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SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Revised note by the Executive Secretary

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- I. PARTIES AND GOVERNMENTS WHICH HAVE SUBMITTED NATIONAL REPORTS
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference of the Parties, in paragraph 9 of decision II/17, requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a report based on the information contained in national reports and other relevant information and containing also suggested next steps. Most national reports were received by the Secretariat after the deadline established by the Conference of the Parties in decision III/9. The Executive Secretary prepared an interim document (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/11), on the basis of information available in mid-March 1998.

The present note contains a more complete synthesis of the information contained in the 86 national reports received by the end of March 1998.

2. The present section provides an outline summary of the note, before recalling previous decisions of the Conference of the Parties relating to national reports. Section II provides information on national reports received by the Executive Secretary by the end of March 1998, and section III contains a synthesis of the information contained in these reports.

3. The information contained in section III is grouped into sub-sections in accordance with categories deriving from the Articles of the Convention; namely:

- (a) Current status of biological diversity and its conservation;
- (b) Status of national biodiversity strategies and action plans;
- (c) Action to integrate conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into other sectors;
- (d) Action to identify and monitor biological diversity and impacts upon it; and
- (e) Protected areas.

The section also contains syntheses of information on implementation of policies and actions across international borders; means of implementation; mechanisms for sharing national experiences, and other information requested of Parties by decisions of the Conference of the Parties.

4. Section IV considers lessons learned from recent biodiversity planning workshops and from the reporting process itself.

5. Challenges and priorities are outlined in section V. The importance of national reports is stressed. The need to assist all Parties with the completion and implementation of their national biodiversity strategy and action plan, and the key role of other provisions of the Convention in the implementation of such strategies and action plans is highlighted. Making the reporting process effective for the Convention as a whole and less onerous for Parties is identified as a key challenge. There are emerging opportunities for harmonization of reporting between related processes.

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6. Section V also recalls that the Conference of the Parties at its fourth meeting should establish the intervals and form of subsequent national reports and recommends that the next reports should be considered in the year 2000, implying a date for submission in late 1999. The second report should focus on the completion of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan process, its implementation, and measures for the implementation of Article 7 (Identification and Monitoring).

7. Section VI contains recommendations on elements of a decision on national reports and support to the completion of the biodiversity strategy and action plan process.

8. Annex I contains a list of national reports received by the end of March 1998 and Annex II lists those countries that are known to the Executive Secretary to have, or to be developing, a national biodiversity strategy and action plan. It is suspected that this information is incomplete and Parties, and Governments are requested to review and update the information in this annex.

9. Article 26 of the Convention requires each Contracting Party to "at intervals to be determined by the Conference of the Parties, present to the Conference of the Parties reports on measures which it has taken for the implementation of the provisions of this Convention and their effectiveness in meeting the objectives of this Convention".

10. Decision II/17 of the Conference of the Parties, concerning the form and interval of national reports by Parties, specifies that the first national reports will be due at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and that they "will focus ... on the measures taken for the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention, as well as the information available in national country studies". Suggested guidelines are annexed to the decision.

11. Decision III/9 of the Conference of the Parties, concerning the implementation of Articles 6 and 8 of the Convention specifies that the first national reports referred to in decision II/17 should be submitted no later than 1 January 1998, taking into account decision III/25 of the Conference of the Parties that the next meeting would take place in Bratislava, in May 1998.

12. Other decisions of the Conference of the Parties also have explicit implications for national reporting. These include the following:

(a) Decision II/8, which encourages Parties to "identify priority issues specifically related to those components of biological diversity under threat" within their national reports;

(b) Decision III/6, which urges developed country Parties to submit information on their financial support for the objectives of the Convention in their national reports;

(c) Decision III/11, requesting Parties to "identify issues and priorities [concerning conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biological diversity] that need to be addressed at the national level and to report back to the Conference of the Parties";

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(d) Decision III/14, which urges Parties to "supply information about the implementation of Article 8(j) and related articles ... and to include such information in national reports"; and

(e) Decision III/18, which invites Parties to "share experiences on incentive measures, and make relevant case studies available".

II. NATIONAL REPORTS RECEIVED

13. By the deadline established by the Conference of the Parties (1 January 1998), the Secretariat had received 16 national reports. By 30 March 1998, 86 national reports had been received. These reports constitute a representative geographical basis for the analysis requested by the Conference of the Parties: there are at least ten reports from each of the five regions and there is a representative number of reports from least-developed countries and small island developing States. This note has therefore been prepared on the basis of the information contained in these 86 reports.

14. The format and content of the reports vary very widely. While the majority have been submitted as final reports, 21 are identified as interim reports, six are identified as drafts, four are in form of executive summaries only, and three Parties have submitted their national biodiversity strategies in lieu of preparing specific reports for the Convention.

15. Of these reports, 52 have been submitted in English, 12 in French, 12 in Spanish and one in Russian. One Party has made available an advance copy in its national language, not being a working language of the Conference of the Parties, pending translation into English.

16. The final reports vary widely in size, ranging from a few pages to hundreds of pages in length. Some were written for a wide audience, while others were written only for submission to the Conference of the Parties. On the whole, the contents of the reports are in line with the guidelines provided by the Conference of the Parties. Furthermore, the richness and detail of most of the reports also provide additional information and indications of what could be contained in future reports.

17. In order to ensure that the reports are widely accessible, the Secretariat is making available on the Convention's website as Adobe Acrobat PDF files those reports submitted in electronic form. As of 16 April 1998, 33 reports are available in this format. Where reports are available on national clearing-house mechanism websites, the Secretariat has established the necessary links to make these reports accessible from the Convention's website. Four such links have so far been made.

18. The Parties and Governments whose reports were received by 30 March 1998, and upon which this note has been prepared, are listed in annex I below.

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III. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS

19. Decision II/17 requests the Executive Secretary to prepare a report based on the synthesis of information contained in national reports and other relevant information and containing also suggested next steps, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties. Decision III/9 provides that the first national reports be submitted no later than 1 January 1998.

20. In reading the present note, some consideration should be given to the following limitations. First, while 86 reports is a significant number and represents half the total number of Parties, the information they contain may not necessarily be representative of all Parties. However, there is a sufficient basis to draw conclusions on emerging trends on the implementation of the Convention at the national level. Secondly, the reports vary widely in size, format and content, requiring great care when making comparisons. Thirdly, it is inevitable that some of the richness and detail provided by the individual reports may not be reflected in the synthesis report.

