



CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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MEETING OF THE INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its decision VIII/11, the Conference of the Parties has updated the strategic plan of the clearing-house mechanism whose mission is to contribute significantly to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity through the promotion and facilitation of technical and scientific cooperation. This mission is articulated around three major strategic goals aiming at:

- (a) promoting and facilitating scientific and technical cooperation;
- (b) promoting and facilitating the exchange of information;
- (c) establishing a fully operational network of Parties and partners.

2. Despite a detailed programme of work, the clearing-house mechanism is facing a key challenge. How can it effectively and significantly contribute to the implementation of the Convention, given its limited resources? In other words, how can it have the highest impact or added value in its facilitating role?

II. THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM IN A GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY CONTEXT

3. Before attempting to answer these questions, a couple of essential points need to be recalled:

- (a) The original definition of a clearing-house refers to an institution that collects and distributes information. Information dissemination is just one side of this exchange mechanism whose purpose is also to gather relevant information from various sources and organize it in a way that makes it easily accessible to everyone.

- (b) It is important to recall that the clearing-house mechanism is interested only in information that is already in the public domain or in improving the accessibility of other unrestricted information. By definition, confidential information is not meant to be openly available to everyone. This key point was reinforced by decision VIII/11, paragraph 3 whereby the Conference of the Parties invites the Parties to provide free and open access to biodiversity information, in accordance with national and international legislation. Put another way, Parties should make their best efforts to share any information whenever distribution is not restricted.
- (c) The Secretariat is not a scientific institution, nor is it an implementing agency. Scientific information on biodiversity is available from specialized sources and technical cooperation is carried out by international or national organizations. As the role of clearing-house mechanism is to improve access to such relevant information, all these stakeholders are encouraged to become active partners within the clearing-house mechanism network.

4. The strategic questions raised above have to be considered in the current global biodiversity context. Today there is such an abundance of biodiversity cooperation initiatives, information sources and networks around the world that the challenge is to fill the right gaps and benefit from existing initiatives without duplicating them. At the same time, the distributed nature of the clearing-house mechanism has to be taken into account. These questions probably have different answers at each level of the network, namely the national level, the Secretariat level and the partner level. The table below gives an overview of the various roles at each level in order to meet the goals of the clearing-house mechanism.

Goals	SCBD Level	National Level	Partner Level
1. Scientific and technical cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global information on cooperation initiatives and their impacts - Facilitating the matching of supply and demand by exchanging information on needs and opportunities - Promoting North-South, South-South cooperation and other partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination between national biodiversity stakeholders. - Involvement in national strategies and action plans - Inventory of national initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Major cooperation agencies (strategies & links to CBD, procedures, activities)
2. Exchange of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central website - Global compilation and dissemination of information - Global search - On-line collaboration tools (discussion forums, blogs, wikis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compilation of national information on biodiversity - National website - Outreach activities - communication, education and public awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providers of scientific and other relevant information
3. Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links to each network node - Guidelines and standardization - Exchange of CHM experiences - Support to national CHM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Network of national stakeholders - Support to other national CHM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International and regional networks

III. POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND GAPS

5. The following sources of information have been taken into account to analyze potential challenges and gaps faced by the clearing-house mechanism:

- (a) The report of the first independent CHM review covering the pilot phase 1996-1998 (UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/2).
- (b) The report of the second independent CHM review covering the period 2002-2003 (UNEP/CBD/COP/7/INF/12).
- (c) The synthesis of the Third National Reports for Article 17, Exchange of Information and 18, Technical and Scientific Cooperation (UNEP/CHM/CHM/IAC/2007/1/INF/1).
- (d) Comments and advice received by the CHM-IAC, Parties and National Focal Points, including those made by CHM National Focal Points during an informal meeting in Quito, Ecuador on 15 December 2006 (Annex I)
- (e) The report of the brainstorming workshop for the identification of a strategy for the Belgian partnership for the period 2008-2012, held in Brussels, Belgium, 2-3 May 2007 (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/INF/2).
- (f) The experience of the Secretariat.

