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

Cancun, Mexico, 3 December 2016

REPORT OF THE INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ON ITS MEETING OF 3 DECEMBER 2016

I. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Award for national clearing-house mechanisms

1. Analyze the information provided by Parties having responded to the questionnaires sent on the CHM award with a view to preparing case studies on national CHMs with some best practices, lessons learned or success stories, taking into account feedback from the jury.
2. Prepare, in collaboration with the CHM-IAC, the modalities for the CHM Awards to be granted at COP 14, taking into account the following feedback from the first CHM Award process:
 - (a) Some Parties did not answer the CHM Award questionnaires.
 - (b) Reviewing the submissions was a time-consuming exercise for the jury members.
 - (c) Some jury members did not fully participate due to other commitments.
 - (d) Information on national CHMs should be captured in a more harmonized way in order to facilitate its review by the jury.
 - (e) The differences between developed and developing countries, and between true national CHMs and ministerial websites, were not sufficiently taken into account.

Online reporting tool

3. Align the online reporting tool with the reporting templates for the sixth national reports adopted by the Conference of the Parties.
4. Invite the CHM-IAC to test the online reporting tool for the sixth national report and provide feedback for improvements.
5. Continue the ongoing work to interconnect the CBD online reporting tool and the Target Cross-linking Tool (TCT) in collaboration with the European Union.

Technical and scientific cooperation, including the Bio-Bridge Initiative (BBI)

6. Implement the web-platform for the Bio-Bridge Initiative.
7. Invite the CHM-IAC to test the web-platform for the Bio-bridge Initiative when it is available.

Web strategy and communication strategy

8. Update the web strategy by including web-related deliverables arising from decisions adopted by COP 13, Nagoya Protocol COP-MOP 2 and Cartagena Protocol COP-MOP 8.
9. Implement the web strategy for the Convention and its Protocols, in line with the communication strategy.

Support for national clearing-house mechanisms

10. Inform Parties of the availability of the Bioland tool and propose a phased approach to those interested in using this tool to establish their national CHM (e.g. trial period, adoption, content preparation, launch).
11. Continue to provide training sessions on the Bioland tool during CHM capacity-building workshops.
12. Further enhance the Bioland tool based on Parties' feedback and advice from the CHM-IAC.
13. Proceed with the ongoing work to upgrade the existing CHM Portal Tool Kit (CHM-PTK) with a view to providing a unified modern platform for national CHMs.
14. Provide guidance to Parties whose national CHM is built with the WordPress, Joomla! or Drupal content management systems on how to make the content of their national CHM openly accessible in a way that is compatible with and searchable through the CHM network.
15. Compile a list of existing metadata standards relevant to national CHMs.
16. Continue to collaborate with relevant partners and initiatives with a view to facilitating access to national biodiversity-related information through national CHMs.

Interoperability

17. Maintain interoperability between the CBD Secretariat and InforMEA and further collaborate with the MEA-IKM initiative with a view to enhancing such interoperability.
18. Improve the CBD Application Programming Interface (API) by:
 - (a) Clarifying the usage of its various versions (e.g. v.2013 and more recent);
 - (b) Improving its overall user-friendliness and consistency;
 - (c) Always making available the unique identifier (id) and date of last update (updated) of each record, particularly for national records;
 - (d) Further documenting it, including through demonstration examples.
19. Invite the CHM-IAC to test any new version of the API and provide feedback for improvements.

Decision-tracking tool

20. Further develop the decision-tracking tool and invite the CHM-IAC to provide feedback for improvements.

CHM-IAC meeting

21. Consider planning the next CHM-IAC meeting as a two-day meeting allowing full participation of all members, while keeping the meeting back-to-back with a major CBD meeting.

II. ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS

General information

1. The meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM-IAC) of the Convention on Biological Diversity was held at the Moon Palace in Cancun, Mexico, on Saturday 3 December 2016, prior to the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13). The meeting documents are available online at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=chmiac-2016-02. The list of participants is annexed.