21. The main conclusion that can be drawn from the reports is that the implementation of the Convention at the national level has been initiated in most countries and attention is also being given to regional cooperation. This is illustrated by:

(a) The high level of submission of reports, which signifies the commitment to the Convention by Parties and Governments;

(b) The formulation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans, which have been or are being developed in most countries, as required by Article 6(a);

(c) Increasing efforts to reform institutional arrangements and legislative measures to integrate the provisions of the Convention into sectoral activities, as envisaged in Article 6(b);

(d) Recognition by Parties and Governments of the importance of the identification and monitoring of biological diversity in accordance with Article 7;

(e) The emphasis on in situ conservation of biological diversity (Article 8);

(f) The continuing requests by Parties and Governments for financial and technical assistance to complete the strategy and action plan process as soon as possible and to focus on national and local implementation;

(g) The emerging interest among Parties and Governments to promote regional cooperation in the implementation of the Convention.

A. Current status of biological diversity and its conservation

22. Parties were asked to include within their national reports summaries of the status of, and threats to, biodiversity, the legal and policy framework for conservation action, and the institutions responsible for the action. Not

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surprisingly, the content and format of these summaries vary significantly between reports, even within fairly homogenous regions, making attempts at comparison difficult. Some reports are virtually entirely devoted to the current status of biodiversity and its conservation; others provide only a minimum amount of information.

23. The reports provide a range of readable summaries of the conservation status of a range of species groups and ecosystem types, sometimes supported by annexes which provide more detailed information. However, such information tends to be very general in nature, serving little purpose beyond adding context to other material in the report. Where the report is intended for wider consumption within the country of origin the purpose of such "scene setting" is obvious, but where the report is only intended for reporting to the Conference of the Parties, it is less so.

24. Many developing country Parties note the recent approval of Global Environment Facility enabling activity funds necessary for the development of their national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP) and the preparation of the national report. In many cases, these Parties have identified their reports as interim reports and have informed the Secretariat of their intention to submit a full report at a later date, once the NBSAP process is complete. In other cases, Parties have informed the Secretariat that they will not be in a position to submit a report, interim or final, in time for the fourth meeting, but that they intend to do so at a later date.

25. In several cases, the information presented is a summary from other documents that are already widely available, or from a country study prepared as a precursor to the development of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan. This is not always obvious from the text of the report and, if the national reports are to serve a purpose in helping other Parties, it would be useful if future reports made adequate reference to sources.

26. There is great variability in the extent to which national reports cover the threats to biodiversity, possibly implying wide differences in the ways in which threats are being addressed at the national level. In the majority of cases where threats are referred to, specific threats are identified (such as pollution or habitat fragmentation), and the steps being taken to deal with these specific problems briefly discussed.

27. In some reports there are systematic reviews, sector by sector, of the potential impacts of other sectors such as agriculture or transport on biodiversity. This is a potentially valuable approach as it moves from looking at the pressures themselves towards an initial assessment of the "driving forces" of activities that potentially impact on biodiversity conservation. Some reports discuss the socio-economic conditions that have led to activities that have adverse impacts on biodiversity. For example, within the European Union, there are moves towards monitoring programmes that address these driving forces and resultant pressures, and the European Union state-of-the-environment reporting incorporates elements of this approach to monitoring and assessment.

28. Most reports provide a summary of the key environmental legislation in force in the country. In some cases, this is tied to particular conservation actions or problems, and in most cases the agency responsible for

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implementation is clear. Of particular interest are the arrangements (both legal and institutional) in those countries with a federal system of government, in part because of the extra steps that they need to take to ensure coordination between the different levels of government. Another issue of particular interest in certain parts of the world, and particularly in the Pacific, is the relative importance of customary law and traditional management structures, and the efforts to build effective conservation programmes into such practices.

29. Several reports imply a lack of coordination in the application of national legislation and, in some, difficulties in actual implementation are raised. In even more cases, the need for closer integration of international agreements into national policies and legislation is apparent. Each of these problems is significant in terms of the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and needs to be specifically addressed in the NBSAP.

30. While many of the reports cover international obligations, only a few make any real attempt to integrate the discussion of national legislation with that on international agreements. Exceptions are the countries of the European Union (EU), where most of the reports specifically mention EU legislation such as the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Wildlife Trade Regulation. ^{1/} Two of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe also specifically mentioned the process of "approximation" they are going through as part of their applications for EU membership.

31. In smaller countries, and in particular in small island developing States, it is apparent that the number and extent of international obligations can overburden relatively small government offices, particularly where these initiatives are uncoordinated.

32. The range of ongoing programmes described is very broad, and includes both new actions as a result of ratification of the Convention and actions that have been ongoing for many years. In fact, because many Parties are in the early stages of preparation of their NBSAP, much discussion of ongoing programmes and activities concerns more general environmental measures (usually in the form of a national environmental action plan or management programme), rather than measures that have arisen through development of the NBSAP.

^{1/} Respectively, the Directive on the conservation of wild birds, the Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, and the Regulation on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein.

33. Descriptions of ongoing programmes contained in a number of national reports include the participation of the country in international programmes, and refer to the activities of international organizations whose collaborative programmes involving a number of countries constitute, directly or indirectly, means for the implementation of provisions of the Convention. Frequent examples referred to are the Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the activities of member institutions of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Developing a better understanding of how such international programmes can provide a framework for supporting national implementation of the Convention emerges as an issue to be further considered.

34. Some reports stress research and monitoring, while others place more emphasis on conservation action, but the overriding message is that almost everywhere there are initiatives to build on. However, it is apparent from the review of the reports that these initiatives place more emphasis on the species and ecosystem levels of biological diversity than on the genetic level. This is not only true for reporting on conservation programmes, but also for research and monitoring programmes. This may not necessarily signify that the countries concerned are not addressing the genetic component. In this context, it would be interesting to learn whether information on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity at the genetic level is provided by the reports of countries prepared in the context of other processes, for example those under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

35. In this context, the FAO Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources, which is based on national reports, notes in its paragraph 40 that many countries have recognized the need for a complete national inventory of cultivated plant genetic resources, wild relatives, ecosystems and the traditional knowledge associated with them.

36. The amount of information provided on institutional responsibility varies considerably from identifying the agency responsible for particular pieces of legislation, to who is carrying out particular programmes. Most Parties reporting provide some details of the organizations and bodies, governmental and otherwise, involved in the conservation of biodiversity. They usually indicate which body is taking the lead in the preparation of the NBSAP, but most do not describe in detail the relationships between the various bodies, or their precise responsibilities. Indeed, a number explicitly note the lack of coordination in activities concerned with biodiversity conservation, and identify this as an impediment to the efficient implementation of the Convention.

