UNEP

CBD

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/3
10 February 2005

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY SERVING AS THE
MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CARTAGENA
PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY
Second meeting
Montreal, 30 May–3 June 2005
Item 5 of the provisional agenda *

OPERATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Article 20, paragraph 1, of the Protocol establishes a Biosafety Clearing-House as part of the clearing-house mechanism under Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention, in order to facilitate the exchange of information and experience pertaining to living modified organisms and assist Parties to implement the Protocol. At its first meeting, serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, the Conference of the Parties approved the transition of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House the fully operational phase, and adopted the modalities of its operation (decision BS-I/3). The Biosafety Clearing-House website is available at http://bch.biodiv.org.

2. In decision BS-I/3, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol also decided to review the implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House at its second meeting, and requested the Executive Secretary to submit a progress report to that meeting with a view to developing a longer-term programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House. Accordingly, the Executive Secretary has prepared the present note, conveying a progress report on the operation and activities of the Biosafety Clearing-House (section II), summarizing the outcomes of an internal review of the Biosafety Clearing-House (section III), addressing capacity needs of developing countries (section IV), and proposing possible elements for inclusion in a multi-year programme of work (section V) for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its second meeting serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. Under this item, the meeting may also wish to consider the information document prepared by the Executive Secretary (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/INF/1), which provides more detailed results of the internal review of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

* UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/1.

/…

3. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol is invited to consider the progress report and the outcomes of the review, and to adopt a decision establishing a multi-year programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House (section VI).

II. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE OPERATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

4. This section provides a summary of inter-sessional activities and initiatives related to the implementation of information-sharing provisions under the Protocol, and the operation and activities of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

A. Launch of the operational phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and maintenance of the website

5. As previously noted, in accordance with decision BS-I/3, paragraph 1, the Biosafety Clearing-House moved from the pilot phase to the fully operational phase following the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. Accordingly, the Biosafety Clearing-House website was revised and enhanced, and the operational phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House was launched on 3 April 2004.

6. The Secretariat continued to maintain and improve the central portal and to assist governments in reporting information as required. Letters were sent to all Biosafety Clearing-House national focal points in January 2005, advising them of the current status of their records available through the Biosafety Clearing-House, and encouraging them to update this information if necessary.

B. Establishment of the Biosafety Clearing-House Current Awareness Service

7. An information service, known as the Biosafety Clearing-House Current Awareness Service, was established in July 2004 to provide regular biweekly or monthly updates summarizing new information that has been added to the Biosafety Clearing-House. This information is sent directly to Biosafety Clearing-House national focal points and other users who have registered to receive these updates by email, or to a specified fax number. The categories of information to be included in the summaries, and the frequency of their delivery, are individually customizable for each user.

8. Governments may also now submit their own national (or regional) news to the Biosafety Clearing-House to ensure that it is circulated widely to all users of the Biosafety Clearing-House, including through the Biosafety Clearing-House Current Awareness Service mentioned above. The Biosafety Clearing-House News Service (and summary of latest additions to the databases) is also freely available for syndication, and websites may take advantage of this service to include dynamically updated biosafety information on their sites if they wish.

C. Support to implementation of the Capacity-Building Coordination Mechanism

9. In accordance with annex IV of decision BS-I/5, the Biosafety Clearing-House continued to support the implementation of the Coordination Mechanism for the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Protocol. 1/ This support included maintenance of the databases on capacity-building projects, short-term opportunities and identified national needs and priorities and the development of collaborative portals (restricted websites) for the Liaison Group on Capacity-Building for Biosafety and for the Biosafety Capacity-Building Network.

1/ Decision BS-I/5, annex I.

D. Online conference

10. The Secretariat hosted an online conference on biosafety considerations in the use of genetically modified organisms for management of animal populations, through the Biosafety Clearing-House from 18 October to 15 November 2004, in order to gauge the suitability of this medium to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms, to facilitate the implementation of the Biosafety Protocol. One objective of holding this conference was to determine if an online conference on the Biosafety Clearing-House would attract a wide range of participants (including governmental and non-governmental organizations, policy makers, research scientists and the general public), inclusive of both developing and developed countries. It also aimed to provide a neutral platform for participants to discuss and exchange views and experiences about a specific biosafety issue.

