 September 2017, a total of 753 records had been published in the ABS Clearing-House by countries and other users, including 570 national records (450 from Parties and 120 from non-Parties) and 183 reference records.

Table 1. Number of national records published and number of Parties to the Nagoya Protocol and other Governments that have published national records in the ABS Clearing-House (as of 14 September 2017)

<i>Type of information</i>	<i>Number of records published</i>	<i>Number of Parties to the Protocol that published records</i>	<i>Number of non-Parties that published records</i>
Competent national authorities	57	38	5
ABS measures	106	33	2
Checkpoints	34	16	0
Permits or their equivalent constituting an internationally recognized certificate of compliance	93	6	0
Checkpoint communiqués	0	0	0
National websites or databases	28	22	2

16. In addition, 170 countries (97 from Parties and 73 from non-Parties) have designated a national focal point on ABS, and the information is available on the ABS Clearing-House.

17. As of 14 September 2017, 43 per cent of Parties had published national information (in addition to ABS national focal point information) in the ABS Clearing-House.

18. Of the 183 reference records available in the ABS Clearing-House: 110 are Virtual Library records (resources, literature, articles, capacity-building materials and others); 46 records are capacity-building initiatives; 25 records are included under the category “model contractual clauses, codes of conduct, guidelines, best practices and/or standards”; and two records are included under the category “community protocols and procedures and customary laws”.

On-demand technical support

19. The ABS Clearing-House help desk has been set up to provide immediate technical support to users of the ABS Clearing-House as they use the website. The live chat application is accessed through the question mark icon available on the lower right corner of every page on the ABS Clearing-House website. When the icon is clicked, users are prompted to chat with a real person based at the Secretariat who can help answer questions and provide technical assistance for the ABS Clearing-House or Nagoya Protocol. Each question is recorded and can be added to a knowledge base of frequently asked questions which are made available on the ABS Clearing-House and also used to improve other awareness-raising and capacity-building guidance material.

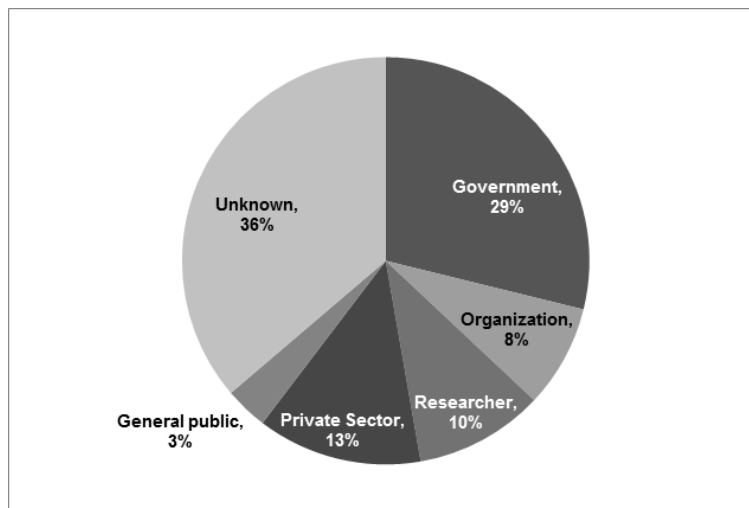
20. The number of users of the live chat has increased steadily over the last year, and this trend is expected to continue. A total of 256 questions were received between May 2016 and September 2017 through the ABS-CH helpdesk, 178 of them since the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. The feedback received on this service has been very positive. The system has also been adopted for other parts of the CBD website and the clearing-house mechanism.

21. The live chat has become a significant source of information for enhancing understanding of ABS Clearing House users and their information needs. Users are unknown unless they provide an email at a domain that indicates their profession or identify themselves during the conversation. However, of the

users who do identify themselves, 29 per cent of the questions come from Government representatives, 13 per cent from the private sector and 10 per cent from researchers and academia.