37. As one of the purposes of national reports is to foster the exchange of information and experiences between Parties, it will be helpful if such institutional arrangements are made clearer in future national reports.

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38. One national report stresses the steps taken by a developed country Party to assess the impact of all of its activities, past and present, on the world's biodiversity. This type of assessment of a nation's "ecological footprint" serves not only to demonstrate the extent of a developed country's impact on the world, but also the dependence of that country's citizens on biodiversity and the products and services that biodiversity provides. Further studies of this sort would be valuable.

B. Status of national biodiversity strategy and action planning

39. Decision II/17 specified that the first national reports should focus in so far as possible on the measures taken for the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention. This Article, entitled "General Measures for Conservation and Sustainable Use", requires Parties to develop or adapt national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and to integrate the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies. Decision II/17 also urged the financial mechanism to make available financial resources to developing country Parties to assist in the preparation of their national reports and commended the guidance provided in key documentation relating to national country studies and national biodiversity planning as relevant to the implementation of Article 6 and the preparation of national reports.

40. Of the various small island developing States that have reported, most have begun work on development of a NBSAP, but in the majority of cases these are at a fairly early stage of development, some having only just started. Only one Party has completed its NBSAP, and all of the reports are of an interim or summary nature.

41. The reports for Parties in the Asia region reveal wide differences in progress towards completing NBSAPs. A number of the reporting Parties have completed their NBSAP (or have advance drafts), often based on previous work in developing national environmental action plans or national conservation strategies. Existing NBSAPs for Parties in this region vary widely in content and level of detail, and some have been in existence for several years. Other Parties are only just beginning the process.

42. Of the Parties from the Africa region that have submitted national reports, half are currently preparing NBSAPs. Most started the process late in 1997 or early in 1998. A further seven Parties report that they are planning the preparation of NBSAPs. Most of the Parties reporting are undertaking the preparation of NBSAPs with financial assistance from the Global Environment Facility. A number of Parties note that national environmental action plans or management programmes have previously been prepared or are in progress, and NBSAPs are in part based on these plans that are, in several cases, complete and have been adopted by the relevant legislature.

43. In Latin America, most Parties report the development of NBSAPs, although in some cases this development is at a fairly early stage. GEF is supporting the process in most countries in the region. In a number of reports attention is drawn to earlier policies and to other strategies and

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action plans on which the NBSAPs can be built. These incorporate a range of activities already under way as well as new activities.

44. In almost all cases, Western European Parties report that their NBSAPs draw heavily on plans and strategies that are already in place for effective management of the environment, and some countries draw attention to the fact that relevant activities had been under way long before the Convention became law. Even in the countries that have not finished development of NBSAPs per se, a significant amount of relevant action is under way. A key task within these countries has therefore been to integrate existing efforts (which include policies, law, programmes and guidelines) into NBSAPs in a meaningful and useful manner, ensuring that the new processes are integrative and additive rather than duplicative.

45. Those developed countries from other regions that have reported have all completed NBSAPs and are working on their implementation.

46. In countries with economies in transition, the situation is less well advanced, and most of the NBSAPs are still under development. Most countries report that they have sought support from GEF and that, in many countries, the approval of such support has taken place only recently. Most reports provide an indication of the main objectives in biodiversity conservation, and a number also indicate both targets and key actions. While most countries in the region have previously developed strategies or action plans in the environmental sector (for example the World Bank-funded national environmental action plans), these only receive attention in two reports, possibly indicating a need to promote greater integration of planning and policy development within countries.

47. Overall, the manner in which the contents of NBSAPs is presented in the reports varies very widely. Further study would be required in order to identify to what extent this is the result of differences in the strategies and plans themselves, rather than to differences in presentation. However it is clear that NBSAPs are under way in most countries, and it appears that countries are developing these in accordance with national conditions and capabilities.

48. Of particular interest in some reports are the objectives and actions that relate to bilateral cross-border issues. For example, a number of reports refer to cross-border protected areas, where international collaboration leads to an increase in protection for certain species and habitats, increased opportunities for managers to cooperate and to share experiences, and an increased profile for conservation action.

49. While the Secretariat is able to monitor the development of NBSAPs in developing countries through information provided by the Global Environment Facility secretariat and Implementing Agencies (UNDP, UNEP, the World Bank), it has not been possible to identify with accuracy where NBSAPs are being or have been developed in developed country Parties (or in developing country Parties that have not sought the assistance of the financial mechanism). The national reports have therefore been used together with the information provided in the report of GEF to the Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/15), and other available sources, to compile a draft progress table for review and updating by Parties as appropriate (see annex II below.)

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C. Action to integrate conservation and sustainable use into other sectors

50. Most reports discuss the integration of environment into specific other sectors, in particular agriculture and forestry.

51. Western European Parties report that significant efforts have been made to include all stakeholders in the development of NBSAPs, and it appears that a wide range of sectors and interests are involved in the implementation of those action plans being implemented. In most cases, it is reported that a steering or coordination group has been set up, usually under the auspices of the ministry of environment or its equivalent. These groups mainly comprise representatives of the relevant ministries, research institutes and non-government organizations. Some countries mention the involvement of different levels of government (local/national), and others stress the involvement of trade, industry and the private sector.

52. Among the most interesting aspects of integration addressed in the Western European reports is integration through the implementation of EU policy and legislation (addressed in section F below) and through the planning process. Two reports lay particular stress on the importance of land-use planning controls and processes in promoting environmental protection and wise use. One report described the process of "sectoral responsibility" and accountability, whereby each ministry was given clear responsibility for biodiversity and sustainable development within its area of operations. Such a model may be applicable elsewhere.

53. The reports suggest that the situation in countries with economies in transition varies widely. In some parts of the region, there are government-appointed commissions responsible for ensuring integration, and policy reviews in different sectors are addressing the links with environmental policy. In other parts of the region, activities in different sectors seem to be insufficiently coordinated. This may in large measure be a result of economic problems, which are more severe in some parts of the region than others. The development of cross-sectoral responsibility clearly emerges as a key issue, to be addressed through collaborative development of NBSAPs.

54. The reports from Parties in Latin America refer to wide consultation in the process for developing the NBSAP, which is designed to lead to inclusive and integrated future programmes. Several Parties identified the body responsible for ensuring (or advising on) cross-sectoral integration, but the overall message is that there is a need and opportunity for significant improvement in this area.