11. An invitation to participate in the conference was sent to all national focal points for the Biosafety Protocol, the Biosafety Clearing-House, the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI), as well as to members of various relevant scientific mailing lists and discussion forums. A total of 495 participants registered for the conference from 104 countries, including 247 participants from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and 228 participants from developed countries (20 participants did not specify their country of origin). 2/ The proceedings of this conference have been archived on the Biosafety Clearing-House and are available on the website at http://bch.biodiv.org/onlineconferences/gmoam.shtml.

12. Comments sent to the Secretariat from participants in the online conference were very positive, and several participants from developing countries (particularly those involved in regulatory agencies) noted that they felt it very beneficial to be able to discuss relevant biosafety issues with scientists around the globe without the associated travel and registration costs of a traditional conference. Scientific experts who participated in the conference also noted that they considered the conference a useful venue to exchange scientific information.

E. Secretariat survey seeking views on the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House

13. As part of an internal review of the Biosafety Clearing-House, the Secretariat sought views of Biosafety Clearing-House users through a questionnaire that was distributed to Cartagena Protocol focal points, Biosafety Clearing-House national focal points and institutional focal points, as well as other registered users of the Biosafety Clearing-House on 17 August 2004. The questionnaire was also made generally available through the Biosafety Clearing-House website. The outcomes of the internal review are discussed in greater detail in section III.

F. Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House

14. The first meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-IAC) was convened in Montreal on 9 and 10 November 2004 by the Executive Secretary, in accordance with the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House (decision BS-I/3, annex, section E), to seek advice with respect to technical issues associated with the ongoing development of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

2/ The number of participants and regional distribution for participation in this first online conference compares favourably with similar activities run by other organizations (for example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations ran their 9th online conference on Biotechnology in Food and Agriculture on "Biotechnology applications in food processing: can developing countries benefit?" from 14 June to 15 July 2004 with a total of 411 participants, roughly 70% from developing countries).

15. The composition of the committee was determined by the Secretariat taking into account the participants' demonstrated expertise and experience with the Biosafety Clearing-House, while ensuring regional and gender balance on the committee. Technical experts selected from the following were invited to join the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House: Argentina, Burkina Faso, Cuba, Czech Republic, Egypt, the European Community, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lesotho, Japan, Mexico, Palau, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States of America.

16. The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House was invited to review technical aspects of the progress of implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and to consider the outcomes of the review of the Biosafety Clearing-House in the context of assisting the Executive Secretary in preparing elements for a longer-term programme of work for future consideration by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The report of the meeting (UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/1/5) is available on the website of the Convention on Biological Diversity at: http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=BSBCHIAC-01.

G. Partnerships

17. The Biosafety Clearing-House is designed to be interoperable with other databases. As such, it offers Governments the option of registering information with the central Biosafety Clearing-House database, or with another (interoperable) database of their choice. Decision BS-I/3, paragraph 4, encourages Parties, Governments and other users to develop national, regional, subregional and institutional nodes that are interlinked with the central portal, in accordance with minimum standards for partnership as outlined in section F of the annex to that decision.

18. During the inter-sessional period, the Secretariat signed a new memorandum of understanding with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Partnerships to provide information through interoperability are ongoing with the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Biosafety Database, the Pilot Phase of CH-BCH (the Swiss Biosafety Clearing-House), and the United States Regulatory Agencies Unified Biotechnology Website.

III. INTERNAL REVIEW OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

19. The Secretariat undertook an internal review of the Biosafety Clearing-House in 2004, in order to provide the basis for suggestions for elements of a multi-year programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House. This review was based on a user survey undertaken by the Secretariat during August and September 2004, together with database statistics and website analytics compiled after the launch of the operational phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House on 27 February 2004.

