



# CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL  
MEETING ON THE CLEARING-HOUSE  
MECHANISM  
Lima, 7 September 2001

## REPORT OF THE LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL MEETING ON THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Background*

1. Article 18, paragraph 3, of the Convention on Biological Diversity established the clearing-house mechanism to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation. Article 20, paragraph 1, of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety established the Biosafety Clearing-House as part of the clearing-house mechanism. In its decision V/14, the Conference of the Parties recommended that the Executive Secretary convene regional workshops to support capacity-building for clearing-house activities, training and awareness, with a focus on cooperation in biodiversity information for the implementation of the clearing-house mechanism at the national, subregional, bioregional, biogeographic and regional levels. Furthermore, the clearing-house mechanism, having completed successfully its information-exchange phase, is now able to focus on the promotion of technical and scientific cooperation, with an emphasis on capacity-building initiatives.

2. The Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Meeting on the Clearing-House Mechanism was held in Lima on 7 September 2001 in support of these objectives, and to provide countries of the region with an opportunity to express their needs and expectations with regard to the facilitation of technical and scientific cooperation.

3. This meeting was also intended to offer an introduction on the synergies between the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House.

#### B. *Attendance*

4. Each country Party to the Convention in Latin America and the Caribbean was invited to nominate one participant, with experience with the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention. In response to that invitation, participants from the following countries were nominated by their respective focal points and attended the meeting: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Uruguay and Venezuela.

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5. Representatives of the following bilateral donors and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations participated in the meeting as observers and/or resource persons:

*Bilateral donors:* Canada, United States of America;

*Intergovernmental organizations active in information-exchange and scientific cooperation issues:* Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network.

6. The Co-Chair of the informal advisory committee (IAC) of the clearing-house mechanism also participated in the meeting.

7. The full list of participants is contained in annex II to the present report.

## **ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

8. The meeting was opened at 8 a.m. on Friday, 7 September 2001. It was addressed by Mr. Marcos Silva, Programme Officer for the Clearing-House Mechanism of the Convention Secretariat, on behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

9. Mr. Silva welcomed the participants to the meeting. After an introduction to the new phase of the clearing-house mechanism, he presented a brief summary on new initiatives to facilitate technical and scientific cooperation, and on the synergies and distinctions between the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House. He then invited countries to use the meeting to identify their priority needs regarding capacities to participate in the new initiatives under the clearing-house mechanism. In regard to the development of the Biosafety Clearing-House, Mr. Silva noted the synergies and distinctions between the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House and summarized the lessons learned from the project. In conclusion, Mr. Silva thanked the Government of Peru for hosting the meeting and the Government of Belgium for providing financial support.

## **ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS**

### ***2.1. Election of officers***

10. At the 1st session of the meeting, on 7 September 2001, Mr. Victor E. Miyakawa (Peru) was elected to serve as Chair and Mr. Linus Spencer Thomas (Grenada) to serve as Rapporteur.

### ***2.2. Adoption of agenda***

11. The Regional Meeting adopted the following agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda proposed in document UNEP/CBD/CHM/LAC.Reg/1/1:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Organizational matters:
  - 2.1. Election of officers;
  - 2.2. Adoption of the agenda;
  - 2.3. Organization of work.
3. Promotion and facilitation of technical and scientific cooperation.

4. Synergies and distinctions in the Latin American and Caribbean implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House and the clearing-house mechanism.
5. Conclusions and recommendations.
6. Adoption of the report.
7. Closure of the meeting.

### **2.3. Organization of work**

12. At its 1st session on 7 September, the Regional Meeting approved the proposed programme of work as contained in annex II to the annotations to the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/CHM/LAC.Reg/1/1/Add.1).

### **ITEM 3. PROMOTION OF TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION UNDER THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

13. Mr. Silva gave a presentation under agenda item 3, considered at the most recent meeting of the informal advisory committee (IAC), on 11 March 2001. In his introduction, Mr. Silva described new initiatives undertaken by the clearing-house mechanism in support of technical and scientific collaboration. He also gave a brief presentation on the level of Internet access in Latin America and the Caribbean. In anticipation of item 4, he also explained the synergies and differences between the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House.

14. Mr. Vanderlei Canhos, representing the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN), gave a presentation on the development of a hemispheric biodiversity Internet-based network whose objective is to increase bioinformatic capacity throughout the Western Hemisphere. He emphasized IABIN's efforts in capacity-building in Latin America and the Caribbean, using as an example an initiative to create a network to assist the region in the monitoring, control and prediction of invasive alien species.

15. Introducing the item for discussion, the Chair highlighted the relevant issues to be discussed, based on documents from the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, the sixth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the IAC meeting held on 11 March 2001. He proposed that the meeting should consider the following elements under the issue of ongoing clearing-house mechanism projects to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation:

(a) Ongoing clearing-house mechanism projects to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation;

(b) Progress report on the joint work of the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House.

#### *Discussion*

16. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Paraguay and Peru.

17. There was general agreement regarding the similarities of the capacities required to implement both the Biosafety Clearing-House and the clearing-house mechanism. The participants from Colombia,

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Peru and Jamaica described their experiences with implementing the clearing-house mechanism at the national level.

18. There was also general agreement regarding the importance of assessing the progress of implementing the clearing-house mechanism, at both the national and the regional levels. One participant suggested that a questionnaire distributed by the Secretariat might facilitate this assessment.

**ITEM 4. SYNERGIES AND DISTINCTIONS IN THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE AND CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM**

19. Agenda item 4 was considered at the 1st session of the meeting, on 7 September 2001. The Chair proposed that discussion under this agenda item should cover the following elements:

(a) What are the potential and existing synergies between the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House?

