



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
UNESCO, Paris, 7 July 2007

REPORT OF THE MEETING

INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity was held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris on Saturday, 7 July 2007.

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

2. The meeting, chaired by Mr. Asghar Fazel, was opened by a representative of the Executive Secretary at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, 7 July 2007. New members and guests were welcome. Then, participants were given the opportunity to introduce themselves.

3. A brief list of participants is available below. Full contact details are available in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/INF/3

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ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

2.1. Adoption of the agenda

4. The provisional agenda prepared by the Executive Secretary (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/1) was submitted to the committee. It was adopted with the agreement that item 3 on the status of implementation of the programme of work which initially consisted of a presentation by the Secretariat, would also include presentations from various partners who wished to present their activities and share their experiences.

2.2. Organization of work

5. The proposed organization of work was adopted with the whole morning session devoted to agenda items 1 to 3 in order to reserve sufficient time for the presentations.

ITEM 3. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

6. Under this item, the Secretariat made a presentation on the status of implementation of the programme of work. The presentation described activities since the last Conference of the Parties, focusing on those in which the Secretariat was involved. Such activities included the development of the new *www.cbd.int* website, technical contribution to the Belgian CHM partnership, the organization of a joint CHM-Article 8(j) capacity-building workshop on networking and information exchange, collaboration with several partners and contributions to various programmes of work. Some concerns were raised regarding the implementation of the CHM programme of work, such as the lack of resources and feedback as well as the need to prioritize activities. The presentation ended with a proposed vision to address Parties' needs.

7. The Executive Secretary came to make an intervention. He emphasized the importance of the Clearing-House Mechanism and congratulated those Parties and partners who have been contributing to its development.

8. The Secretariat's presentation was followed by several additional presentations from various partners:

- (a) Ms. Rania Spyropoulou (European Community) presented the results of the recent EC-CHM workshop held in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 28-29 June 2006. (<http://biodiversity-chm.eea.europa.eu/stories/story960300>)

- (b) Mr. Han de Koeijer (Belgium) presented the results of the recent brainstorming workshop for the identification of a strategy for the Belgian CHM partnership held in Brussels, Belgium, on 2-3 May 2007 (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/INF/2).
- (c) Mr. Patrice Dallaire (OIF/IEPF) presented the experience of Médiaterre as a global online environmental information network in French for the promotion of sustainable development (<http://www.mediatorre.org>).
- (d) Mr. Peter Herkenrath (UNEP-WCMC) presented the current status of the UNEP-WCMC knowledge management project whose purpose is, among others, to provide access to and cross-linkages among strategic documents and information tools of the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements (<http://development.unep-wcmc.org/km>).
- (e) Ms. Beatriz Torres (GBIF) presented the new GBIF data portal providing access to millions of species records by species, countries or datasets (<http://data.gbif.org>).
- (f) Mr. Paul Walberg (Yale University) presented the Online Access to Research in the Environment (OARE), an international public-private consortium which enables developing countries to gain free access to one of the world's largest collections of environmental science literature (<http://www.oaresciences.org>).

ITEM 4. ISSUES FOR IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION

9. Given the limited time left to cover all issues under item 4, the Chair suggested a general discussion to allow each member to express his/her views on all sub-items. The sub-sections below are a synthesis of the main points raised during the discussion.

4.1. Role of the clearing-house mechanism in a global biodiversity context

10. The committee discussed the role of the clearing-house mechanism by attempting to identify the needs from the various audiences. While the main audience remains the Parties implementing the Convention, other audiences include the general public, experts and scientists, indigenous and local communities, and other stakeholders. With respect to these audiences, the link with sub-item 4.7. on education and public awareness programme of work was noted, and it was clear that the clearing-house mechanism should provide an appropriate information exchange platform to support outreach.

11. Some participants referred to section IV of document UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/3, proposing four types of on-line services to address Parties' needs, and assist them in implementing the Convention:

- (a) A knowledge base to provide relevant reference information.
- (b) Collaboration tools to share ideas and experience in an informal and easy way.
- (c) A planning and reporting facility to complement the NBSAPs and national reports.
- (d) The network of national information and websites to disseminate information.

12. As a promoter of information exchange, the clearing-house mechanism should strengthen its role by identifying and evaluating major relevant information sources, and increasing their visibility. This should be done both at the global level via the central portal, and at the national level via the national clearing-house mechanisms.

