



Convention on Biological Diversity

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/2/2

24 October 2014

ENGLISH ONLY

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

Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, 5 October 2014

REPORT OF THE MEETING

INTRODUCTION

General information

1. The meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CHM-IAC) was held in the Bobsleigh and Biathlon room of the Alpensia Convention Center on Sunday, 5 October 2014, in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, prior to the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 12). The documentation of the meeting is available online at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=CHMIAC-2014-02. The list of participants is available in annex II below.

Background

2. The Conference of the Parties, in decision X/15, adopted the mission, goals and objectives of the clearing-house mechanism for the period 2011-2020, and in paragraph 11 of decision XI/2 welcomed the work programme for the clearing-house mechanism in support of implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 (UNEP/CBD/COP/11/31) and agreed to keep this work programme under review.

3. The previous meeting of the informal advisory committee to the clearing-house mechanism (CHM-IAC) was held on 13-14 June 2014, in Montreal, Canada, to review the progress made on the clearing-house mechanism. The report of this meeting (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/1/2) includes recommendations to the Executive Secretary.

4. At its fifth meeting (WGRI 5), the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention adopted recommendation 5/11 C after consideration of a progress report on the clearing-house mechanism (UNEP/CBD/WGRI/5/3/Add.2).

5. In preparation for the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12), the Executive Secretary prepared a progress report on technical and scientific cooperation and the clearing-house mechanism (UNEP/CBD/COP/12/11) as well as an information note providing additional information on progress on the clearing-house mechanism (UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/2).

Expected outcome

6. The main purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the implementation of the work programme for the clearing-house mechanism as well as on the guidance of the Committee to the Executive Secretary in light of recent recommendations on the clearing-house mechanism. The meeting was also an opportunity to share views on the clearing-house mechanism prior to the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

7. The meeting started at 9.30 a.m. on 5 October 2014. Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) opened the meeting on behalf of the Executive Secretary. The Chair, Mr. Han de Koeijer (Belgium) also welcomed all participants. The participants then introduced themselves through a tour de table. The Executive Secretary briefly joined the end of the morning session to welcome the Committee members and share some views with them.

ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

2.1. Adoption of the agenda

8. The Committee adopted the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/2/1) prepared by the Executive Secretary.

2.2. Organization of work

9. The Committee adopted the proposed organization of work as described in annex I of the annotations to the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/2/1/Add.1).

ITEM 3. REVIEW OF LATEST RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

10. This item started with a presentation made by Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) to recap the latest recommendations related to the clearing-house mechanism, including:

(a) The recommendations contained in annex II of the report of the June 2014 meeting of the informal advisory committee to the clearing-house mechanism (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/1/2);

(b) Recommendation 5/11 C adopted by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention at its fifth meeting;

(c) Elements related to the clearing-house mechanism that are included in other recommendations from the fifth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention (WGRI 5), the eighteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 18) and the third meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee on the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing (ICNP 3).

11. A brief discussion followed the presentation, and views were exchanged about the importance of particular recommendations, including those related to online reporting, the development of national clearing-house mechanisms and the web strategy.

ITEM 4. ISSUES FOR IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION

12. The following issues were discussed by the Committee:

- (a) Online reporting tool;
- (b) Common formats;
- (c) Interoperability;
- (d) Web strategy;
- (e) Award for national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (f) Support to national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (g) Additional issues.

4.1. Online reporting tool

13. This item started with a presentation made by Ms. Kata Koppel (CBD Secretariat). She demonstrated the main features of the pilot online reporting system being developed by the CBD Secretariat and available at <http://chm.cbd.int>. After the demonstration, the Committee was invited to provide comments on this system.

14. Ms. Fanny Lendi Ramirez (France) said that one of the underlying principles of the European reporting framework was to “report once and use many times”. She suggested adoption of a coordinated approach that took into consideration existing national and regional reporting processes.