22. Regarding the type of questions received, 29 per cent are requests for general information,² 23 per cent are requests for technical assistance,³ 20 per cent relate to how to find information about a specific country,⁴ 15 per cent are general questions related access to genetic resources or associated traditional knowledge,⁵ 11 per cent of questions are about the application of the Protocol,⁶ and 2 per cent are about monitoring the utilization of genetic resources.⁷

Figure 1. Types of users of the ABS-CH Helpdesk (May 2016 to September 2017)



² Questions about finding information on the ABS-CH or website, about the ABS Clearing-House, and others (for example, “where can I find ABS case studies?”).

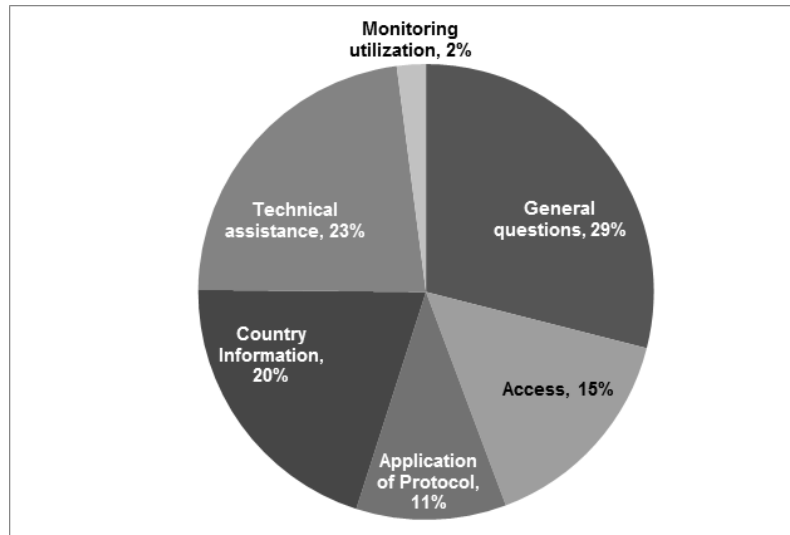
³ This includes issues related to bugs or technical errors, browser compatibility and questions on how to perform certain actions in the ABS Clearing-House (for example, “how can I add a contact to an existing format?” or “I cannot log in to my account”).

⁴ For example, “How can I obtain PIC and MAT from a country?”

⁵ For example, “What do I need to do for accessing a genetic resource?”

⁶ Questions on how the Nagoya Protocol applies to a specific case, what the Protocol provides, or issues related to obligations of Parties to the Protocol (for example, “Does the Nagoya Protocol apply to cultivated plants?” or “do all Parties to the Nagoya Protocol have legislation in place?”).

⁷ Questions related to the internationally recognized certificate of compliance (IRCC), the checkpoint communiqué, and the system for monitoring the utilization of genetic resources (for example, “How can I obtain an IRCC?”).

Figure 2. Types of queries received (May 2016 - September 2017)

Dissemination of capacity-building resources for the use of the ABS Clearing-House

23. Capacity-building material for the ABS Clearing-House is disseminated through ABS Clearing-house capacity-building activities whenever possible. Currently, statistics such as the number of views or downloads of this capacity-building material are not available. However, progress is being made to improve the tracking of such information, including viewed records and downloaded attachments, on the ABS Clearing-House.

2. Capacity-building

ABS Clearing-House e-learning module

24. Thanks to the financial support of the Japan Biodiversity Fund this e-learning module provides a comprehensive overview of the important concepts and functionalities related to the ABS Clearing-House to help understand its central role in the implementation of the Protocol. It will be publicly available on the Secretariat's Biodiversity E-Learning Platform (<https://scbd.unssc.org/>) and as a reference record on the ABS Clearing-House. This e-learning course has been designed to present the key elements of particular importance to government users. It is available for use by all and can be particularly useful to governments and capacity-building partners in building capacity regarding the functionalities of the ABS Clearing-House. The e-learning course will be made available in the six official languages of the United Nations thanks to the financial support of Japan through the Japan Biodiversity Fund.

Step-by-step guides

25. These guides present each of the keys steps to follow in order to publish each information type on the ABS Clearing-House. The guides also cover other important functionalities, such as using the search and designating PAs and NAUs. These guides are available for download in portable document format (PDF) (see <https://absch.cbd.int/help/guides>). These guides will also be available online as an interactive tour. Both the online and PDF versions will be translated into all six languages of the United Nations thanks to the financial support of the Japan Biodiversity Fund.