55. With one exception, the reports from Parties that are small island developing States do not emphasize either collaboration in the development of strategies and action plans, or action to integrate conservation and sustainable use into other sectors. This may be due to the relative brevity of the reports, and because most Parties are still in the early stages of the strategy-development process. Alternatively, it may be because the need for integration is often much more apparent within smaller countries and, as a consequence, may often be already under way.

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56. Several reports from Parties in the Asia region make reference to the importance of the NBSAP process in promoting dialogue between diverse stakeholders, and in facilitating the development of a better awareness and understanding of cross-sectoral responsibility. This is an important process, as one Party reports overlaps of mandate and areas in which there is no clear coordinator, while another draws attention to deficiencies in integration resulting from restrictions inherent in the existing legislative framework.

57. Mechanisms used in Asia for achieving integration appear to vary widely. Some Parties have established national biodiversity commissions, or committees to coordinate (or at least advise on) the development and implementation of biodiversity policy. These encompass key areas of government, as well as NGOs and the private sector. Other Parties are more restricted in their approach, with one ministry or group of ministries clearly taking the lead in the development and implementation of biodiversity policy, although other bodies may be able to contribute.

58. Many African Parties stress the participatory nature of the development of their NBSAPs, often through a series of workshops in different parts of the country involving as many stakeholders as possible. Most reports also stress the importance of incorporating biodiversity-related policies into their forestry, fishery and agricultural sectors, but many note that this is currently at a preliminary stage.

59. Generally speaking, the NBSAP development processes as described involve a wide range of sectors and interests, ensuring in most cases a wide ownership of the resulting documents. The integration of biodiversity into different sectors is discussed in detail in some reports, including discussion of the forestry, agriculture, mining and fisheries sectors.

60. One national report identifies a key aim of its NBSAP, and the collaborative process for its implementation, as an opportunity for promoting the creation of new jobs in the biodiversity and environment sector. Private sector organizations were represented on the commission responsible for developing and implementation the action plan.

61. Several reports make explicit mention of the role of the defence sector in biodiversity conservation, including, for example, conservation reviews of military areas, and the use of military personnel to carry out conservation programme tasks. This suggests the importance of looking beyond those sectors that are normally thought to have an impact on biological diversity, and to include all sectors in the discussion on the conservation and use of biological diversity within the country.

62. Finally, several reports give the impression that the integration that they discuss is led from one ministry and, in effect, imposed on other sectors in the name of national policy. If this is the case, there may be cause for concern that integration of biodiversity into other sectors may be more apparent than real in some countries. On the other hand, it does appear from many reports that there are real efforts to ensure effective integration of biological diversity into other sectors.

D. Action to identify and monitor biological diversity and impacts upon it

63. Effective implementation of Article 6 of the Convention requires identification of the components of biodiversity (Articles 7(a)-(b)) and the activities that impact on conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity (Article 7(c)), and the effective management of this information (Article 7(d)).

64. In Latin America, Parties mostly report that while there is a significant body of information on biodiversity within their countries, there are also significant gaps in knowledge concerning particular regions and components of biological diversity. Much is known about important components of biodiversity, and the key threats to biodiversity are generally known. In most cases, however, monitoring programmes are not in place, and it is recognized that these need to be developed as part of the process of developing strategies and action plans.

65. The status of information systems is not mentioned in all the reports for the Latin America region, but it appears to vary widely, from Parties with very few mechanisms for managing and ensuring access to information, to those that are in the process of developing more integrated information systems that will facilitate the access to, and flow of, information necessary for effective implementation of the Convention. However, the reports suggest that greater integration and information-sharing is needed, and that most monitoring and information management currently relates to the status of the biodiversity elements and not to threats.

66. The reports for Parties that are small island developing States are generally brief and do not all cover information and information systems. Information on key components of biodiversity is certainly available, and there is an understanding of some of the major threats, but the information base is known to be incomplete, and the availability of integrated information is a problem.

67. The reports for Parties in the Asia region suggest that the key biodiversity elements are generally known, at least at the species and ecosystem level, and that the main threats to biodiversity are also well documented. However, in some countries, and particularly in the larger countries, this information is often patchy in nature, and there are significant gaps. Action is already under way in a number of these countries to fill information gaps, to address the causes of biodiversity loss, and to continue to monitor the situation.

68. One Party in Asia reports that a moratorium was placed on timber felling in the national forest estate throughout one major region, while a conservation review of these forests was carried out, as part of a World Bank-funded forest-sector review.

69. A number of African Parties note that they have completed biodiversity country studies or biodiversity monographs in advance of their NBSAPs. However, lack of baseline information is widely identified as an impediment to the effective implementation of the Convention and one that needs to be addressed in subsequent actions. It is often noted that where information exists, it is widely scattered and not easily accessible. Several countries note that national biodiversity units are being or have been set up to address this problem.

70. From the reports of Western European Parties, there appears to be significant activity already under way to assess and monitor the various different elements of biological diversity. Programmes being proposed will complement and strengthen these activities, and should lead to improved coordination. However, while a wide range of programmes on species and ecosystems are clearly in place or planned, mechanisms for assessment and monitoring of genetic diversity are given less attention.

71. Mechanisms for the management of the information arising from assessment and monitoring programmes are not mentioned in all reports, but where they are, it is suggested that improvement in coordination of information management is required. Two countries report on the proposed development of national information networks, with the emphasis on distributed information systems, improved coordination, and the sharing of information (probably using the Internet). The need to reduce duplication of effort and to increase compatibility is stressed.

72. The reports from countries with economies in transition stress the excellent information base that already exists, based on research and monitoring programmes that, in some cases, have been in place for a long time. It is not clear to what extent these programmes have been augmented or adjusted as a result of ratification of the Convention, nor is it clear from the reports the extent to which these programmes address monitoring of adverse impacts (although in most cases the threats are known). At least one country has carried out an assessment of biodiversity in forest areas, as a basis for future conservation planning.

73. There is little discussion of information management in the reports of these countries, although it is known that there are a number of initiatives under way that are trying to increase access to the substantial body of information that exists. Two reports mention the Environment and Natural Resources Information Network programme of UNEP, which assists countries to develop their information management capacity and their ability to produce state-of-the-Environment reports. A recent meeting of regional biodiversity experts stressed the importance of international initiatives to support the harmonization and sharing of information between neighbouring countries.

74. All the developed country Parties have significant bodies of information on which to base the assessment of the important components of biodiversity and the factors which have adverse impacts on these components. Research and inventory programmes have been ongoing in these Parties for many years.