Background

2. In decision X/15, the Conference of the Parties adopted the mission, goals and objectives of the clearing-house mechanism for the period 2011-2020. In paragraph 11 of decision XI/2 B, it 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)¹ and agreed to keep this work programme under review. More recently, in section 3 of decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties made a number of requests concerning the clearing-house mechanism.

3. The previous meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism was held in Montreal, Canada, on 1 May 2016 to review progress made on the clearing-house mechanism. The report of that meeting (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2016/1/2), including recommendations to the Executive Secretary, is available online at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=chmiac-2016-01.

4. At the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the clearing-house mechanism was included under agenda item 12 (Other means of implementation: enhancement of capacity--building, technical and scientific cooperation and other initiatives to assist implementation). The above-mentioned meeting documents include the documents related to agenda item 12.

Expected outcome

5. The main purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the progress made on the clearing-house mechanism in the light of decision XII/2 B, as well as the guidance of the Committee to the Executive Secretary. The meeting was also an opportunity to share views on the clearing-house mechanism prior to the opening of the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

6. The meeting was opened at 8.30 a.m. on 3 December 2016. Mr. Ravi Sharma, Head of Implementation Support, opened the meeting on behalf of the Executive Secretary and welcomed all participants. In his opening statement, he mentioned that the meeting was an opportunity to review the overall progress made since the previous Conference of the Parties and to have a fruitful discussion in preparation for agenda item 12 on means to enhance implementation. He then made a few remarks on the agenda. Regarding the CHM award, he thanked the jury members who dedicated time to review the national clearing-house mechanisms. He reminded participants about the forthcoming award ceremony to be held on Friday 9 December, and invited the Committee to already provide advice for the next CHM Award process. He mentioned the progress made in various areas, including the online reporting tool, Bio-Bridge Initiative, the web and communication strategies, interoperability and the support to national

¹ See <https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-11/official/cop-11-31-en.pdf>

clearing-house mechanisms. Finally he indicated that the advice from the committee would be very useful as initial guidance to the upcoming Executive Secretary who would take office in early 2017.

7. The Chair of the meeting, Mr. Han de Koeijer (Belgium), then called for a tour de table in order to give participants the opportunity to introduce themselves. He also conveyed the regrets of the participants who could not attend.

ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

2.1. Adoption of the agenda

8. The Committee adopted the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2016/2/1) prepared by the Executive Secretary in consultation with the Chair.

2.2. Organization of work

9. The Committee adopted the proposed organization of work, as proposed in annex I of the annotations to the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/CHM/IAC/2016/2/1/Add.1).

ITEM 3. ISSUES FOR IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION

10. The Committee was invited to consider the following key issues for an in-depth discussion, while additional relevant issues could be raised and discussed at the end of this agenda item:

- (a) Award for national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (b) Online reporting tool;
- (c) Technical and scientific cooperation, including the Bio-Bridge Initiative;
- (d) Web strategy/communication strategy;
- (e) Support for national clearing-house mechanisms;
- (f) Interoperability.

3.1. Award for national clearing-house mechanisms

11. In paragraph 15 of decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to propose, in collaboration with the Informal Advisory Committee to the Clearing-House Mechanism, a process to grant, at the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth meetings of the Conference of the Parties, subject to the availability of resources, an award to the Parties that had made the most significant progress in the establishment or further development of their national clearing-house mechanisms.

12. Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) summarized the CHM award process, mentioning the two questionnaires sent to Parties, the compilation of the submissions received by the Secretariat, as well as the work of the jury to review these submissions and the corresponding national clearing-house mechanisms. He thanked the jury members for having carried out this review on top of their normal duties. He then invited the Committee to provide feedback on this first round of the CHM award process and advice for the second one.