13. The role of the clearing-house mechanism as a facilitator of scientific and technical cooperation, including in the field of technology transfer, was re-emphasized. At the same time, the committee acknowledged the complexity of the issue, and recommended to work in collaboration with the *Ad hoc* Technical Expert Group on Technology Transfer.

14. The clearing-house mechanism has also a strategic role to play in further developing and consolidating its own network of national clearing-house mechanisms. This could be done not only through direct-capacity building initiatives such as training workshops, but also through other means such as providing guidance, establishing standards, developing tools, promoting consistency and encouraging collaboration. Those points are further detailed in the next sub-items.

15. Another key point was about raising awareness on the clearing-house mechanism. National decision makers should be aware of the potential benefits of a national clearing-house mechanism in order to support its development. Furthermore, all stakeholders should know that this mechanism exists as a valuable source of information. Appropriate marketing and branding should be considered, especially in non English-speaking countries where the concept of "clearing-house" is not trivial.

16. Last but not least, the importance of feedback was stressed by the participants, as a bottom-up complement to the top-down decision process. Feedback could be extremely useful to assess the effectiveness of the clearing-house mechanism and determine where further improvements are needed. User feedback could be on any aspect of the clearing-house mechanism, including its presentation, content, services, data, or information sources.

4.2. *The network of national clearing-house mechanisms and international partners*

17. The committee recognised the need to strengthen the network of national clearing-house mechanisms and welcomed initiatives to do so. The contribution of the Belgian CHM partnership was highlighted, not only for its past achievements but also for its renewed commitment for the future based on feedback from partner countries. Morocco mentioned its intention to work with the Arab League to encourage other Arab countries to join the CHM network.

18. Several ways or of strengthening the network of national clearing-house mechanism were recommended:

- (a) The single-domain pilot initiative, consisting of making national CHM websites available under the *chm-cbd.net* domain should be pursued to include more countries. A portal should be developed to promote this network, to give more visibility to the national websites, and to facilitate the exchange of information between countries.
- (b) The network would also benefit from further harmonization and consistency. This could be done through the preparation of global guidelines (ie. menu items, terminology, look & feel) and the adoption of common formats and standards. At the same time, this harmonization process should remain flexible in order not to affect national diversity and creativity.
- (c) An effort should be made to create linkages between the global, regional and national levels of the clearing-house mechanism. For instance, the use of global services or databases at the national level should be promoted whenever feasible. All partners attending the meeting (GBIF, IABIN, Médiaterre, OARE and UNEP-WCMC) have expressed their interest in further collaboration along those lines.

4.3. *The central portal of the clearing-house mechanism and the Convention website*

19. The new version of the Convention website was welcomed, including the move to the *cbd.int* domain. Several suggestions were made for further improvements:

- (a) The need for translation into major UN languages was emphasized, especially to make the website more accessible to many developing countries. The Secretariat indicated its intention to initiate this process with its current limited resources.

- (b) There is currently no clear distinction between the central portal of the clearing-house mechanism and the Convention website, which is confusing for some users. A distinct portal would help clarify the role and services of the clearing-house mechanism.
- (c) The clearing-house mechanism should enhance the visibility of major relevant information sources by bringing together information from existing biodiversity-related portals and databases. Doing so would complement the existing information mostly related to the Convention.

4.4. *Advanced information-exchange mechanisms*

20. RSS feeds and data aggregation were mentioned as very useful information exchange mechanisms. Some countries and partners already make use of those mechanisms which should be promoted at the global level of the clearing-house mechanism. The issue of filtering harvested information was also raised.

21. The importance of common formats, protocols and standards was reiterated. As an example, IABIN provided information on their standards and protocols. There is a need to define and promote a global information exchange mechanism to facilitate the exchange of information between members of the clearing-house mechanism network.

4.5. *Capacity-building activities, tools and services*

22. The conclusions and recommendations of the brainstorming workshop on the identification of a strategy for the Belgian CHM partnership for the period 2008-2012, held in Brussels, Belgium on 2-3 May 2007 (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/INF/2, Section 9), call for a flexible approach to capacity-building to adapt well to various needs. They also stress the fact that partnership activities will be useful and sustainable only if effective cooperation and collaboration among various actors, as well as a long-term vision, exist at the national level. The report contains the following recommendations in order to create conditions favourable to such an approach.