On-demand capacity-building training

26. The Secretariat of the Convention has provided a number of on-demand capacity-building trainings for the use of the ABS Clearing-House. In general, these trainings are provided remotely (via webinar or Skype). In addition, and in order to maximize impact while minimizing costs, the Japan Biodiversity Fund is supporting the inclusion of an ABS Clearing-House component in relevant global and regional events, meetings or workshops. All trainings are used as an opportunity to disseminate the

materials developed. Since the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, the Secretariat has participated in four awareness-raising activities (one face to face and three remotely) and one face-to face capacity-building training.

Capacity-building common formats and display of capacity-building information

27. The Secretariat has developed common formats for capacity-building needs and opportunities and is in the process of developing a capacity-building portal,⁸ to be launched by June 2018. This portal will provide an online searchable database for capacity-building and technical and scientific cooperation initiatives, resources and opportunities (including capacity-building and technical support providers) and facilitate access to all capacity-building information submitted. Following the development of the portal, the common formats and the display of relevant information will be integrated with the ABS Clearing-House.

3. Interoperability and collaboration

28. The application programming interface (API) is a strategic component to facilitate interoperability and exchange of information with other databases and systems. Facilitating the sharing of information to avoid duplication is crucial to promote the ABS Clearing-House as the central repository of reliable ABS information. The API is a way to connect IT systems to allow Parties, other Governments and partner organizations to benefit from accurate and up-to-date ABS information, as well as reduce the additional burden and potential for confusion caused by maintaining different sets of the same information. Documentation for the API has been made available on the ABS Clearing-House (<http://absch.cbd.int/developer>). This webpage, primarily aimed at web developers, is meant to facilitate programmatic access to read and write ABS Clearing-House information from other websites or applications. The Secretariat of the Convention also has been providing technical advice to a number of Parties and partners (such as the European Union's Declare system, ITPGRFA, WFCC, and InforMEA) on the use of the API to facilitate the exchange of information with other systems.

B. Translation and functionality for operationalizing the ABSCH in the six United Nations languages (Goal 2)

29. Translation of the website has been a top priority in order to facilitate and encourage the population of information in the ABS Clearing-House by all Parties, other Governments, and partners. Unfortunately, the translation of the website has been slow due to the delays in procuring the necessary software. However, since setting up the required software, translation of the website into all six official languages of the United Nations has continued in a stepwise manner, as recommended by the Informal Advisory Committee at its first meeting.⁹ Translation of all the submission forms has been completed, and all remaining elements will be sent for translation by the end of the year in order to have the ABS Clearing-House fully translated by June 2018.

C. Maintain and improve functionality (Goal 3)

30. Since the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, the bulk of the development work has been the maintenance of the current functionalities based on feedback received from users of the website. This work includes fixing bugs and errors, as well as implementing minor improvements to the existing functionalities, in particular on issues related to browser compatibility and optimization.

⁸ See Conference of the Parties decision XII/2 B, paras. 8(f) and 9(b).

⁹ See UNEP/CBD/ABS/CH-IAC/2015/1/3, para. 66.

1. *General website maintenance, improving existing functions and fixing bugs and optimizing the website and browser compatibility*

31. Although the Secretariat carries out automated and manual testing before each new release of the website, in both a development and a staging¹⁰ environment, bugs and errors are often inevitable due to the complexity of the system. Therefore, a number of new internal maintenance tools for administrators of the website have been created to ensure that errors encountered by users are reported and are addressed by developers. These tools are described below.

Client-side error logging tool

32. The ABS Clearing-House's client-side error logging tool alerts the Secretariat's information technology team automatically when website errors (including the related information that can help when fixing the issue, such as browser version) occur on the client's browser. In the past, the only way to know about these errors was if the user reported them, which was normally done by email. However, in many cases, bugs reported were difficult to recreate because the user reporting the error had failed to provide key information needed to understand and resolve the issue, such as the URL of the page where the error occurred, and the version of the browser being used. This tool helps address a number of issues to ensure that the website minimizes errors, is working properly for users and is compatible with the maximum number of browsers and systems.