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75. A number of reports cover the development of targets and indicators for use in monitoring, planning and reporting. In most cases these are at an early stage of development. Some indicator programmes are based on further development of targets and indicators developed for other processes, including the review of the implementation of environmental action plans, and the statistical information prepared for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and others.

76. The reports indicate the fundamental role of science in the Convention process. In this respect, the Conference of the Parties will recall recommendation II/1 of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, concerning indicators, monitoring and assessment of biological diversity, which was endorsed by decision III/10 of the Conference of the Parties. These matters will be further considered under items 4 (Report of the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice) and 13 (Review of the operations of the Convention) of the provisional agenda of the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

E. Protected areas

77. Virtually all reports from every region stress the importance of protected area systems in national programmes for implementing conservation, either directly or indirectly. Protected area systems are described and, in many cases, the action to be taken as part of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan is identified. The key issues are identified as being the need to ensure that protected area systems cover the full range of biodiversity adequately, the need to ensure adequate legislation and effective management (including sufficient human and financial resources), the need to ensure effective integration between protected areas and the wider region, and the need to ensure effective involvement of all interested parties in the establishment and management of protected areas.

78. The importance of international protected-area initiatives and of transfrontier protected areas are also stressed in a number of reports, particularly those of Western European countries and countries with economies in transition. For example, within the countries of the European Union and those countries seeking to apply for membership in the near future, particular emphasis is placed on development of the networks of Special Areas of Conservation and the Specially Protected Areas established under European Community legislation (see section F below). This international network of nationally designated sites (Natura 2000) aims to protect core areas for all species and habitats of European significance. Elsewhere in Europe and beyond, the Bern Convention is encouraging the development of a parallel network of core areas.

79. In the wider Pan-European region, which includes the Russian Federation and the Central Asian republics, there is a programme for development of a "Pan-European Ecological Network", as part of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy. The aim of this programme is to build on the series of core areas developed under the European Union directives and the Bern Convention, with a series of buffer zones, corridors and other protected

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areas that between them ensure the efficient conservation of all biodiversity and landscape elements of Pan-European significance.

80. These multinational networks of protected areas, including networks of Ramsar sites, UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage sites, and others not mentioned explicitly in the national reports, all contribute to increasing the effectiveness of conservation action through international recognition of their value and importance.

F. Implementation of policies and actions across international borders

81. Many international initiatives exist that bring Governments together for planning and implementing activities of potential relevance to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Parties mention a wide range of such initiatives in their national reports, including other biodiversity-related conventions, and refer to various attempts being made at the national level to build integration into the implementation of these different initiatives. Several Parties refer to concrete efforts to coordinate implementation of international conventions.

82. Of particular interest are those multilateral efforts that are not global in nature, but bring together countries with particular interests or issues in common.

83. The 15 countries of the European Union are unique in that they are subject to regulations, directives and decisions agreed at the European level. Many of these are directly relevant to implementation of the Convention and are discussed in national reports and the report of the European Community.

84. For example, the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive of the European Community (EC) require member States to identify and adequately manage protected sites for certain listed species. The resulting network of protected areas (the Natura 2000 network) will provide core areas for the protection of species and habitats of European significance. Significantly, these directives provide a European Union impetus to the implementation of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and collaboration is increasing between the European Commission and the Bern Convention Secretariat on the identification of an equivalent network of sites in other Parties to the Bern Convention (the proposed EMERALD network).

85. The European Community Regulation on agriculture production methods compatible with the requirements of the protection of the environment and the maintenance of the countryside is mentioned in several reports, primarily because of the financial incentive it provides for promoting biodiversity in agriculture. It is one of a wide range of European Community regulations and directives relevant to the environmental implications of agriculture and the conservation of genetic materials.

86. The European Community not only has an effect on the environment through its legal frameworks, but also as a result of the influence it brings to bear through incentive mechanisms and policies on application of the funds under its control, for example, through the "structural funds" and the "Cohesion Fund".

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87. In the reports, attention is drawn not only to the existence of these policy and regulatory initiatives, and their role in furthering the aims of the Convention, but also the fact that the European Commission effectively harmonizes implementation of these measures across all 15 countries of the European Union (all of which are Parties to the Convention). Negotiations for accession to the European Union will shortly begin with six other countries, all of which are Parties to the Convention, and two of these countries specifically mention the steps they are taking towards harmonization with European Community legislation and policy. The steps being taken by the European Commission are therefore very significant in implementing the Convention across the region.

88. Some of the reports from countries with economies in transition mention the steps they are taking towards harmonization with the European Union as part of their application for membership. This includes consideration of the steps required to implement the various directives and regulations applicable to European Union member States and, in some cases, implementation is proceeding ahead of membership with the support of the European Community funding initiatives PHARE (for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe) and TACIS (for countries of the former Soviet Union).

89. The Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, adopted at the Conference of European Environment Ministers at its meeting in Sofia in 1995, covers an area stretching from Western European through the whole of the former Soviet Union. Several of the reports for both the Western European region and the countries with economies in transition stress the key role this strategy is likely to play in implementation of the Convention across the region. The various action themes offer an opportunity for integrating initiatives under various international programmes, and stress is placed on the value of integrating initiatives. The various international meetings and intergovernmental meetings organized as part of the Pan-European Strategy provide a forum for also achieving some of the mutual objectives of the strategy and the Convention.

90. The reports also refer to the role of the European Environment Agency (EEA) in compiling information in standard formats from across the European Union and beyond, building on programmes of standard data collection started more than 15 years ago. Information is collected through a series of national focal points and several specialist institutions. EEA is able to review biodiversity systematically at the European level, and there are a range of standard reports and other products that result from this work, including reports on the state of the environment within the Pan-European region. Within the countries of the European Union this can be linked directly to the effects of European Union policy, and analysis is being made using indicators in a DPSIR matrix.

91. Within the western hemisphere region, the 1996 Summit of the Americas called for the establishment of an Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) to promote compatible means of collection, communication and exchange of information relevant to decision-making. Similar efforts to develop better application of information within regions and themes can be found in other parts of the world.