20. A detailed discussion of the internal review is presented as an information document (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/INF/1). This document contains information on the conduct of the review, limitations of the review, the methodology of the user survey, detailed findings of the review, implications of the findings for a multi-year programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House, a list of countries from which survey responses were received, and a copy of the survey itself.

21. Overall, survey respondents were satisfied with the design of the Biosafety Clearing-House and the services received from the Secretariat. However, concerns were expressed regarding delays with provision of information to the Biosafety Clearing-House by Governments.

22. Key findings from the review included:

(a) *General level of user satisfaction.* Most survey respondents considered the design of the Biosafety Clearing-House to be satisfactory or very satisfactory, most were very satisfied with the assistance received from the Secretariat regarding the Biosafety Clearing-House, and most survey

respondents were satisfied with the options available to register information with the Biosafety Clearing-House.

(b) *Use of the central portal.* Users from the government sector were generally more satisfied with the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House than other sectors. For example, government users were relatively easily able to find information in the Biosafety Clearing-House; however, users from other sectors, such as industry and non-governmental organizations experienced some difficulties in locating information;

(c) *Information content and management.* The greatest concern with the Biosafety Clearing-House was incomplete information, including delays experienced in Governments providing information, particularly that which the Protocol requires Parties to submit to the Biosafety Clearing-House. Online help functions and documentation were considered important to Biosafety Clearing-House users and need to be maintained, and continued flexibility of the Secretariat in modifying the central portal in response to user needs was greatly appreciated by survey respondents;

(d) *Capacity-building and use of non-Internet or non-Web options.* New Biosafety Clearing-House information services that are being introduced by the Secretariat were well-received, in particular the Current Awareness Service that sends e-mail updates of new records registered with the Biosafety Clearing-House. Several survey respondents would like to use the Biosafety Clearing-House to access a broader range of biosafety information. Some concerns were expressed regarding timely access to Biosafety Clearing-House information using the non-Internet options.

23. Of particular note in the consideration of this item of the agenda are the types of information that are currently not well represented in the Biosafety Clearing-House. For example, no decisions under the advance informed agreement procedure (AIA) and no risk assessments have been registered directly with the Biosafety Clearing-House to date (although some risk assessments are available indirectly through links to national websites, this information is not searchable in languages through the Biosafety Clearing-House unless it has been registered directly with the databases). The 341 decisions taken in accordance with Article 11 of the Protocol registered with the Biosafety Clearing-House have been posted by a total of 12 Governments and the European Community. Seventy Parties and 13 other Governments have registered competent national authorities; of these, 27 have not specified the responsibilities of those authorities. National laws and regulations (or summaries of regulatory systems) have been registered by 44 Governments to date (all statistics current as at 8 February 2005).

24. The usefulness of the information available in the Biosafety Clearing-House is therefore somewhat constrained by a lack of certainty regarding its completeness. It is currently difficult to ascertain whether the countries that have not posted information in certain categories have not done so because, for example, they have not taken any relevant decisions or prepared relevant risk assessments, or if they are still in the process of developing their national biosafety frameworks (in which case legislation or regulations may not yet exist), or if there are other constraints which limit the availability of information (such as the design of the common formats for reporting information, or the language of submission). However, given that it is widely known that some of the missing information is currently available, it seems reasonable to assume that there may be internal constraints delaying the timely provision of information to the Biosafety Clearing-House that should be addressed at a national level.

25. In their submissions to the Secretariat on this item, the United States of America and the Global Industry Coalition noted that the insufficiency of information available on the Biosafety Clearing-House has led to a number of difficulties for importers and exporters. The Global Industry Coalition drew particular attention to the need for Governments to clarify through the Biosafety Clearing-House the applicable processes in place for documentation requirements to accompany imports under Article 18, paragraph 2.