6. The information provided by those sources converge in terms of challenges faced by the clearing house mechanism, and reveal that some gaps still need to be filled, as summarized below:

- (a) As always, resources are limited and sustainability remains an issue.
- (b) There is still a lack of understanding of the clearing-house concept and its potential benefits. This perception is partly due to the fact that there is no central portal offering true clearing-house services.
- (c) Efforts and resources required for the establishment, maintenance and effective operations of a national clearing-house mechanism are often underestimated, especially at the level of inter-institutional coordination and information management.
- (d) With regard to information exchange, the clearing-house mechanism network suffers from a lack of focus, consistency and standardization, resulting in limited information integration and global exchange.
- (e) The Secretariat and the Parties receive limited feedback on the implementation of the Convention, and to a large extent, remain unaware of the impact of such initiatives.
- (f) So far, information made available by the clearing-house mechanism has not been geared towards the enhanced implementation phase of the Convention. For instance, Parties do not necessarily know where to find specific guidelines or how to exchange experiences.

7. Point (e) was revealed by a detailed look at the third national reports, and more specifically at the sections on Article 17, exchange of information, and Article 18, technical and scientific cooperation. National reports have intrinsic limitations as they are a static snapshot of the status of implementation at a given time. There is no global structured mechanism to assist Parties in planning and reporting on initiatives related to the Convention, and it is difficult to establish links between decisions and related implementation initiatives. Moreover, there is no systematic way of collecting this missing information from other sources, such as the main implementing agencies, major donors, regional institutions, and many governments actively involved in international cooperation. This situation affects the Parties by depriving them of potentially relevant facts that could assist them in making sound decisions. Overall, this is a big knowledge management gap that hampers the effective implementation of the Convention.

IV. PROPOSED VISION TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ENHANCED IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF THE CONVENTION

8. Given the previous section, there is an opportunity for the clearing-house mechanism to play a stronger role in the enhanced implementation phase of the Convention. The vision is to position the clearing-house mechanism as a provider of on-line services that assist Parties in the implementation process. Those services should be need-driven to fill identified gaps. The table below summarizes this service-oriented approach further described in the following sub-sections.

Needs	On-line Services
Parties need access to relevant reference information, such as guidelines, strategies, reports, etc..	Knowledge Base
Parties need to collaborate to share ideas and brainstorm on how to implement the Convention.	Collaboration Tools
Parties need to plan and report on implementation activities.	Planning and Reporting Facility
Parties need to reach out to many audiences, disseminate national information and share their experiences.	National Information and Websites

A. Knowledge Base

9. There is a wealth of reference information such as guidelines, strategies, reports, case-studies and toolkits, that can help Parties implement the Convention. Much of this is produced by Parties themselves, as well as by partner organizations (United Nations agencies, IGOs, NGOs, the private sector and academic institutions). This information is scattered across multiple locations and sources, and Parties do not necessarily know how to access it.

10. In line with activities under its Strategic Goal 2.3. aiming at "making data and information available in support of activities related to the implementation of the Convention", the clearing-house mechanism should initiate a knowledge management initiative to inventory, organize and classify this information with a long-term objective to build an easy-to-access on-line knowledge base on the Convention and its implementation. This knowledge base will grow incrementally, depending on resources made available.

11. Development could start during 2007. A logical starting point will be the compilation of guidelines, toolkits, and case studies related to the implementation of the Convention with a particular focus on national biodiversity strategies and action plans. Parties and partner organizations will be requested to identify and submit relevant information, and the initiative could be undertaken in collaboration with the ongoing efforts being pursued under the Biodiversity Planning Support Programme jointly coordinated by UNEP and UNDP.

12. On-line submission by Parties and partners will be encouraged. The Secretariat will design the on-line system and manage its content. In particular, the Secretariat will ensure that submissions are correctly classified and that appropriate contextual summary information is present to facilitate access to relevant material.

B. Collaboration Tools

13. Parties need to collaborate to share ideas, exchange expertise, seek advice and brainstorm on how to implement the Convention. Discussion forums, blogs and wikis are popular on-line collaboration tools that can connect together National Focal Points, the Secretariat and other Convention stakeholders in a modern and easy way. The characteristics of each tool is summarized below:

- (a) A discussion forum involves many active participants. It is usually structured around key questions and reply threads. Moderation and a time scope are recommended.
- (b) By contrast, a blog (for web log) consist of simple posts to share information on a particular subject. Blog entries are usually created by a single person and displayed in reverse chronological order. Blog readers can provide comments. Many search engines are now specialized in searching blogs.
- (c) A wiki is a website that allows visitors to update content and provide comments. It can be seen as a generalization of a blog where everyone is a potential contributor.