15. Mr. Marcos Silva (MEA IKM Initiative and CITES Secretariat) informed the Committee that five multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) had online reporting systems either operational or under development. He said that biodiversity-related conventions should consider the possible alignment of their reporting frameworks to contribute to global reporting on biodiversity, in line with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. He also mentioned that the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) would be organizing a meeting soon, to be held 15-16 December 2014 at the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Geneva, to discuss interoperability of MEA reporting systems, thanks to support from the Swiss Government.

16. Some Committee members requested clarifications about notification 2014-107 (Ref. no. SCBD/SAM/NR/LC/83832) sent by the CBD Secretariat on 26 August 2014, which asked Parties to nominate, by 22 September 2014, National Report Focal Point and National Authorized User(s) for the new online reporting system. Mr. Robert Höft (CBD Secretariat) explained that the purpose of this notification was to ask Parties to confirm who had the authority to publish national reports as well as other official information related to national planning and reporting, such as national targets and indicators. He also clarified that the new national focal point for national reports could well be the existing national CHM focal point if a Party decided so. The Committee proposed that a new notification be sent out to Parties to provide further clarifications.

17. Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo (CBD Secretariat) provided some background on the new pilot online reporting system. He explained that it was built based on the successful experience of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

18. Several Committee members expressed their willingness to have access to this pilot system in order to learn more about it and to provide feedback for improvements.

19. Overall, the Committee recommended thinking strategically about the further development of the system. It is important to have clarity not only about the type of information that the system will contain, but also about how this information is going to be used and analysed to provide meaningful information on progress toward the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

4.2. Common formats

20. The current common formats and metadata developed for the new version of the central clearing-house mechanism are described in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/1/INF/1.¹ Under this item, the Committee was kindly requested to provide comments for their further development.

21. The Committee noted that, to define appropriate common formats, it was important to know how the information would be searched and used in order to determine which fields and metadata were needed. For instance, if the objective was to aggregate a certain type of information over time by target, region, or actor, then the corresponding common format should be designed accordingly.

22. The Committee also indicated that a few new common formats may be needed to implement some of the forthcoming decisions arising from COP 12. Therefore, the Committee recommended extending the period to provide comments on these formats and expressed its interest in remaining involved in their definition and future evolution.

4.3. Interoperability

23. Interoperability is a critical aspect for the implementation of paragraph 14 (a) of decision XI/2 which requested the Executive Secretary to establish a standard information-exchange mechanism for the clearing-house mechanism to interconnect the central and national clearing-house mechanisms, where possible. The importance of such interoperability was reiterated in recommendations A.4, A.5 and C.4 made during the previous meeting of the Committee. Under this item, the Committee was invited to review the current status of interoperability for the clearing-house mechanism.

24. Part of the discussion under this item was to answer the following questions raised by some Committee members:

- (a) What is the difference between a web page link (hyperlink) and interoperability?
- (b) Why does the clearing-house mechanism need interoperability?
- (c) What should the scope of such interoperability be?

25. Two websites can be linked with an hyperlink. This means that a web user following such a link leaves the first website to reach the second one. Interoperability makes it possible to display on the first website the information from the second one. The user can then get the whole information without having to navigate from one site to another. One of the advantages of interoperability over hyperlinks is the possibility to display the same information on several websites without having to duplicate data entry.

¹ See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/chm/chmiac-2014-01/information/chmiac-2014-01-inf-01-en.pdf>.