26. Several respondents to the Secretariat's survey recommended that the Biosafety Clearing-House be used to access a broader range of biosafety information. This idea was also touched on in submissions relating to other items for consideration by this meeting. For example the Global Industry Coalition raised the importance of sharing concrete and reliable information about biosafety research among the international community (in its submission on scientific and technical issues (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/14)), but noted that this would require a well-managed control mechanism, such as the establishment of an editorial board of reputed scientists to ensure scientific integrity of posted results and exchanges of views (the PRELEX system of the European Commission was suggested as a good model in this regard).

IV. CAPACITY NEEDS OF COUNTRIES TO ACCESS AND USE THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

27. Recognizing the need for capacity-building related to the Biosafety Clearing-House, and in accordance with paragraph 10 of decision BS-I/3, the Secretariat continues to analyse the identified capacity-building and financial requirements of developing countries, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries with economies in transition, as well as countries that are centres of origin and centres of genetic diversity, to enable their active participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House. This issue was examined further during the internal review discussed in section III above.

28. The Secretariat continues to maintain alternative methods of access to the Biosafety Clearing-House database for countries with unreliable Internet access, and distributes the simple national biosafety clearing-house application to countries on request. Through the database on capacity-building needs and priorities, developing countries continue to place a high priority on capacity-building needs for information-sharing, including improved capacity for data collection and data management at a national level, strengthening of core human resources at a national level, and the establishment of appropriate infrastructure to share information at both national, regional and international levels.

29. In collaboration with UNEP/GEF, the Secretariat is also actively participating in the implementation of the add-on project on Building Capacity for the Effective Participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House of the Cartagena Protocol. Among other things, this project is developing a comprehensive user guide that will be integrated into the Biosafety Clearing-House to assist more effective participation by all users.

V. ELEMENTS OF A MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE OPERATION OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

30. This section proposes potential programme elements for inclusion in a multi-year programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House, developed on the basis of the outcomes of the review and input from the Informal Advisory Committee for the Biosafety Clearing-House, as well as activities that are drawn from the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. It also outlines the objectives and scope for each proposed element, and possible activities that may be taken to achieve these objectives. A detailed programme of work based on these proposed elements is provided for consideration in the annex to the present note.

31. It is understood that the programme of work will also include ongoing implementation of relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, as appropriate.

Programme element 1: Structure and function of the Central Portal

32. The primary objective of this programme element would be to make it easier for Governments and other users to report and access information in the Biosafety Clearing-House by improving the categorization of information and by making navigation of the website more intuitive. Ongoing review of controlled vocabularies and common formats to better reflect country needs (such as changing technologies and types of information that are available), while ensuring support for interoperability options with partner Governments and organizations, would assist in achieving this goal.

Programme element 2: Information content and management

33. The primary objective of this programme element would be to increase the amount, quality and timeliness of information that is reported to the Biosafety Clearing-House. Under this element, user documentation and help functions would be improved to provide greater assistance to Governments in reporting information through the Biosafety Clearing-House, and existing constraints on making information available in a timely manner would be identified and overcome at a national level.

Programme element 3: Sharing information on and experience with LMOs

34. The primary objective of this programme element would be to make a broader range of biosafety information accessible to users of the Biosafety Clearing-House, in accordance with the requests expressed through the 2004 Secretariat survey. This could be achieved through ongoing development of the Biosafety Information Resource Centre (see document UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/4), and through making use of discussion forums and online conference facilities through the Biosafety Clearing-House to facilitate the exchange of information on, and experience with, living modified organisms.

Programme element 4: Capacity-building and non-Internet accessibility

35. The primary objective of this programme element would be to ensure that countries have the necessary capabilities to access the Internet-based central portal, so that they are able to provide and access information to the Biosafety Clearing-House in a timely manner. Priority areas for capacity-building would be data collection and data management at a national level, strengthening of core human resources at a national level, and the establishment of appropriate infrastructure to share information at both national, regional and international levels. Additional activities could include regular circulation of Biosafety Clearing-House information on CD-ROM, adding the facility to easily download records from the central portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House to a local database, and additional training on the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Programme element 5: Review of activities

36. The primary objective of this programme element would be to ensure that the programme of work is achieving the goals of the Biosafety Clearing-House effectively. This would be achieved through eliciting ongoing feedback from Governments and other users, and undertaking a second review of the Biosafety Clearing-House within the next few years to compare the impact of proposed improvements against existing baseline data; for example, at the time of the review of the Protocol stipulated in Article 35 and decision BS-I/12 (i.e. at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Parties to the Protocol).