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92. The reports also refer to international cooperation at a subregional level. The following examples are drawn from several national reports:

(a) Within Europe, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) work together on a wide range of issues including the environment, and the countries of the Baltic region (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Russian Federation and Sweden) are collaborating on the Baltic Sea environment;

(b) In Central Asia, the proposed biodiversity conservation project for the western Tien Shan mountain region of Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan has among its objectives the encouragement of regional cooperation and harmonization of environmental standards;

(c) The countries of Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) have developed agreements at various levels on different aspects of environmental policy, including sustainable development and protected-area networks. One report emphasizes the importance of such multilateral agreements and programmes, stressing the need for the various participants to work to achieve increased international cooperation between neighbouring countries using these existing mechanisms.

93. On a wider scale, the countries of the Arctic region (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States) are collaborating at an intergovernmental level on sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Reports refer to the active involvement of indigenous peoples within this process.

94. There is a wide range of international conventions that cover given regions, including for example the Cartagena and Barcelona Conventions, covering the Wider Caribbean and the Mediterranean Sea, respectively; the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) and Apia Conventions covering the Pacific Island nations; the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Convention, and many more. Aspects of each of these instruments are relevant to the objectives and articles of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

95. However, a noticeable aspect of these reports is that, while Parties provide information on relevant international conventions to which they are party, there is very little explicit discussion of the extent to which the national implementation of these conventions is carried out in an integrated way. In addition, and bearing in mind the number and scope of existing initiatives, relatively few Parties discuss regional integration or cooperation to any great extent. It is noticeable that a number of significant regional agreements are hardly mentioned. The reasons for this warrant examination, and future reporting on steps taken to integrate implementation of international agreements and programmes could provide a useful stimulus to building links between such initiatives, where they do not already exist.

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G. Means of implementation

1. Financial and human resources

96. The reports from Latin America vary widely in the extent to which they cover the availability of and need for resources, and to what extent these needs can be met from within the country. GEF support for strategy development is acknowledged in a number of reports, and other international assistance is mentioned, but not in a systematic way. Most Parties acknowledge that they are at the beginning of a process that will bring changes and add new tasks to the programmes of their agencies. Training in new skills is identified as a future need in several reports. Biotechnology and biosafety are both identified as areas where training will be required.

97. Reports from small island developing States tend not to include information on the availability of, and need for, resources.

98. Several reports from Parties in Asia identify a need for additional financial resources and/or for more skilled personnel, in order to implement the full range of measures required for ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Bilateral and multilateral collaboration is identified as a valuable mechanism for ensuring the building up of practical experience in country, and most countries are developing their NBSAPs with support from GEF.

99. Within Africa, lack of financial and human resources are extensively cited as factors constraining the development and implementation of programmes for both environmental protection and the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The World Bank has supported the development of a number of national environmental action plans, and GEF is supporting development of most of the NBSAPs through biodiversity enabling activities.

100. Within Western Europe, the human and financial resources available for implementation of NBSAPs are generally good, although not all the reports address the matter. Further financial resources are identified as being required in several countries, but innovative approaches to raising revenue and sponsorship are being explored, particularly with the private sector. In some areas of Western Europe, significant funds are available through the European Commission, where structural funds and the Cohesion Fund can be used to finance activities that support (or at least do not impact upon) biodiversity conservation.

101. Reports of Western European Parties refer to their financial and human resources available for technology transfer and capacity-building programmes in other parts of the world. Several reports emphasize foreign assistance programmes, and some identify the quantity of funds being allocated to this, either directly, or through financial mechanisms such as GEF. Relevant reports indicate that the responsible agencies have defined policies for the programmes they manage, have identified countries and sectors eligible for funds, and have established procedures to avoid funding potentially damaging activities.

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102. The availability of resources varies widely in the countries with economies in transition, and most of the countries are seeking outside assistance, both financial and for technical assistance, in at least some areas of activity. Such support ranges from specific projects, such as managing protected-area systems or developing biodiversity information management, to a much more wide-ranging requirement for capacity-building. In most cases, GEF is supporting the development of NBSAPs.

103. Other developed country Parties have sufficient resources for ensuring implementation of their NBSAPs, and in most cases are also supporting conservation related activities in other countries through bilateral and multilateral development aid programmes.

104. During the period from July 1996 to December 1997, GEF, as the institutional structure operating the financial mechanism, approved biodiversity enabling activity projects for 93 developing country Parties. These projects included, inter alia, assistance to Parties with the implementation of Articles 6 and 8 of the Convention, including the preparation of NBSAPs and of the first national reports. Details of these enabling activity projects are contained in the report of GEF to the Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/15).

105. The need to provide the conditions by which all countries can complete the strategy and planning cycle clearly emerges from the reports. This is echoed in the conclusions of the recent biodiversity-planning workshops (see section IV below). Developing countries and those with economies in transition identify the need for coordination, sharing of information and experience, and capacity-building at the regional level, in such a way that countries advanced in the process can assist those still formulating their NBSAPs.

2. Information resources

106. Within Western Europe, information resources are also generally available to support implementation, although they are not currently organized as efficiently as they might be. Further development of information networks is planned in several countries and internationally under the auspices of the European Environment Agency. An aspect on which more information could have been provided in the national reports of Western European Parties is the extent to which they hold information relevant to biodiversity conservation in other parts of the world. Some references are however made to ongoing collaborative projects in this area.

107. Other developed country Parties have access to significant bodies of information, and either have developed or are in the process of developing information systems that are increasingly providing integrated access to this information. Most are using the Internet to ensure wide access to networked information.

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108. A significant body of information is available in countries with economies in transition, based on research and monitoring programmes that are in some cases long-standing. There are gaps in these programmes, however, and reports reveal an underlying concern that the economic situation may have an effect on the future of research and monitoring programmes. The need to develop more coordinated information systems is clear, and in some cases this needs to begin with computerization of data in order to increase its accessibility.

109. Parties in Latin America generally report that there is a good body of information, but that there are significant gaps that need to be addressed. The issue of the accessibility of this information is not really covered in the reports, but there is a need to build on the programmes that already exist in many countries to promote greater access to information held in-country and elsewhere. The development of national biodiversity-information systems that encourage the sharing and exchange of information could be promoted further through case-studies and training programmes.

110. Within the small island developing States, information systems which support the development and implementation of biodiversity conservation policy are being developed by some Parties, but in most cases significant further planning and development are required. At least one report also stresses the importance of access to information held overseas, including published information.

111. Within Asia much information exists, in some cases based on long-standing research, but this information is not always accessible to those that need it. For this reason, a number of countries are already working on development of information systems, and a number of reports identify the need for further development in this area.