Workflow manager

33. The workflow manager was developed for administrators (SCBD) to view all requests from the NAUs to the PAs. This is to help deal with errors with the workflow and permits tracking of the number of and frequency of the requests to PAs and to send manual and/or automatic reminders to PAs to encourage them to address requests as soon as possible.

Report generator tool

34. In order to help understanding the impact of the outreach campaign and the rate of population and use of the ABS Clearing-House, a simple reporting tool has been set up to track the frequency of records published. This tool allows the Secretariat of the Convention to filter by date, country, Party status and record types and understand trends in publication over time.

2. *Implementation of new features*

35. The following features have been implemented in accordance with feedback from previous meetings of the Informal Advisory Committee.

Online reporting on Aichi Target 16 (sixth national report)

36. In order to enhance integration and reduce duplication, online reporting for the sixth national report under the Convention on Biological Diversity has been linked to the interim national report on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. When submitting a national report through the clearing-house mechanism, when countries fill out the section on their national contribution to Aichi Target 16, the system automatically checks to see if they have completed the interim national report on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. If they have completed their interim national report it can be linked to the sixth national report. If not, the country is invited to complete the interim national report, or else they can provide information on the extent of their contribution to the achievement of this Aichi Biodiversity Target. Countries can also provide links to relevant records published in the ABS Clearing-House.

¹⁰ A staging server is a type of server that is used to test a software, website or service in a production-similar environment before being set live. It is part of a staging environment or staging site, where it serves as a temporary hosting and testing server for any new software or websites.

Custom alerts and saved searches

37. Following advice of the Informal Advisory Committee at its second meeting¹¹ and as part of the stepwise improvement of the notification system, functionality has been setup to allow users of the ABS Clearing-House with a basic CBD account to subscribe to email alerts when records are published/updated. ABS Clearing-House users can setup alerts by creating a collection of search filters and saving them in the “preferences” tab in the “ABSCH Record Management” or “submit” section of the website. National users (NFP, PA, NAUs) of the ABS Clearing-House also have the option to subscribe to alerts when an IRCC is constituted indicating the user (the person or entity to whom granted PIC was granted) is from their country when this information is not confidential.

38. Saved searches use similar functionality to allow users to save complicated sets of filters for the searches they use frequently.

Printer friendly versions

39. ABS Clearing-House records are now available in a printer friendly version. This functionality can be accessed using the print button, located at the top right corner of any ABS Clearing-House record.

Export to spreadsheet

40. Following the advice of the Informal Advisory Committee,¹² functionality has also been setup to export search results and country profiles to a format that can be opened by spreadsheet applications. This functionality allows the user to download any information that is displayed in the search. The export functionality on the country profiles allows the export of all national information published by that country.

Improved update and revocation of IRCCs

41. In order to maintain transparency and traceability, IRCCs published are never deleted or removed from the ABS Clearing-House. Instead of deleting an IRCC, it can be revoked or cancelled. At its last meeting, the Informal Advisory Committee advised¹³ that the process of revoking an IRCC, by creating a new “revoked” version, was misleading and should be improved. To address this concern, the process to revoke or cancel an IRCC has been simplified and the appropriate warning messages improved. Currently, when an IRCC is revoked, the current version is indicated as revoked.

3. Interim national reports analyser

42. The interim national report analyser (available once finalized at <http://absch.cbd.int/reports>), based on the BCH report analyser, provides an interface to explore breakdown of the information submitted for each question of the interim national report on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. This tool allows users to select sections or questions of interest, compare results by region or country and visualize the number of responses and averages. The analyser will also allow the interim national report to be compared with future national reports on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol in order to gauge and visualize progress.

D. Integration with the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention (Goal 4)

1. Improvements to the shared infrastructure

43. A number of improvements have been made to the common backend infrastructure to strengthen or upgrade the software in order to optimize the systems that support the ABS Clearing-House. This includes work done on automated testing and finalizing the separate environments for development.

¹¹ UNEP/CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/INF/3, paras. 16-17.

¹³ See UNEP/CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/INF/3, para. 36.