VI. ELEMENTS OF A DRAFT DECISION ON THE MODALITIES OF OPERATION OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

37. On the basis of the progress report on the operation and activities of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and taking into account the outcomes of the internal review of the operation of the

Biosafety Clearing-House conducted by the Secretariat, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to may wish to adopt a multi-year programme of work, based on the draft contained in the annex to the present note.

38. The provision of relevant information is essential for the effective operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. Therefore, in addition to welcoming the participation of Governments and international organizations that have already provided information to the Biosafety Clearing-House, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties may wish to urge Parties, Governments and other users to participate in the Biosafety Clearing-House by contributing information to the Biosafety Clearing-House, including information pertaining to decisions on the release or import of living modified organisms and risk assessments taken prior to entry into force of the Protocol, whether directly through the Management Centre of the central portal, or through the development of nodes that are interoperable with the central portal, as soon as possible. Governments could also be encouraged to undertake regular review of the information they have previously made available.

39. Recalling the need for capacity-building to enable developing countries to effectively use the Biosafety Clearing-House, including managing their information-reporting obligations, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties may wish to invite Governments and international organisations to make relevant biosafety information available through the Biosafety Information Resource Centre, and to invite donor Governments and organizations to assist developing country Parties, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries with economies in transition as well as countries that are centres of origin and centres of genetic diversity, to access and use the Biosafety Clearing-House, particularly in the areas of improved capacity for data collection and data management at the national level, strengthening of core human resources at the national level, and the establishment of appropriate infrastructure to share information at national, regional and international levels.

Annex

DRAFT MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMMME OF WORK FOR THE OPERATION OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

Programme element 1: Structure and function of the central portal

Objective: Improve ease of reporting and accessing information in the Biosafety Clearing-House in response to identified needs of users.

Possible activities:

- Expand the general user base of the Biosafety Clearing-House by making it more accessible to novice users, for example by making the information more intuitively easy to find (while maintaining as much of the existing structure as is feasible), clustering search results, improving support functions such as an interactive Biosafety Clearing-House user guide. *Main actor: Secretariat, with input from Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: annual.*

- Ensure that common formats are flexible enough to enable full reporting of information (for example, able to accommodate reporting of data produced prior to entry into force of the Protocol, such as risk assessments conducted outside the annex III format; able to accommodate data reported through product-based regulatory models), while maintaining backwards compatibility with existing information-exchange partners. *Main actor: Secretariat, with input from Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: annual review of common formats.*

- Expand controlled vocabularies as required to reflect changing technologies and types of information that are being reported to the Biosafety Clearing-House. *Main actor: Secretariat, with input from other organizations maintaining multilingual thesauri. Timeframe: biannual.*

- Differentiate between null responses where information is not available because it does not exist, versus information that has not been reported on. *Main actor: Secretariat, with input from Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: December 2005.*

- Maintain support for interoperability options with partner Governments and organizations. *Main actor: Secretariat with input from Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: ongoing.*

Programme element 2: Information content and management

Objective: Increase the amount of information that is currently being reported to the Biosafety Clearing-House, and ensure it is provided in a timely manner.

