

Foreword

Biological diversity—or biodiversity—is the term given to the variety of life on Earth, including plants, animals and micro-organisms, as well as the ecosystems of which they are part. Biodiversity includes genetic differences within species, the diversity of species and the variety of ecosystems. It is the result of the interaction of species, including humans, with one another and with the air, water and soil around them. This combination of life forms—ecosystems, species and genetic varieties—has made Earth a uniquely habitable place and provides the goods and services that sustain our lives, such as clean air and water, food and medicine, fuel, fibre, and material for construction. Our cultures are founded upon the different environments in which they have developed.

However, biodiversity is currently being lost at unprecedented rates due to human activities that degrade or encroach on habitats, increase pollution, and contribute to climate change. The Convention on Biological Diversity, also known as the CBD, addresses this problem. This legally binding treaty seeks to preserve the diversity of life forms through conservation and sustainable use. In so doing, it contributes to the overall objective of sustainable development. In ratifying, the 188 Parties to the Convention have committed themselves, in general terms, to undertaking national and international measures aimed at achieving three explicit objectives: the conservation of biological diversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. The Convention was opened for signature at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, in June 1992 and entered into force on 29 December 1993. Currently 187 countries and the European Community have subscribed to it, representing a nearly universal participation.

The sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 6) adopted the Strategic Plan for the Convention. Parties committed themselves to a more effective and coherent implementation of the three objectives of the Convention, and agreed to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002 to review progress made since the Earth Summit and to chart the way ahead, confirmed this “2010 biodiversity target” and reaffirmed that biodiversity plays a critical role in overall sustainable development and poverty eradication. The World Summit also reaffirmed that the Convention on Biological Diversity is the key instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

Since the adoption of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties has met seven times and, on each occasion, has, through its decisions, taken steps necessary to translate the general provisions of the Convention into practical action. These measures have included, among other things, the adoption of programmes of work for a number of thematic areas and cross-cutting issues, the issuance of specific guidance for funding through the Convention's financial mechanism of projects for the implementation of those programmes, and the establishment of ad hoc bodies to focus on the implementation of specific provisions of the Convention, such as those relating to access and benefit-sharing, traditional knowledge, biosafety, protected areas and a review of implementation of the Convention.

In the case of biosafety, this process led to the adoption of a new legal instrument, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, itself a landmark treaty that provides an international regulatory framework for reconciling the respective needs of free trade and environmental protection with respect to a rapidly growing global industry. The Cartagena Protocol entered into force on 11 September 2003 and as of December 2004 had 111 Parties.

Until 2000, these decisions had been available only in separate publications, each covering the work of a particular meeting of the Conference of the Parties. That year saw the publication of the first edition of this Handbook, which was intended to help clarify the relationship of the decisions of the Conference of the Parties both to each other and to the individual provisions of the Convention and to indicate at the same time how they serve to develop and enlarge upon the general commitments set out in the Convention. The second edition of the Handbook was updated in 2003, to reflect new developments, and, in particular, the outcome of the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in The Hague in April 2002.

This third edition of the Handbook continues to reflect the latest developments in the Convention process. Specifically, this edition contains the outcomes of the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 7), as well as the decisions from the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP-1), both held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February 2004.

As with the previous editions, the Handbook is a comprehensive reference to the achievements of the Convention and the Protocol. To this end, the Handbook includes the texts of the Convention, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and every decision of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol. It explains, in a comprehensive manner, how the decisions of the Conference of the Parties have sought to give practical effect to the general obligations set out in the individual articles of the Convention. The Handbook also includes other relevant material such as: the Final Act of the Nairobi Conference of Plenipotentiaries for the Adoption of the Agreed Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity; declarations made by Governments upon the adoption, signature, ratification, accession, acceptance or approval of the Convention; the text of The Hague Ministerial Declaration of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity; and a current list of Parties to the Convention and to the Biosafety Protocol.

I would like to thank the staff of the Secretariat and all those who have contributed to its publication. I trust that this third edition of the Handbook will serve as a useful reference guide for those interested in the development of the Convention and the efforts of the international community to protect the world's biological diversity.

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