13. The feedback and advice received could be summarized as follows:

(a) Overall, the questionnaires were considered with the right level of details, but it was a burden for some countries which could not submit them due to other priorities. An option to reduce the burden could be to consider having only a single questionnaire;

(b) The jury's review mechanism should be improved. It was challenging for jury members to compare different replies, particularly for open questions. There was a need for something more harmonized in order to facilitate assessments and comparisons;

(c) More importance should be given to technical and scientific cooperation;

(d) A difference should be made between true national clearing-house mechanisms and ministerial websites, and between developed and developing countries;

(e) Online questionnaires would be welcome;

(f) The CHM-IAC should be involved again in the next award process.

14. Further to the discussion, the Committee was reminded that the award ceremony would take place on the evening of Friday 9 December 2016. The Committee was also informed that the Executive Secretary would grant certificates of achievements to the Parties that did not win any award but were ranked in the top-ten of each category, as a token of recognition of their efforts. The arrangements for this event were discussed, including how to inform all participants and winners to ensure good participation, but without releasing specific information about the winners. It was agreed that the Secretariat would send two emails: one to remind all CHM and CBD National Focal Points of the event, and one targeted at the Parties in the top-ten of each category to kindly ask them to send a representative.

15. The "Award for national clearing-house mechanisms" section on page 1 contains the recommendations to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

3.2. Online reporting tool

16. In paragraph 18 (a) of decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to establish a fully-functional online reporting tool enabling Parties to submit, on a voluntary basis, information on their progress towards national targets and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, directly involving Parties in the development and testing of this tool.

17. Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) briefly presented the latest version of the online reporting tool with its new sections aligned to the draft guidelines for the sixth national report. Mr. Frédéric Vogel (CBD Secretariat) gave more details about the development process of this tool and added that an helpdesk feature was now available for immediate assistance to users during working hours of the CBD Secretariat.

18. The Committee welcomed the progress made, including the helpdesk feature which had been quite useful to users. It was suggested to extend the use of the helpdesk beyond technical support by including respondents with expertise in the programme areas of the Convention and its Protocols.

19. Some discussion took place about user roles and the next steps to be carried out after the review and official adoption of the guidelines for the sixth national report. The Committee proposed to test the next version of the tool once it would be aligned to these official guidelines.

20. The "Online reporting tool" section on page 1 contains the recommendations to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

3.3. Technical and scientific cooperation, including the Bio-Bridge Initiative

21. In paragraphs 9 to 13 of decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to enhance technical and scientific cooperation. It encouraged developing country Parties to express their needs and priorities while encouraging developed country Parties and other donors to contribute to technical and scientific cooperation. It also welcomed the Bio-Bridge Initiative (BBI) from the Republic of Korea.

22. Mr. Erie Tamale (CBD Secretariat) presented the progress made in the development of the BBI since the twelfth Conference of the Parties. He summarized the various steps taken, in collaboration with two selected partners, the Quebec Centre for Biodiversity Science and UNEP-WCMC, to establish the coordination structure and the three implementation tools: the web platform, the help desk, and the regional round tables. He also mentioned the pilot projects and their selection process. Regarding the web platform, he explained that it would capture information on technical and scientific cooperation needs, providers, and opportunities through three common formats. Finally, he reminded the Committee that three BBI side-events were planned: one in English, one in French and one in Spanish.

23. The Committee was then invited to provide comments and advice. Some questions were asked on the web platform, its expected content and its implementation. Mr. Frédéric Vogel (CBD Secretariat) indicated that the BBI web platform was being implemented within the new web infrastructure of the central CHM, and that a first version would be made available during the first quarter of 2017. The Committee would then be invited to test this platform and provide feedback on it.

24. The “Technical and scientific cooperation, including the Bio-Bridge Initiative (BBI)” section on page 1 contains the recommendations to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

3.4. Web strategy/Communication strategy

25. In paragraph 19 of its decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary 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, could be accessed centrally to avoid duplication of efforts. In paragraph 4 of its recommendation 1/5, the Subsidiary Body on Implementation took note of this web strategy and requested the Executive Secretary to align it with the communication strategy that was being prepared for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting. The communication strategy was issued as document UNEP/CBD/COP/13/14, and the aligned web strategy as document UNEP/CBD/COP/13/14/Add.1.

26. Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) summarized the preparatory process of these strategies. He gave an overview of the recently-prepared communication strategy while indicating which sections of the web strategy were aligned, namely those on guiding principles, context and vision, and target audiences and user groups.

27. The Committee was then invited to provide some feedback and advice. The Chair indicated that this strategy would need to be updated to reflect the forthcoming decisions to be adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting, as well as by the decision bodies of the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols. For instance, certain activities related to capacity-building would have implications on the website. Some discussion followed about the extent to which the web strategy should remain a living document. The influence of social media on web-based communications was also discussed, and comments were made about precautions to be taken against potentially inaccurate information from

unreliable sources. It was suggested to include a section on social media management in the guidance for national CHMs.

28. Mr. Frédéric Vogel (CBD Secretariat) proposed to consider the use of the agile methodology² to implement the web strategy and the concept of personas³ to define typical website users. He invited Committee members to contribute to the identification of these personas which would then be used in test scenarios when developing the future version of the website.

29. The “Web strategy and communication strategy” section on page 2 contains the recommendations to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

3.5. Support to national clearing-house mechanisms

30. In paragraph 16 of decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties invited Parties and partners to provide support to developing country Parties that were developing their national clearing-house mechanisms. In paragraph 17 of the same decision, it also invited Parties and donors to continue to provide financial support to establish and strengthen their national clearing-house mechanisms.

31. Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) provided an update in that area. He mentioned that, thanks to the generous funding from the Japan Biodiversity Fund (JBF), the CBD Secretariat convened two regional capacity-building workshops on the CHM (one for Central and Eastern Europe and Western Asia,⁴ and one in the Pacific⁵). He also presented the latest version of the Bioland tool (available at <http://demo.chm-cbd.net>) for assisting Parties in the establishment of their national clearing-house mechanisms, and indicated that training sessions on this tool were now an integral part of capacity-building workshops on the clearing-house mechanism. He said that the tool would be demonstrated at the side-event on the clearing-house mechanism to be held the evening of Monday 5 December 2016, and that the CBD Secretariat would remain available to assist Parties willing to use the tool.

32. The Chair then invited the members of the Committee to share their own initiatives aiming at supporting the development of national clearing-house mechanisms. Ms. Véronique Herrenschildt (France) said that France had been cooperating with Madagascar. Mr. Mostafa Madbouhi (Morocco) mentioned that in 2016, Morocco assisted Jordan, Syria and Palestine through triangular cooperation, and that it had plans to provide assistance to Cameroon and Gabon. Mr. Han de Koeijer (Belgium) gave a brief update on the Belgian cooperation activities related to the clearing-house mechanism.

33. Further to these updates, the Committee was invited to provide feedback and advice on the tool for national CHMs, including its deployment and potential enhancements. The feedback and advice received could be summarized as follows:

- (a) The user interface is elegant;
- (b) Countries should be able to customize the user interface if they so wish;
- (c) The search engine has a high potential at two levels: at the country level, and at the network level;

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agile_software_development.

³ See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persona_\(user_experience\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persona_(user_experience)).

⁴ See meeting documents at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=chmws-2016-02.

⁵ See meeting documents at www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=chmws-2016-01.

(d) Interoperability should eventually allow national information available on the central CHM, including information from the ABSCH or BCH, to be made available on national CHMs as needed;

(e) Whenever feasible, relevant national data from various sources, such as the IUCN red list, the World Database on Protected Areas, or the GEF project database, should be included in the system and kept synchronized ;

(f) The content types and metadata should be reviewed to see whether they respond to the needs of Parties;

(g) National legislation should be included as it is likely to be a need for many countries;

(h) The use of a common system would promote data harmonization across the CHM network;

(i) Guidance should be available for countries using other content management systems (e.g. WordPress or Joomla), so that their content types and metadata could be gradually aligned to the rest of the CHM network;

(j) The web infrastructure should be scalable to potentially support more than 100 websites;