To improve the efficiency and visibility of the CHM:

- (a) Develop a national CHM implementation strategy or develop a strategy for CHM implementation as a part of the National Biodiversity Strategy.
- (b) Develop a communication strategy targeting decision-makers.
- (c) Increase collaboration among national partners through, for example, the integration of the CHM in existing networks or those under development.
- (d) Identify the roles and responsibilities of each national partner in regard to the collection, dissemination and use of information in order to raise awareness.
- (e) Reinforce the concept of clearing-house by encouraging focal points and other national partners to contribute information to the CHM.
- (f) Integrate the CHM in the sections of biodiversity-related projects related to themes of “dissemination” or “communication” in order to ensure that the CHM is a part of the distributed project results.

For the CHM Partnership:

- (g) Develop guidelines and training modules to assist countries with the installation and development of their national CHM.
 - (h) Offer training programmes that respond to the specific needs of partners.
 - (i) Assist partners in evolving with new information technology. The European Community's CHM Portal Toolkit (PTK) is a tool that can be used in this regard.
 - (j) Reinforce networking among the national CHMs, thereby stimulating collaboration and facilitating information exchange through the use of modern communication tools.
 - (k) Assist with capacity-building related to infrastructure through the transfer of technology.
 - (l) Assist in the development of databases through inventorying existing databases and those of potential use at all levels (international, national, local), directing partners to databases that best respond to their needs or, given the situation, possibly creating new databases and integrating them within the CHM site.
 - (m) Assist with the implementation of the Convention through non web-related activities.
23. The discussions reinforced some of these recommendations:
- (a) The Secretariat will work on a new version of its CHM toolkit to assist countries in the development of their national CHM.
 - (b) The European Community confirmed its commitment to support and upgrade the European Portal Toolkit to respond to users' needs.
 - (c) The case of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was mentioned as an example where capacity-building should be adapted to specific needs.
 - (d) Further collaboration with partner organizations (such as GBIF, IABIN, Médiaterre, OARE and UNEP-WCMC) should result in synergies and a wider range of services available to national CHMs.
 - (e) The visibility and accessibility of scientific information should be increased for the benefit of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
 - (f) A summary of all decisions related to the clearing-house mechanism would be a useful reference for CHM national focal points.

4.6. *Transfer of technology and technology cooperation*

24. The committee recalled the role of the clearing-house mechanism in supporting the implementation of the programme of work on technology transfer and technology cooperation. In particular, Germany referred to its views submitted to the Secretariat in preparation for the forthcoming meeting of the *Ad hoc* Technical Expert Group on Technology Transfer and Scientific and Technological Cooperation to be held in Geneva Switzerland on 10-12 September 2007 (available in document UNEP/CBD/AHTEG-TTSTC/INF/1). As far as information systems are concerned, these views recommend that the clearing-house mechanism be developed to disseminate information on technologies and best practices in technology transfer relevant to the Convention. They also stress the fact that any development in that direction should be based on concrete needs and expectations from Parties and future users.

25. The Secretariat also mentioned its plan to enhance its existing information database on technology transfer and cooperation by including additional information from external sources. That initiative will be carried out in collaboration with a few partners willing to share their information with the Secretariat.

4.7. Communication, education and public awareness

26. It is clear the clearing-house mechanism has an important role to play in the implementation of the programme of work on communication, education and public awareness. Close collaboration between CHM and CEPA actors is required at all global and national levels (Secretariat, CHM-IAC & CEPA-IAC, National Focal Points) to define and implement a coherent and appropriate communication strategy to address each target audience. Examples could include:

- (a) Disseminating global key messages to raise awareness of the general public, taking into account the need to adapt those messages to national and cultural environments.
- (b) Promoting collaborative and educational tools.
- (c) Providing guidance and relevant information to national focal points and other national stakeholders.
- (d) Making relevant references and/or scientific information available to experts and scientists.
- (e) Reaching out to major groups such as indigenous and local communities, the business sector, the youth, or the press and media.

27. The committee highlighted the need to provide content that can easily catch the attention and interest of the target audiences. The use of GBO2 graphics or other multimedia materials was suggested.