(b) What are the needs in Latin America and the Caribbean to participate effectively in the synergetic work of the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House?

*Discussion*

20. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela.

21. There was a short discussion on the different roles of the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House. It was noted that the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House was designed to process information required under the Biosafety Protocol; whereas the clearing-house mechanism was designed to facilitate exchange of information and promote technical cooperation. Participants also noted the importance of providing long-term support, particularly financial, in order to maintain both the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House.

22. In response to a question by one participant, a representative of the Secretariat presented the website of the clearing-house mechanism and described its structure and operation. He clarified that the clearing-house mechanism was not a custodian of data, but rather provided a portal to access the data.

23. One participant noted that a key problem at a national level was preparing and maintaining adequate biological-data systems.

24. The Chair offered to prepare a short list of the main themes identified by the meeting for discussion.

25. Following the Chair's presentation of the list of themes, the meeting concentrated on elaborating the items under the headings in this list. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and IABIN.

26. The main themes raised during the discussion included: assessment of needs of users at national, subregional and regional levels; technical capacity building needs; ensuring the establishment and sustainability of the clearing-house mechanism; increasing awareness and visibility of the clearing-house mechanism; exchange of experiences and improving regional cooperation; ensuring development, operation and interoperability between national clearing-house mechanisms; and synthesizing lessons learned from the Biosafety Clearing-House.

**ITEM 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

27. Agenda item 5 was considered at the 1st session of the meeting, on 7 September. The item was introduced by the Chair, who invited the Rapporteur to present the recommendations. Following a short discussion, the Meeting adopted the recommendations, which are attached to the present report as annex I.

**ITEM 6. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

28. The present report was adopted at the 2nd session of the meeting, on 7 September 2001, on the basis of the draft report of the Meeting (UNEP/CBD/CHM/LAC.Reg/1/L.1).

**ITEM 7. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

29. The Chair declared the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Meeting on the Clearing-House Mechanism closed at 5 p.m. on Friday, 7 September 2001.

*Annex I*

**CONCLUSIONS OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN REGIONAL MEETING ON  
THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM**

*Note*

Short-term = 6 months to 1 year

Mid-term = 1-3 years

Long-term = 3-5 years

Ongoing

(Activities are subject to the achievement of funding)

Levels: National, subregional, regional

**A. Assessment needs**

1. Identify users of the clearing-house mechanism (CHM) (National) (Short-term)
2. Identify status of cooperation and levels of cooperation among CHM national focal points and other mechanisms; (National) (Short-term)
3. Identify user needs in relation to the CHM (National) (Short-term)
4. Evaluate necessity for regional nodes using a baseline analysis for Latin America and the Caribbean (Subregional, regional) (Mid-term)
5. Identify information protocols and standards utilized in Latin America and the Caribbean; (Subregional, regional) (Short-term)
6. Benefit from experience gained from the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) (National, subregional and regional) (Short-term).

**B. Capacity-building needs**

1. Identify human resource needs, including technical expertise; (National) (Short-term)
2. Create mechanisms to foster cooperation and exchange of expertise; (Regional, subregional) (Short-term and ongoing)
3. Organize technical workshops to exchange ideas and expertise; (Regional, subregional) (Short-term and ongoing)
4. Identify common needs and synergies between the CHM and the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH); (National) (Short-term);
5. Establish procedures to evaluate and respond to identified needs. (National) (Short-term and ongoing).

**C. *Ensuring the establishment and sustainability of the clearing-house mechanism***

1. Identify available financial sustainable support, such as the GEF; (National) (Short-term and ongoing)
2. Promote national commitment and political support to establish and maintain CHM national focal points; (National) (Short-term and ongoing)
3. Facilitate the development of technologies that are flexible and adaptable; (Regional, subregional, national) (Long-term and ongoing)
4. Create feedback mechanisms to assist in new and ongoing development of CHM National Focal Points. (National) (Short-term and ongoing)

**D. *Increase public awareness and visibility of the clearing-house mechanism***

1. Disseminate information on the CBD and the CHM to the scientific community and to policy makers through:
  - a. The Internet;
  - b. Publications on the CHM and other informational materials;
  - c. The public media;
  - d. CD-ROMs;
2. Disseminate information on the Convention on Biological Diversity and the CHM to all sectors of society, especially the general public, through the means described above, considering the need to adapt the language employed according to the target audience.

**E. *Exchange of experience to improve inter-regional cooperation***

1. Develop questionnaires to collect information and disseminate it through the web site of the Convention on Biological Diversity; (Short-term) (National, subregional and regional)
2. Facilitate the creation of national directories of experts; (Short-term) (National)
3. Facilitate communication among experts listed in these directories; (Short-term) (National, subregional and regional)
4. Create mechanisms to allow experts to exchange ideas and projects; (Short-term) (National, subregional and regional)
5. Identify stakeholders and existing networks at the regional level; (Short-term) (Subregional and regional)
6. Identify mechanisms to facilitate alternatives to face-to-face meetings of experts. (Short-term and ongoing) (National, subregional and regional)

***F. Ensure the development and operation and interoperability of national focal points for the clearing-house mechanism***

1. Update existing CHM toolkit with new information tools; (Short-term) (National, subregional, regional);
2. Create the CHM toolkit as a CD-ROM in addition to other media and systems; (Short-term) (National, subregional, regional)
3. Incorporate issues pertaining to interoperability and metadata, etc., into the CHM toolkit to assist in the searching, locating and retrieving of information. (Short-term) (National, subregional, regional)

***G. Lessons learned from the Biosafety Clearing-House (synergies and differences)***

Synthesize the synergies and differences between the clearing-house mechanism and the Biosafety Clearing-House and make it available to the public. (Short-term) (National, subregional, regional)



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