(k) There should be a migration path from the CHM Portal Tool Kit to the Bioland tool. A small group could be assembled with representatives of countries interested in migrating;

(l) The Committee should be invited to test the Bioland tool and provide suggestions for improvements or additional features;

(m) A notification should be sent to Parties to inform them about the availability of the tool, and propose a phased approach for its use, but after the tool has been tested and reviewed by the Committee;

34. The “Support to national clearing-house mechanisms” section on page 2 contains the recommendations to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

3.6. Interoperability

35. In paragraphs 18 (b) and 18 (c) of decision XII/2 B, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to continue developing the interoperability services of the central clearing-house mechanism, in order to allow information exchange with national clearing-house mechanisms and relevant partners, including InforMEA.

36. Mr. Olivier de Munck (CBD Secretariat) summarized the progress made by the Secretariat in the development of its application programming interface (API). He explained that this API had been evolving from providing an alternative way to access records of the central clearing-house mechanism to being the primary way of accessing the records (e.g. API-first approach) of the online services built on the new web infrastructure, such as the online reporting tool and the ABS Clearing-House. He noted that work was still needed to streamline and document the API in order to facilitate its use by national clearing-house mechanisms and other partners. He also indicated that work was carried out in collaboration with the European Environment Agency (EEA) to interconnect the Target Cross-linking Tool (TCT) to the CBD online reporting tool with this API, and in collaboration with the MEA-IKM initiative to ensure that the InforMEA API was well-implemented at the CBD Secretariat.

37. Further to this introduction, Mr. Han de Koeijer (Belgium) made an online demonstration showing that information updated on the TCT could be successfully transferred to the CBD online reporting tool.

38. The Committee was then invited to provide comments and advice on the further development of interoperability and its potential use through the network. The comments and advice received could be summarized as follows:

(a) Today, application programming interfaces (APIs) are playing a key role in data visibility and discovery. As much information as possible should be made openly accessible through APIs;

(b) The CBD Secretariat should improve its API to make it easier to use by national CHMs or other partners;

(c) The CBD Secretariat should maintain its interoperability with InforMEA and collaborate with the MEA-IKM initiative on possible enhancements;

(d) Adequate metadata is very important for effective information exchange through interoperability. Globally-adopted classifications, such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and Sustainable Development Goals, should be used whenever applicable. In some other areas, there is a need for further metadata harmonization and streamlining;

(e) Many global resources are available online, and some of them are accessible through APIs. There is great potential for a modern national CHM to tap into those resources in order to access those that are of national relevance.

39. The “Interoperability” section on page 2 contains the recommendations to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

3.7. Additional issues

40. Under this sub-item, the Committee was invited to raise and discuss any relevant issues not covered under the previous sub-items. The Committee briefly discussed the decision tracking tool under development by the CBD Secretariat, and recommended that it be invited to test the next version of this tool in order to provide feedback for potential enhancements.

41. The “Decision-tracking tool” section on page 2 contains the recommendation to the Executive Secretary arising from this sub-item.

ITEM 4. OTHER MATTERS

42. Under this item, the Committee was invited to consider any other matter, such as matters related to the operations of the Committee.

43. Participants were informed that the draft decision on agenda item 12 included an element to extend the mandate of the Committee until the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15).

44. The Committee recommended that, to the extent possible, future CHM-IAC meetings be planned to enable participation of all CHM-IAC members and allow sufficient time for in-depth discussion of all agenda items. A consensus was reached by proposing a two-day meeting while scheduling it back-to-back with a major CBD meeting.

45. The “CHM-IAC meeting” section on page 2 contains the recommendation to the Executive Secretary arising from this item.

ITEM 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

46. Before closing the meeting, the Committee agreed that the discussions of the previous items would form the basis for preparing recommendations to the Executive Secretary. These recommendations are contained in section I.

ITEM 6. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

47. The chair made closing remarks to express his appreciation of the work done and thanked the participants for their valuable contributions. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the meeting was closed at 3.30 p.m. on Saturday, 3 December 2016.

Annex

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