4.8. Additional issues

28. No additional technical issues were raised under this sub-item.

ITEM 5. MATTERS RELATED TO THE INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

29. Under this item, the members discussed the role of Informal Advisory Committee (CHM-IAC) and the strategy to adopt for its future. The general view was that the CHM-IAC is a useful body to guide the CHM, but that its effectiveness could be improved in various ways:

- (a) The mandate of the CHM-IAC is to provide guidance to the Executive Secretary. Therefore meetings should be geared towards this objective, in order to make recommendations and provide specific advice, while avoiding general discussions without outcomes. Agenda items should be prepared along those lines with a clear focus and the allocation of sufficient time for in-depth discussion.
- (b) The CHM-IAC should have a closer look at the strategic plan of the clearing-house mechanism, and make recommendations on how to implement it given limited available resources.
- (c) CHM-IAC members need to interact more between the meetings in order to prepare the work and follow up on the recommendations. The committee recommended to reactivate the CHM-IAC forum to facilitate this interaction.
- (d) The absence of funding has negative impacts on the CHM-IAC. First, participants need to attend at their own cost, which is a barrier to the participation of developing countries. Second, meetings are always limited to one day, which is often not enough to cover all major issues. Finally, there is always some uncertainty as to when a meeting could take place.

30. The committee recommended that an information note on the CHM-IAC be submitted to the ninth Conference of the Parties, taking into account the views of the Parties. A first draft could be discussed at the next CHM-IAC meeting tentatively scheduled for 17 February 2007. The committee took note of the fact that this tentative meeting has not yet been confirmed.

31. Regarding membership, the committee recommended to improve regional balance by including more representatives from developing countries, economies in transitions, and small island developing states.

ITEM 6. OTHER MATTERS

32. No other matters were raised by the participants.

ITEM 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

33. Based on the discussions and the draft recommendations contained in section V of document UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2007/1/3, the committee supports the following general recommendations for the development of the clearing-house mechanism:

At the Secretariat level:

- (a) Clarify the role of the CHM and its 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.

At the national level:

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

At the partner level:

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

34. In addition, some comments and recommendations on the clearing-house mechanism were provided by Mr. Tom Hammond (IUCN) on 8 August 2007. They are available in Annex I.

ITEM 8. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

35. The meeting was closed at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, 7 July 2007.

ANNEX I - COMMENTS FROM IUCN

Comments provided by Mr. Tom Hammond (IUCN) on 8 August 2007

1. As the discussion during the meeting identified, the CHM has always struggled with a lack of resources. I think the reason we still have a CHM in my view, with a Programme of Work and a committed group of people on the CHM-IAC, is that there remains an unfulfilled vision and need for a place (or mechanism) where practitioners, decision makers, policy analysts, and the public can go to obtain easily understandable and useable information (and data where necessary) on biodiversity and its conservation.

2. There are a great many Parties and non-Parties that are making a contribution to this vision at present. I would submit, therefore, that the notion that the CHM can be a one stop shop for any information (or data) a user may require on biodiversity is probably no longer valid. I believe the fundamental question for the CMH is the particular niche it occupies in this context, and how it can help facilitate progress towards this vision.

3. The key niche the CHM occupies in my view is its formal link to departments within national governments responsible for biodiversity conservation. No other organization or entity involved with biodiversity conservation has this established network with these players. IUCN and GBIF have established networks with governments, but definitely not to the extent of the SCBD-CHM. The challenge, therefore, is how best to leverage the resources and information of this network that the CHM is uniquely at the centre of and put it to use for conservation. [Note - the other valuable role of the CHM, of course, is being a clearing house and repository for all official documentation related to the work of the Secretariat - and this function is being performed very well].

4. I don't have a simple answer for moving forward on this, but by concentrating efforts on the CHM's particular niche and value added (I believe) will help to focus actions (and progress on results). The current weaknesses of the CHM and IAC are well documented – and many are touched upon in your report. But an additional weakness of this process (in my view) is the tendency in our discussions to be drawn off onto tangents which are clearly not within (at least in my view) the unique niche or value added of the CHM – although these may well be making valuable contributions to our knowledge of biodiversity and its conservation.

5. I'll also repeat my suggestion (noting, of course, our e-mail exchange before the meeting) of bifurcating the CHM-IAC into 2 specialist groups - specifically an information group and a capacity building group respectively. I think this would assist in bringing greater focus and clarity to the work of the IAC.