2. *SCBD website and communications strategy*

44. Since the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and over the current biennium, the IT and knowledge management resources of the Secretariat have been dedicated to carrying out the web strategy, contained in UNEP/CBD/COP/13/14/Add.1, in order develop the new CBD website, as well as, the migration of frontend interface of the Biosafety Clearing-House to the same platform as the ABS Clearing-House. Both websites are due to be ready prior to the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

45. An integral part of the development of the new CBD website and the migration of the BCH is the improved alignment and integration of all websites and clearing-houses administered by the Secretariat including the ABS Clearing-House. Careful consideration has been given to ensure efficient use of the limited IT resources when implementing these strategies and developing/migrating the new websites.

3. *Ensure relevant CHM records are made available on the ABS Clearing-House (and vice-versa)*

46. All ABS Clearing-House information is part of the clearing-house mechanism and will be made available appropriately on the new version of the CBD website. Care has been taken to ensure that new common formats, for example on capacity-building needs and opportunities, contain the relevant fields to enable information relevant to ABS to be displayed on the ABS Clearing-House.

4. *Development of the joint modalities of operation*

47. For information on the development of the joint modalities, see section IV.

48. The Informal Advisory Committee will be invited to provide general feedback on the progress made in the implementation of the ABS Clearing-House as addressed in subsections A to D above and to provide guidance in particular with respect to the interim national report analyser (para. 41 above).

III. **TECHNICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE AND CHECKPOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

49. In decision NP-2/2, paragraph 2, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol took note of the progress made on issues related to the internationally recognized certificate of compliance (IRCC) and the checkpoint communiqué, and recognized the need for additional experience regarding how the IRCC and the checkpoint communiqué work in a variety of circumstances, including transboundary or shared genetic resources, traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources, and other issues related to the monitoring of the utilization of genetic resources.

50. There is still very limited experience in using the IRCC. As of 14 September 2017, 93 IRCCs had been made available by only six Parties. To date, no checkpoint communiqués have been published.

Table 2. Number of IRCCs made available in the ABS Clearing-House by Parties

<i>Parties</i>	<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>South Africa</i>	<i>Spain</i>
Number of IRCCs published	1	2	75	2	9	4

51. Of the 93 IRCCs published, 37 per cent do not set any of the mandatory information as confidential while 63 per cent have at least one field identified as confidential. 33 per cent of the IRCCs indicate that they cover commercial use, 50 per cent keep the use type confidential and 17 per cent are granted for non-commercial use. In relation to confidentiality, 46 per cent of the IRCCs identify the “provider” as confidential, 55 per cent identifies the “person or entity to whom prior informed consent (PIC) was granted” as confidential, and 53 per cent keep the subject-matter confidential.

52. In term of the subject-matter keywords, 52 per cent of the IRCCs are tagged with plants, 19 per cent microorganisms, 11 per cent animals, 10 per cent domesticated species and/or cultivated species, 5 per cent wild species, and 3 per cent fungi. 4 per cent of the IRCCs cover access to associated traditional knowledge.

53. In order to gain experience on the IRCC and issues related to monitoring the utilization of genetic resources, there is a need to raise awareness and understanding among Parties and stakeholders on the progress made on those issues as described in UNEP/CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/3.

54. The Secretariat is collaborating with the ABS Capacity Development Initiative to produce a short video explaining the system for monitoring the utilization of genetic resources facilitated through the ABS Clearing-House in a simple manner. The main target audience for the video are national authorities in both the user and provider countries. The video is planned to be ready for release before the end of 2017.

55. The members of the Informal Advisory Committee will be invited to share their experiences with a view to exploring how these tools and system will work on a practical level in a variety of circumstances.

IV. JOINT MODALITIES OF OPERATION: ENHANCING INTEGRATION OF THE ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING CLEARING-HOUSE WITH THE CENTRAL CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM OF THE CONVENTION

56. In decision NP-2/2, paragraph 8(a), the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol requested the Executive Secretary to further refine the modalities of operation, taking into account the advice given by the Informal Advisory Committee and the feedback received on the implementation and operation of the ABS-Clearing-House, in particular that of Parties, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its third meeting.