26. In the context of the clearing-house mechanism, such interoperability is desirable at two levels:
- (a) Between the central and national clearing-house mechanisms, because some national information (e.g. national focal points, national targets, etc.) is expected to appear at the country level and at the central level;
 - (b) Between the InforMEA website and each MEA Secretariat website, because the purpose of InforMEA is to provide a one-stop window for key MEA information (e.g. Parties, national focal points, decisions, etc.).
27. In each of the two above cases, the scope of interoperability is determined by the information expected to appear on both sites. For the interoperability between the central and national clearing-house mechanisms, this information includes national focal points, national reports, national biodiversity strategies and action plans, national targets and national indicators.
28. Mr. Benoît Nizigidahera (Burundi) recommended that interoperability between the central and national clearing-house mechanisms be integrated into the European Portal Toolkit (PTK) because this toolkit was used by many national clearing-house mechanisms.
29. Mr. Marcos Silva (MEA IKM Initiative and CITES Secretariat) mentioned that the interoperability mechanism used by InforMEA was the result of a collaborative process among the members of the MEA Information and Knowledge Management (MEA IKM) Initiative.
30. Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo (CBD Secretariat) said that the CBD Secretariat had implemented interoperability through an application programming interface (API) which was currently used internally. He added that this API was not yet publicly released because it was not yet documented. Mr. Han de Koeijer recommended that this API be released as soon as possible so that Parties could start testing it, at least with a simple test case to share with national focal points. Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo said that this would depend on the priority given to this activity. The CBD Secretariat was reminded that this activity was requested in decision XI/2, and that it was likely to be requested again in a forthcoming COP 12 decision.
31. The direction of the data flow was also discussed. Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo explained that the API developed by the CBD Secretariat allowed the retrieval of data stored at the central level. This was the scenario where the master data was updated on the central clearing-house mechanism, and national clearing-house mechanisms used the API to query this data in order to display it on their national websites.
32. Mr. Jerry Harrison (UNEP-WCMC) mentioned that when a national reporting system was in place, the master data would be updated at the national level and the interoperability mechanism should allow the transfer of such data to the central clearing-house mechanism. Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo said that this approach would be more complex to implement.

4.4. *Web strategy*

33. In paragraph 5 of WGRI recommendation 5/11 C, the Executive Secretary is requested to develop a web strategy to ensure that all information common or relevant to the clearing-house mechanism, the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House and the Biosafety Clearing-House, as well as other platforms developed under the Convention, can be accessed centrally to avoid duplication of efforts. This recommendation is in line with activity 1.2.1 of the CHM work programme. In addition, this strategy should take into account the ongoing functional review of the CBD Secretariat (see UNEP/CBD/COP/12/28 and UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/26). Under this item, the Committee was invited to discuss this request with a view to providing some guidance to the Executive Secretary.

34. The Committee first acknowledged that there were indeed a number of online systems and web-based services resulting from various decisions and initiatives, and that it would be a good idea to think about a strategic approach to increase coherence and avoid duplication. The Committee expressed its willingness to assist the Executive Secretary in this endeavor. It was suggested that the CBD Secretariat could first prepare an outline that would be shared with the Committee for comments. The Committee would then provide further inputs to help prepare the first draft of the web strategy.

4.5. *Award for national clearing-house mechanisms*

35. At its previous meeting, the Committee recommended that an award for the best national clearing-house mechanisms be established at the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 12) based on the proposal in annex III of document UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2014/1/2.

36. The attention of the Committee was drawn to the fact that the current draft decision on the CHM had no mention of such an initiative. Given the high number of requests made to the Executive Secretary, there was a risk that this initiative would not be carried out if it was not part of the decision. Further to this comment, several options were discussed by the Committee, including the possible addition of this recommendation to the forthcoming decision on the clearing-house mechanism, its consideration by the COP Bureau or by the Government of the Republic of Korea in the context of the forthcoming Pyeongchang Roadmap. The Committee recommended that the CBD Secretariat follow up on these options.

4.6. *Support to national clearing-house mechanisms*

37. Paragraph 2 of WGRI recommendation 5/11 C strongly encourages Parties to accelerate the establishment and development of their national clearing-house mechanisms where they have not done so. According to objective 2.5 in decision X/15, partners and the CBD Secretariat should support the development of these clearing-house mechanisms. Under this item, the Committee was invited to discuss ways and means to provide this support, taking into account relevant past recommendations.