Possible activities:

- Appoint national focal points (or, where appropriate, institutional focal points) for the Biosafety Clearing-House, to actively make information available through the Biosafety Clearing-House. *Main actor: Governments. Timeframe: To be appointed by mid-2005.*
- Collate information relating to obligations of Governments to provide certain data within particular time-limits and make this more visible through the Biosafety Clearing-House. *Main actor: Secretariat. Timeframe: To be made available by mid-2005.*

- Compile existing biosafety information required to be reported under the Protocol (see section A of the Modalities of Operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House) and ensure it has been made available to the Biosafety Clearing-House where appropriate. *Main actor: Governments. Timeframe: December 2005.*
- Review existing information in the Biosafety Clearing-House to ensure it has been accurately reported and categorized. *Main actor: Governments. Timeframe: quarterly.*
- Improve user documentation to assist focal points and other authorized users by providing clear examples and descriptions of data required in each field within the common formats. *Main actor: Secretariat, in collaboration with capacity-building organizations. Timeframe: biannual.*
- Identify constraints on making information available in a timely manner and implement strategies to overcome these difficulties. *Main actor: Governments. Timeframe: December 2005.*
- Share experiences with the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House, particularly by providing case-studies of experiences with national management and clearance of information ("validation"). *Main actor: Governments. Timeframe: December 2005.*
- Continue to encourage Governments to provide information to the Biosafety Clearing-House through, for example, reminders of information-exchange requirements and provision of tools to allow Governments to assess their performance in meeting their reporting requirements to the Biosafety Clearing-House. *Main actor: Secretariat. Timeframe: ongoing.*

Programme element 3: Sharing information on and experience with LMOs

Objective: Make a broader range of biosafety information accessible to users of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Possible activities:

- Continue to develop the Biosafety Information Resource Centre. *Main actor: Secretariat. Timeframe: December 2005.*
- Collect information relevant to biosafety issues, and make it available through the Biosafety Information Resource Centre. *Main actor: Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: biannual.*
- Make use of information-sharing mechanisms such as discussion forums and online conference facilities through the Biosafety Clearing-House to facilitate a broad exchange of views on experience with LMOs. *Main actor: Secretariat with Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: as appropriate.*
- Consult among national, regional, subregional and institutional centres with relevant expertise, as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to maximize use of existing experience and expertise. *Main actor: Secretariat with relevant organizations. Timeframe: Initial consultations to be completed by June 2006.*

Programme element 4: Capacity-building and non-Internet accessibility

Objective: Ensure that countries have the necessary capabilities to access the Internet-based central Portal and are able to access information through the Biosafety Clearing-House in a timely manner.

Possible activities:

- Continue to take into account the identified capacity-building constraints and financial limitations of developing countries with regard to effective participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House, placing a high priority on data collection and data management, strengthening of core human resources at a national level, and the establishment of appropriate infrastructure to share information at national, regional and international levels. *Main actor: Donor governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: ongoing.*

- Incorporate the facility for users to download records from the central portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House to a local database in both the central portal and the simple national Biosafety Clearing-House application. *Main actor: Secretariat, if adequate resources are made available. Timeframe: mid 2006.*

- Examine the feasibility of expanding existing web features to enable distribution by e-mail and fax (for example, participation in discussion forums). *Main actor: Secretariat, if adequate resources are made available. Timeframe: December 2005.*

- Circulate regularly updated CD-ROM versions of information in the Biosafety Clearing-House to those users without good access to the Internet. *Main actor: Secretariat, if adequate resources are made available. Timeframe: biannual.*

- Take advantage of opportunities for providing training in the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House, such as meetings of the Parties to the Protocol, taking into account the need for the Biosafety Clearing-House to be used in the broader context of Protocol implementation. *Main actor: Secretariat, if adequate resources are made available. Timeframe: ongoing.*

Programme element 5: Review of activities

Objective: Ensure that the programme of work is achieving the goals of the Biosafety Clearing-House effectively.

Possible activities:

- Continue to review the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, including through the use of targeted follow-up surveys and usability studies, and by providing user feedback mechanisms directly on the Biosafety Clearing-House, subject to available resources. *Main actor: Secretariat with input from Governments and relevant organizations. Timeframe: ongoing.*

- Conduct a second review of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and compare improvements against existing baseline data, as part of the review of the implementation of the Protocol envisaged in the medium-term programme of work for the Protocol. *Timeframe: for consideration at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.*