14. Those collaboration tools have an important role to play in complementing other on-line services. For instance they can be used for exchanging experience and seeking advice on the forthcoming fourth national reports. Those reports will be critical for assessing progress towards the 2010 Biodiversity Target. The secretariat has prepared guidelines according to COP decisions and is now developing a reference manual and model report. In this context, a moderated discussion forum or wiki could be established to support the preparation of those reports.

C. Planning and Reporting Facility.

15. In its decision VIII/14, paragraph 10, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish an on-line facility to support national planning and reporting, through the clearing-house mechanism. Annex II is a concept note describing the features of this major on-line service designed to fill some of the gaps identified in Section III.

D. National Information and Websites

16. The new version of the CBD website now contains a section dedicated to country profiles. Besides providing a snapshot of national activities to implement the Convention, these web pages are an entry point to national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), national reports and other country-level information. These pages will be further developed and linked with the network of national clearing house mechanisms (cbd-chm.net) as well as the proposed on-line planning and reporting facility. In the longer term, it is envisaged that the country pages could be directly managed by National Focal Points.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

17. Further to sections III and IV, the following recommendations could be made to strengthen the clearing-house mechanism and enhance its facilitating role in the implementation of the Convention.

A. Secretariat Level

- (a) Clarify the role of the CHM and the long-term vision.
- (b) Strengthen SCBD's capacity for the enhanced implementation phase within the context of the management review (Web Content Manager, Knowledge Management Officer, CHM developer, CHM assistant, etc).
- (c) Adopt a global knowledge management strategy for the CHM (define classifications, common formats, exchange protocols, roles and procedures for managing information).
- (d) Provide standards, guidance and support to Parties willing to establish their national CHM.
- (e) Develop a CHM central portal providing services geared towards the implementation of the Convention (knowledge base, collaboration, planning and reporting, national information).
- (f) Request Parties to provide financial resources to enable the Secretariat to carry out the above activities.

B. National Level

- (a) Incorporate the CHM in the national biodiversity strategy.
- (b) Establish an appropriate national structure (inter-ministerial steering committee).
- (c) Whenever possible, integrate the CHM into existing networks.
- (d) Define roles and responsibilities for collecting and disseminating information, and for outreach activities.
- (e) Identify all relevant information sources at the national level.
- (f) Mobilize resources for managing content (a website without content is like a TV channel without programme).
- (g) Allow National Focal Points to contribute relevant information to a future global CHM on-line system also used for planning and reporting.

C. Partner Level

- (a) Recommend that SCBD's major partners designate a technical contact or focal points for the clearing-house mechanism.
- (b) Build an inventory of relevant databases and other information sources managed by SCBD's major partners.
- (c) Whenever feasible, implement mechanisms to exchange information between SCBD and its partners.
- (d) Collaborate with partners in providing guidance and support to Parties, and in particular with organizations which are present and active at the national level.

*Annex I***COMMENTS AND ADVICE FOR STRENGTHENING THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM (CHM) - QUITO, ECUADOR, 15 DECEMBER 2006***Introduction*

1. This section summarizes the comments and suggestions made by some CHM National Focal Points during an informal coordination meeting held on 15 December 2006.

A. South-South cooperation

2. There is a potential for South-South cooperation between national clearing-house mechanisms of Latin American countries. For instance, Colombia has acquired a strong experience and is ready to share it with other countries in the region. Argentina is quite interested in organizing a national capacity-building workshop which could also be useful to other countries.

3. Another rationale for this willingness to collaborate is the existence of common needs and ecosystems. DarwinNet's successful experience as a bi-national clearing-house mechanism for Peru and Ecuador focusing on dry forest ecosystem is an excellent model which could be replicated for other ecosystems. Along these lines, there are on-going discussions on the possibility to develop a multinational clearing-house mechanism which would cover ecosystems shared by Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. The next step could be the preparation of a project concept for this initiative.

4. In addition, Colombia recommends the creation of a regional directory of experts to facilitate the identification of specialists in certain fields whenever needed.

5. Regarding direct support to other national clearing-house mechanisms, Colombia has shared a lesson learned: support to the development of a national clearing-house is unlikely to be successful if there is no prior strong political willingness from the beneficiary country together with minimal sustainability conditions.