112. One report from the Asia region makes recommendations on data and information management that seem to encapsulate the needs of many Parties. These are (in summary):

(a) Investigate and implement means to enhance the collection, sharing, analysis, scope and distribution of data and information;

(b) Promote development of information management systems that facilitate rapid analysis and distribution of data and information;

(c) Ensure that data and information are made available to potential users through appropriate sharing arrangements; and

(d) Participate in the development and maintenance of appropriate international databases.

113. Within Africa, lack of baseline information is widely identified within national reports as an impediment to the effective implementation of the Convention, and attention is drawn to the relative inaccessibility of the information. Further development of environmental information systems in Africa is clearly a priority.

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114. Issues that emerge from the reports and the recent biodiversity planning workshops (see section IV below) include accessibility of information, including that held outside the country, data management and capacity-building.

H. Mechanisms for sharing national experience

115. Few national reports include case-studies, but such case-studies as are included provide excellent brief summaries that could provide valuable guidance to other Parties.

116. In addition to case-studies, the reports generally contain a wide range of information and experience of potential value to other Parties. Examples include a Party's assessment of its impact on the biodiversity of other countries, the concept of "sectoral responsibility" for biodiversity, or experiences with the application of incentive mechanisms.

117. Mechanisms exist in a number of countries to facilitate the sharing of information and experience, but these are generally oriented more towards information than to sharing of experience. In almost all cases where this is reported on, the need for improvement is emphasized, particularly in sharing and networking of information. It is therefore also the case that better mechanisms for locating and sharing experience also need to be developed.

118. National clearing-house mechanisms have been developed in several countries, and are reported to be under development in a number of others. There are six national sites using the clearing-house mechanism logo, and nine other national websites are maintained by the clearing-house mechanism national focal points. In addition, a number of Parties have developed Web-based information services which function as clearing-house mechanisms, but are not named as such and are not currently managed by the clearing-house mechanism national focal point.

I. Other information requested of Contracting Parties

119. Several decisions of the Conference of the Parties request Parties to provide information additional to that requested by decision II/17. It appears from the reports examined that this information has not been provided in a structured manner, and that many Parties have not reported on the issues at all.

120. Decision III/6 requested developed country Parties to submit information on their financial support for the objectives of the Convention. Relatively few of these national reports provide more than very basic figures on the allocation of financial resources, and many reports provide no information at all. In part, this is a result of difficulty in clearly identifying within national budgets what is relevant to biodiversity conservation and what is not, particularly when cross-sectoral integration is involved. (In this context, document UNEP/CBD/COP/4/17 ("Additional financial resources") refers to the initial discussions between the Secretariat and OECD on the development of an appropriate statistical marker.)

121. Decision III/11 requested Parties to identify issues and priorities concerning conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biological

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diversity. The extent to which this has been done is not clear from most reports, and there is insufficient information on which to base any further analysis or recommendation.

122. Decision III/14 urged Parties to supply information about implementation of Article 8(j) and related articles. While a number of national reports provide information on actions taken to involve indigenous and local communities in the development of NBSAPs, and to ensure that their interests are taken into account, analysis of the information provided is difficult as such participation in the NBSAP process, while a positive step, does not of itself provide information about implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions of the Convention.

123. Decision III/18 invited Parties to share experiences on incentive measures and make relevant case-studies available. Various incentive measures are referred to in the reports, but not necessarily in the form of case-studies with a view to wider dissemination. (In this context, document UNEP/CBD/COP/4/18 ("Design and implementation of incentive measures") discusses case-studies on incentive measures submitted in response to decision III/18.)

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Lessons learned from biodiversity-planning workshops

124. Three recent intergovernmental workshops on NBSAP have taken place. These were:

(a) The Planning for Biodiversity workshop organized by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland through the United Kingdom Environmental Know-How Fund, with the participation of representatives of 25 Central and Eastern European countries (Bristol, 4-7 November 1997);

(b) The Regional Expert Workshop on Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with the participation of representatives of 17 African countries (Nairobi, 19-21 November 1997); and

(c) The Regional Expert Workshop on Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans organized by UNDP and UNEP, with the participation of representatives of 28 Latin American and Caribbean countries (Santo Domingo, 14-16 January 1998).

125. The participants in these workshops were predominantly the national focal points for the Convention and/or the coordinators of the NBSAPs and national reports. The Secretariat attended all three workshops. The two workshops organized by UNDP formed part of its activities under a Project Development Facility (PDF) Block B grant from GEF for the development of a proposal for a biodiversity planning support programme.

126. As part of the PDF-B project, UNDP also sought, by questionnaire, the views of NBSAP coordinators and relevant GEF Implementing Agency staff on their experiences of the NBSAP process, including the identification of constraints and unmet capacity-building requirements.

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127. Conclusions drawn from the returned questionnaires and from the workshops can be summarized as follows:

(a) Biodiversity planning, in the context of the comprehensive scope of the Convention, is a new concept for which there are no prior models or examples of best practices, and for which few methodological tools are currently available;

(b) All countries, notwithstanding differences arising from the specific conditions of each, are engaged in similar learning processes;

(c) Specific problems cited included:

(i) Inadequacy or absence of political support for crucial aspects of the planning process and for the approval of actions;

(ii) Weak legislative base;

(iii) Inadequacy of existing information on biodiversity issues;

(iv) Lack of appropriate scientific and technical expertise and experience in biodiversity planning within Government and among stakeholders;

(v) Lack of institutional coordination, both horizontally and vertically within Governments, and between Governments and stakeholders;

(vi) Difficulties in access to and availability of funding;

(vii) Direct economic pressure on ecosystems and a lack of national budget allocations;

(viii) Need for increased public education and awareness;

(ix) Lack of clarity among Implementing Agencies about the NBSAP process, its components and outcomes;

(x) Need for recognition of the long-term nature of the NBSAP process;

(xi) Complexity of the issues raised by the need to translate a biodiversity strategy into costed and prioritized action plans, with the requisite funding strategy, and the continued need in most countries for these to be addressed;

(xii) Scarcity of examples of the effective integration of biodiversity considerations into sectoral or cross-sectoral planning.

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128. These conclusions are drawn predominantly from views expressed by representatives of Parties from the European, African and Latin American and Caribbean regions, by staff of the Implementing Agencies and by external consultants assisting NBSAP processes.

B. Lessons learned from the reporting process

129. Only some reports clearly identify the processes being followed to ensure effective implementation of the Convention in general, and the NBSAP in particular.

130. Several reports make explicit mention of the dynamic nature of the NBSAP, and the need to update it and adjust it as goals are achieved and conditions change. This is an essential part of the monitoring and review process, of which the reporting process is a part.