57. In paragraph 8(b) of the same decision, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol also requested the Executive Secretary to develop, as part of the exercise for refining the modalities, joint modalities of operation for the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, the Biosafety Clearing-House and the ABS Clearing-House, taking into consideration the web strategy, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its fourteenth meeting, the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety at their ninth meeting and the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol at their third meeting with a view to enhancing coherence in the implementation and operation of the common elements of the central clearing-house mechanism, while preserving the specific functionalities of the mechanisms under the Protocols and the Convention.

58. Modalities of operation for the ABS Clearing-House and the Biosafety Clearing-House were adopted by decisions NP-1/2 and BS-I/3, respectively. The mission, goals and objectives of the clearing-house mechanism for the period 2011-2020 were adopted in decision X/15 in line with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. This was further articulated in the programme of work for the clearing-house mechanism (UNEP/CBD/COP/11/31) that was welcomed in decision XI/2. While explicit modalities of operation for the clearing-house mechanism do not exist, the way information services of the clearing-house mechanism operate is usually communicated to Parties through various mechanisms, including through notifications. Also, it should be noted that many elements of the modalities of the ABS Clearing-House and the Biosafety Clearing-House are of general relevance and also apply to the clearing-house mechanism.

59. With regard to paragraph 8(a) of decision NP-2/2 concerning the modalities of operation for the ABS Clearing-House adopted at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, progress made in the operation and implementation of the ABS Clearing-House and feedback received do not suggest a need to further refine the modalities at this stage.

60. In response to the request in paragraph 8(b) of decision NP-2/2, possible elements for joint modalities of operation for the clearing-house mechanism, ABS Clearing-House and Biosafety Clearing-House are contained in document CBD/ABS/CH-IAC/2017/1/3.

61. The objective of the proposed elements for joint modalities is to enhance coherence in the implementation and operation among the clearing-house mechanism and the ABS and Biosafety clearing-houses. The joint modalities of operation would complement the modalities of operation adopted for each of the information-exchange mechanisms.

62. Under this item, the Informal Advisory Committee will be invited to consider whether there is a need to further refine the modalities of the ABS Clearing-House. The Informal Advisory Committee will also be invited to consider the possible elements for joint modalities of operation for the clearing-house mechanism, the ABS Clearing-House and the Biosafety Clearing-House (CBD/ABS/CH-IAC/2017/1/3). The Executive Secretary will take into account the advice of the Informal Advisory Committee on this issue in the preparation of documents for consideration by the informal advisory committees on the clearing-house mechanism and Biosafety Clearing-House.

V. THE REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION OF THE ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING CLEARING-HOUSE AS PART OF THE ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROTOCOL (ARTICLE 31)

63. In decision NP-2/2, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol decided to review the implementation and operation of the ABS Clearing-House as part of the assessment and review process to evaluate the effectiveness of the Protocol established by Article 31. Annex I of decision NP-2/4 contains the elements to be included in the first assessment and review and sources of information.

64. The following elements were identified to review the implementation and operation of the ABS Clearing-House: number of access and benefit-sharing measures made available; number of countries that have published information on their competent national authorities; number of internationally recognized certificates of compliance that have been constituted and number of checkpoint communiqués published.

65. The sources of information identified to review the implementation and operation of the ABS Clearing-House are the following: (a) Interim national reports (question 3); (b) ABS Clearing-House, including information on the use of the help function/dialogue box; (c) Reports of meetings of the IAC on the ABS Clearing-House; and (d) a possible targeted survey of focal points and/or users.

66. A targeted survey has been developed for NFPs, publishing authorities (Pas) and national authorised users (NAUs), as well as other users of the ABS Clearing-House.

67. The Informal Advisory Committee will be invited to provide general comments on the implementation and operation of the ABS Clearing-House as a contribution to the assessment and review process.

VI. PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

68. The Informal Advisory Committee may wish to provide technical advice on the following goals and activities for the future implementation and administration of the ABS Clearing-House.