38. The Committee recommended that the priority should be to assist Parties that have not yet established their national clearing-house mechanisms. Some advice was also given on how to provide such assistance, as described in the following paragraphs.

39. First, an assessment of the situation of each country or region would be useful in order to identify needs and barriers to the establishment and maintenance of an effective national clearing-house mechanism. There should also be some kind of monitoring over time to keep track of the progress and evolution of national clearing-house mechanisms. In this context, contacts with CHM national focal points are encouraged, including through modern communications tools.

40. Parties with no clearing-house mechanism would benefit from a tool allowing them to quickly establish one. Such a tool should therefore be made available, taking into account the range of tools that exist and could be customized to meet this goal.

41. Whenever possible, partnerships and technical and scientific cooperation are encouraged in order to support the establishment of national clearing-house mechanisms. Mr. Benoît Nzigidahera (Burundi) said that his country and some others would probably not have been in a position to establish their national clearing-house mechanism without the support of the Belgian cooperation. Mr. Hesiquio Benítez was pleased to share with the Committee that three scientific institutions, each of them hosting the national clearing-house mechanism of their respective country, namely the Alexander von Humboldt Institute in Colombia, INBio in Costa Rica and CONABIO in Mexico, had signed a South-South cooperation agreement.

42. Mr. Han de Koeijer (Belgium) added that as a follow-up to the capacity-building workshop held in May 2014 in Buea, Cameroon, some participating countries were eligible for support from Belgium provided that they submit a request for such support. He also emphasized that it was essential for a country to establish a good network of contributors in order to collect information and keep the national clearing-house mechanism content up-to-date.

4.7. Additional issues

43. Under this sub-item, the Committee was invited to raise and discuss any relevant issues not covered under the previous sub-items. The issue of collaboration with partners was raised and the Committee was reminded that the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) would take place in January 2015. It was suggested that Committee members who were also members of the two IPBES task forces (one on capacity-building and one on knowledge and data) should take advantages of this meeting to seek opportunities for further collaboration.

ITEM 5. OTHER MATTERS

44. Under this item, the Committee was invited to raise and consider any other matters. Two points were brought to the attention of the Committee, noted below.

45. The first point was about planning the next meetings of the Committee. It was suggested to follow the recommendation, made at the 2012 meeting of the Committee, that two meetings be held during the intersessional period before the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13), as proposed below:

(a) One meeting a few months after COP 12 to determine how the CHM could best contribute to the implementation of the adopted decisions (3 to 6 months after COP 12);

(b) One meeting to review the progress made and to make recommendations which can then be taken into account when drafting the next COP decisions (6 to 9 months before COP 13).

46. The second point was related to the CHM side event to be held on 8 October 2014. Some suggestions were made to make it as interesting as possible, including by streamlining the content, demonstrating the use of the new online tool, involving some Parties, and leaving sufficient time for questions and answers at the end.

ITEM 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

47. Before closing the meeting, the main conclusions and recommendations arising from the discussion were recapped. The recommendations addressed to the Executive Secretary are available in annex I.

ITEM 7. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

48. The meeting was closed at 4.30 p.m. on 5 October 2014.

*Annex I***RECOMMENDATIONS**

This annex contains the recommendations arising from the meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM-IAC) which took place on 5 October 2014 in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea. These recommendations are addressed to the Executive Secretary and complement those made at the CHM-IAC meeting held in June 2014 in Montreal.

1. Grant the Committee members full access to the pilot version of the online reporting tool in order to allow them to test it appropriately and provide feedback for improvements;
2. Make the new application programming interface (API) publicly available to Parties as soon as possible in order to allow them to test it and provide feedback on it;
3. Prepare a draft outline of the future web strategy and share it with the Committee for initial comments;
4. Proceed with the process to grant an award for the best national clearing-house mechanisms;
5. Prioritize the support to Parties on the clearing-house mechanism by targeting those that have not yet established their national clearing-house mechanism.

Annex II

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