



Convention on Biological Diversity

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SUBREGIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING
WORKSHOP FOR SOUTH ASIA ON THE
CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM
Dehradun, India, 12-16 December 2011

BACKGROUND NOTE ON THE PROPOSAL BY THE SOUTH ASIA CO-OPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME TO ESTABLISH A REGIONAL CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM IN SOUTH ASIA

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this note is to provide the participants of this clearing-house mechanism (CHM) workshop with some background on the proposal by the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) to establish a regional clearing-house mechanism for the South Asia region. The information contained in this note has been prepared in collaboration with the representative of SACEP attending the CHM workshop.

ABOUT SACEP

2. The South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) is an intergovernmental institution including eight member countries from South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its head office is located in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

3. The mission of SACEP is “to promote regional co-operation in South Asia in the field of environment, both natural and human in the context of sustainable development and on issues of economic and social development which also impinge on the environment and vice versa; to support conservation and management of natural resources of the region and to work closely with all national, regional, and international institutions, governmental and non governmental, as well as experts and groups engaged in such co-operation and conservation efforts.”

4. Since its creation, SACEP has implemented a number of projects and programmes in the areas of environmental education, environmental legislation, biodiversity, air pollution, and the protection and management of the coastal environment. SACEP also acts as the secretariat for the South Asian Seas Programme. SACEP encourages intergovernmental cooperation to combat the problem of transboundary air pollution. The *Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia* has been a significant initiative in this area.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

5. In the report entitled *South Asia: State of the Environment 2011* (United Nations Environment Programme), it was stated that biodiversity was under severe threat in South Asia. This is a particularly critical issue due to the millions of people in the region who directly depend on biological resources for their livelihoods.

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6. Given that one of the key barriers to the preservation of biodiversity in the region is the lack of access to information to allow stakeholders to conserve and use these resources sustainably, SACEP has been investigating ways to improve access to relevant biodiversity-related information. In this context, contacts were established with the Belgian CHM Partnership to develop a project proposal to establish a regional CHM website for SACEP member countries.

7. Subsequently, this proposal was adopted by the Tenth Governing Council of SACEP held in January 2007 in Kathmandu, Nepal, in the presence of the environmental ministers of all member countries. Contacts were then established with potential donors to fund the project, but so far no funding has been made available for implementation. Nevertheless, support was provided in September 2004 and in April 2011 by the Belgian CHM Partnership to train a SACEP expert on the use of the European Portal Toolkit, with a view to initiating the establishment of the regional CHM using existing resources available at SACEP. Further, the Belgian CHM Partnership made funds available to conduct two national CHM capacity-building workshops for postgraduate students in Sri Lanka in 2007.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

8. The **goal** of the project is to contribute to the achievement of Aichi Biodiversity target 19 and to the implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) in South Asia through the establishment and maintenance of one regional and eight national clearing-house mechanisms in SACEP member countries.

9. The **expected benefits** of the project are better preservation of biodiversity in South Asia through a more efficient NBSAP implementation process thanks to enhanced cooperation, networking, knowledge sharing, and information exchange.

10. The project has two major **objectives**:

(a) To increase the capacity of SACEP member countries to establish and maintain national clearing-house mechanisms that provide effective information services to facilitate the implementation of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans;

(b) To establish a sustainable regional clearing-house mechanism on biodiversity for South Asia that links together its national clearing-house mechanisms and provides a forum for regional cooperation within SACEP member countries.

11. **Project governance** will be assured by the SACEP Governing Council, which will have the ultimate decision-making authority for the project, including for its strategic mandate and funding. The project will be executed by SACEP, which will designate a **project manager** responsible for day-to-day operations and for product delivery.

12. The project would have the following **deliverables**:

(a) A strategic document, including the site objectives and target audience, the recommended information architecture, and the content management strategy;

(b) The list of web pages with their purpose;

(c) The identification and compilation of corresponding information, such as a list of related websites and online references;

(d) The minimal visual elements including branding, banner, logo and typography;

(e) The initial setup on a host server, using the European CHM toolkit;

(f) The gradual creation of the web pages;

(g) The collection of web usage feedback and analytics;

(h) Information updates on a regular basis.

13. In considering the above items, the primary focus will remain on effectiveness and quality rather than on quantity. It is better to have 10 web pages that users visit frequently rather than 200 pages with no added value to anyone.

14. One of the objectives of the capacity-building workshop will be to determine which content should be made available on the regional and national CHM websites based on available resources. Suggestions for content include:

- (a) Status of biodiversity, ecosystems and threats in the region;
- (b) Major reports and references;
- (c) National targets;
- (d) Maps with biodiversity information;
- (e) List of centres of excellence/specialized organizations;
- (f) List of cooperation agencies;
- (g) List of ongoing projects in the region;
- (h) List of biodiversity experts in the region;
- (i) List of information sources.

15. Taking into account the fact that funding has not yet been secured, two project scenarios are being considered:

- (a) A small-scope scenario with existing resources and modest expected benefits;
- (b) A full-scope scenario with additional resources and higher expected benefits.

16. In either scenario, a business case will be prepared to confirm the viability of the project, that is, its expected ability to deliver the expected benefits with the available resources and time frame. Realistically, the project will first focus on the small-scope scenario and will maintain the option of the full-scope scenario to mobilize resources and to adapt swiftly should the opportunity for further funding materialize.

17. The small-scope scenario assumes that the project resources are limited to the project manager being an existing staff member of SACEP who can devote an average of 40 per cent of his or her time (two days a week) to the establishment of a regional clearing-house mechanism at SACEP. Given these limited resources, the project's initial objectives would be reduced as follows:

- (a) Only minimal support could be provided to SACEP member countries, primarily through email exchange; and
- (b) Only a small regional clearing-house mechanism could be established and maintained.

18. The full-scope scenario assumes that a formal cooperation project has been approved by the financial mechanism (Global Environment Facility, GEF) or another donor.

19. Given that each SACEP member country has control over use of its GEF allocation for its national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP), one suggestion to mobilize funding could be to submit a proposal to the SACEP Governing Council recommending that a small percentage of the GEF allocation for the NBSAP from each country be allocated to the SACEP project.

20. In the case of a full-scope scenario, support to national CHM websites will be enhanced by:

- (a) More technical support;
- (b) Common platform with economies of scales;
- (c) Capacity-building workshops to share experiences.

21. In this full-scope scenario, the regional CHM website will be improved thanks to:
- (a) Enhanced visual design to drive user traffic;
 - (b) Enhanced content with more scientific information;
 - (c) A relational database interconnecting various resources;
 - (d) An open information exchange mechanism exposing key information through data feeds and an application programming interface (API) accessible by all SACEP countries;
 - (e) A regional search engine.