Goal 1: Population and increase use of the ABS Clearing-House

69. Thanks to the financial support of the Japan Biodiversity Fund and the G-6 post which was established by Parties at the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat is continuing the outreach and engagement campaign to increase the population and use of the ABS Clearing-House. Activities listed under Goal 1 from the indicative list of future goals and priorities, agreed to in decision NP-2/2, are expected to continue unimpeded as an important priority in the future development and implementation of the ABS Clearing-House.

70. Activities to be carried out under this goal include:

Outreach and engagement

- (a) Ensure that each Party has designated their publishing authority;
- (b) Assist with the publication of the interim national report;
- (c) Assist with the publication of available national information, in particular CNAs, ABS measures and IRCCs, with a view to having all available national information on the ABS Clearing-House by the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol;

Capacity-building

- (a) Continue to disseminate and promote the use of the ABS Clearing-House e-learning module and step-by-step guides;
- (b) Finalize, disseminate and promote the “simply explained” video on the ABS Clearing-House and monitoring of the utilization of genetic resources;
- (c) Continue to support trainings, as needed;
- (d) Work and collaborate with partners developing capacity-building projects to ensure they include relevant activities to support and promote the use of the ABS Clearing-House;

Interoperability and collaboration

- (a) Continue to raise awareness for the use of the API;
- (b) Facilitate the exchange of information with national databases or systems;
- (c) Continue to explore collaboration with relevant instruments and initiatives (such as ITPGRFA, InforMEA, WFCC).

Goal 2: Translation and functionality for operationalizing the ABSCH in the six official languages of the United Nations

74. Translating the ABS Clearing-House will continue to be implemented as a top priority. The Secretariat will aim at having the majority of the ABS Clearing-House website sent to the translators by the end of 2017 with a view to having the entire website translated and available in the six official languages of the United Nations by June 2018.

75. Improvements to the mechanism for translation are a common element and core component of both the new CBD website and migration of the Biosafety Clearing-House. The work done and improvements made in this regard will also benefit the ABS Clearing-House.

Goal 3: Maintain and improve functionality

76. Under this goal the expectation is that the Secretariat would continue to maintain and improve only the existing functionalities and finalize any remaining issues.

77. Until the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat’s IT resources have been dedicated to carrying out the web strategy, contained in UNEP/CBD/COP/13/14/Add.1, in order to develop the new CBD website, as well as, the migration of the Biosafety Clearing-House website to the same platform as the ABS Clearing-House. Both websites are due to be ready in advance of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

78. In order to make efficient use of the Secretariat’s limited IT resources, certain features can be prioritized to the extent possible, based on common priorities that can contribute to advancing progress on the development of the ABS Clearing-House. This common approach may address a number of overlapping priorities, such as:

- (a) Improve search, search engine optimization (for Google and other search engines), and tools to monitor queries and keyword searches in order to improve the display of information;
- (b) Improve the tools to manage vocabulary and keywords;
- (c) Improve responsiveness and browser compatibility;
- (d) Improve management and consolidate databases related to organizations;
- (e) Integrate country profiles on the CBD website, including summarized ABS Clearing-House information;
- (f) Enhance website analytics to include tracking downloads and views of individual records and their attached files;
- (g) Enhance user feedback and quality control tools;
- (h) Improve the system to manage updated records to ensure references to those records may also be easily updated;
- (i) Improve API and documentation;
- (j) Continue to improve and maintain the supporting infrastructure;
- (k) Integrate capacity-building common formats and display of relevant information into the ABS Clearing-House based on the implementation of the capacity-building portal.

79. In addition, feedback received by Parties and users of genetic resources has highlighted the need to make available improved explanatory information on national ABS procedures in the ABS Clearing-House.

80. Currently, the ABS Clearing-House allows for the submission of explanatory material as a type of ABS measure. This explanatory information may include explanatory memoranda, flow charts that describe national ABS processes, or an overview of the national framework in place. However, to date, no such explanatory information has been published.

81. The IAC may wish to provide advice on how the ABS Clearing-House could facilitate the submission and display of clear step-by-step information describing national procedures for access and benefit-sharing.

Goal 4: Integration with the clearing-house mechanism

82. New developments planned will follow an integrated approach to improve the CBD clearing-house mechanism and Biosafety Clearing-House, as well as the ABS Clearing-House.