B. Global clearing-house mechanism network

6. The participants support the proposal to group national clearing-house mechanisms under a common Internet domain called "chm-cbd.net" in order to strengthen the feeling of international network. This way, each national clearing-house mechanism could be identified by its ISO 3166-2 country code (eg.: cc.chm-cbd.net where cc is the country code).

7. This common domain can coexist with the web addresses of the national CHM already developed through alias names or mirror sites. It also allows transparent national web hosting by other countries, whenever necessary.

8. The main website of this new domain (www.chm-cbd.net) should offer the following information on national clearing-house mechanisms to exchange experiences and facilitate cooperation:

- Background, description, contacts, photos;
- Technical information on the infrastructure (hardware/software/network);
- Institutional information;

- General recommendations on how to establish or strengthen a national clearing-house mechanism, including suggested job descriptions for staff (coordinator, technical posts, etc.).

9. It is also recommended to develop the human network of the clearing-house mechanism in the following way:

- By maintaining contact information (including technical contacts);
- By mutual support and information exchange;
- By more contacts between the Secretariat and the staff of the national clearing-house mechanisms (coordinators and technical staff).

C. Capacity-building for the clearing-house mechanism

10. The clearing-house mechanism should provide more capacity-building information, such as:

- Options for strengthening national clearing-house mechanisms;
- Guidelines for web design, according to recent standards;
- Guidelines for facilitating the interoperability between national clearing-house mechanisms;
- Best practices or case-studies based on the experience of some national clearing-house mechanisms;
- A list of cooperation offers from institutions or countries to strengthen national clearing-house mechanisms, with contacts for further details.

11. This information should be included in a new version of the toolkit.

D. Secretariat's website

12. The participants support the initiative of the Convention Secretariat to redesign its website and recommend that the following elements be improved:

- Web site navigation;
- Information search;
- Consistency between sections;
- The language which should be more accessible to the general public;
- The introduction to biodiversity which should present descriptions and examples;
- Metadata associated to web pages and documents;
- Translation to make the website available at least in Spanish and French which are important languages for developing countries.

13. The clearing-house mechanism section of the website could be improved by:

- Revising its content;
- A focus on useful information as suggested in section C above;
- Standardizing the logo of the clearing-house mechanism (which could be based on the Colombian version).

Annex II

ON-LINE PLANNING AND REPORTING FACILITY: CONCEPT NOTE

1. In its decision VIII/14, paragraph 10, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish an on-line facility to support national planning and reporting, through the clearing-house mechanism. This on-line facility should be designed to fill the gaps mentioned in Section III. Basically, the proposal is to develop an on-line system with the following features:

- (a) The system will be a central registry for reporting initiatives related to the implementation of the Convention. This registry will be available on-line. Off-line submission mechanisms could be considered if needed.
- (b) Each initiative registered will conform to a common format to be defined by the Secretariat. The format will capture the main elements of an initiative with the understanding that further details could be obtained by contacting the submitter.
- (c) Submission of information by the Parties will be considered part of the normal reporting process. This information will be controlled by the CHM NFP and their assistants in charge of compiling data at the national level. Relevant partner organizations will also be encouraged to submit relevant information.
- (d) The Secretariat would be responsible for providing metadata information connecting initiatives to articles and decisions.
- (e) Only public information will be registered.

2. Each initiative registered will be based on a simple yet flexible common format with the following information items:

- (a) Submitter information (automatic from user account).
- (b) Title, description, objectives.
- (c) Implementing agency / funding agency / beneficiaries.
- (d) Convention-related metadata (thematic area, article, decision, programme of work).
- (e) Timeline & geographical scope.
- (f) Contact information, including e-mail and website.
- (g) Attachments.
- (h) Additional information...

3. Development could start during the second phase of 2007 and a prototype could be demonstrated during 2008, with a progress report at COP-9. The goal is to have a fully operational version for COP-10. Development will be coordinated with UNEP's ongoing initiative to harmonize and promote interoperability among biodiversity related conventions.

4. This system will greatly enhance the visibility of the implementation:

- (a) At the national level, Parties will be able to view their national implementation through their national CHM.
- (b) At the global level, a click on a decision (or a paragraph within it), or an Article of the Convention, or a thematic area, will link to a page showing a list of initiatives.