131. It appears from some national reports that the request from the Conference of Parties constituted the sole reason for the preparation of the report. However, in other cases, the obligation to report has led to the preparation of a document for wider consumption, or provided a structured opportunity to review progress.

132. National focal points in several countries have informed the Secretariat of difficulties encountered in applying the guidelines for national reporting on the implementation of Article 6 contained in the annex to decision II/17. These difficulties are also apparent from the review of national reports. Such difficulties, and the variability of the national reports that have resulted, need to be assessed before the next reporting round, and recommendations on future reporting distilled from this assessment.

133. Key questions concern: the length of the report, and depth of content; the time period to be covered; apparent duplication between sections; duplication between the report and other existing documents; difficulty of providing meaningful budget figures; whether the report should only cover activities which are a direct result of ratification of the Convention; how to report on implementation of decisions of the Conference of the Parties; and what to report on sustainable use and fair and equitable sharing of resources.

C. Harmonization of reporting

134. Various biodiversity-related instruments and processes require the submission of periodic national reports. The format, content and periodicity of these reports are usually specified through agreed guidelines. A synthesis report is usually compiled by the convention or programme secretariat, with the aim of assessing progress in implementation and ensuring that lessons learned are shared among Parties and member States.

135. Relevant instruments and processes include the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the preparation of the review by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) of the state of the world's plant genetic resources.

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136. At its fifth session, the Commission on Sustainable Development considered the recommendations of the Secretary-General for the streamlining of national reports (see document E/CN.17/1997/6). The special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21 concluded that national reports on the implementation of Agenda 21 have proved to be a valuable means of sharing information at the international and regional levels and, even more important, of providing a focus for the coordination of issues related to sustainable development at the national level within individual countries.

137. The Secretariat is currently participating in a feasibility study, together with the secretariats of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Ramsar Convention, the World Heritage Convention and UNEP, to examine harmonized information management for the biodiversity-related conventions. Possible recommendations are currently under examination for their feasibility and, if adopted by the governing bodies of the conventions in question, these would aim to assist Parties to provide information in forms that:

- (a) Are complementary (non-overlapping), so that information is provided only once and in one consistent format;
- (b) Serve the needs of more than one convention;
- (c) Are a subset of national biodiversity-information-management products (i.e. part of the input to national planning and policy development);
- (d) Are produced in a cycle that suits national requirements and that is in harmony with the reporting cycles of the conventions; and
- (e) Are developed through a process supported by harmonized guidelines, nomenclature and thesauri, as well as recommended good practices and information management methodologies.

138. A meeting of the relevant secretariats has been arranged for the last week of April to consider the feasibility of such arrangements. The report of this meeting will be made available to the Conference of the Parties at its fourth meeting.

V. CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES AHEAD

139. Reports by Parties on measures taken for the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and their effectiveness are the key to monitoring the implementation of the Convention on a global scale, to identifying both solutions and constraints, and to the effective formulation of policies and programmes to assist Parties to fulfil their obligations.

140. In the vast majority of countries, national biodiversity strategies and action plans are being developed. Countries that have not yet completed the development of their NBSAP should be given such assistance as they may need in order to complete this process and to move forward to implementation of the action plan. The national reports, and the conclusions of the

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biodiversity-planning workshops referred to above, identify the need for continued technical and financial support for both the planning and implementation phases. These needs involve capacity-building, the sharing of information and experiences, and access to expertise and financial resources. There are opportunities for those countries who have completed their NBSAP process to assist countries, particularly those of the same region, who are in the planning and development stage. Financial resources for such regional technical support may be required.

141. The successful development and implementation of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan is clearly linked to other key provisions of the Convention, most prominent of which are public education and awareness and the adoption of appropriate incentive measures. The implementation of these provisions will be discussed under item 15 of the agenda of the meeting (see documents UNEP/CBD/COP/4/18 and 19).

142. Governments are facing demands for reporting on closely related issues under a series of international legal instruments and intergovernmental processes relating to biological diversity, environmental protection and sustainable development. The need for harmonization of reporting in order to make best use of resources and to improve the effectiveness of the reporting process has been widely recognized. In this regard, the Conference of the Parties will need to consider the revision of guidelines on reporting by Parties so that the reporting process results in the provision of the necessary information on the measures taken for the implementation of the Convention and their effectiveness, while at the same avoiding unnecessary burdens on Parties and maximizing the utility and accessibility of such information to related processes.

143. In decision II/17, the Conference of the Parties decided that, at its fourth meeting, it would determine the intervals and form of subsequent national reports. This determination would be based on the experience of Parties in preparing their first national reports and taking into account the state of implementation of the Convention.

144. A substantial number of first national reports have been submitted and more Parties have informed the Executive Secretary of their intention to submit reports by the time of the fourth meeting. Many of the reports examined have been submitted as interim reports, and full reports are expected to be submitted by the Parties in question once the NBSAP process is further advanced. Other Parties have advised that they intend to submit their report later in the year.

145. It would be advisable to allow for completion of this process and full analysis of the lessons learned. Such a course of action would provide the necessary incentives and encouragement to Parties to continue with the preparation and submission of a full first national report.

146. Nevertheless, the information provided in this note constitutes a synthesis of the information contained in a representative sample of reports received from almost half the total number of Parties, from all regions.

A. Intervals

147. Under item 13 of the agenda of the meeting, the Conference of the Parties will consider the frequency of its ordinary meetings. If it is decided to maintain the current arrangements for annual meetings, then the Conference of the Parties will decide, under item 19 of the agenda (Date and venue of the fifth meeting), to hold its next meeting in early 1999.

148. The experience of submission of the first national reports suggests that the date of submission of reports needs to be more in advance of the relevant meeting of the Conference of the Parties than was the case this time. In order to allow for sufficient time for the analysis of reports and for the preparation of the report of the Executive Secretary, the date to be established for receipt of national reports needs to be at least six months before the date of the meeting.

149. A decision to hold the fifth meeting in the first half of 1999 would therefore imply a need to establish a deadline in the second half of 1998 for receipt of the next national report. It would probably be unrealistic to imagine that the majority of Parties will be in a position to prepare a second report so soon after the first.

150. This suggests that the Conference of the Parties should request the next national report for the year 2000. If the decision is taken to maintain the current arrangements of annual meetings, this would imply that the second national reports be considered at its sixth meeting and that the date for submission be established for late 1999. On the other hand, if a decision is taken to extend the intervals between meetings of the Conference of the Parties to two years or longer, the Conference of the Parties would thus need to call for the second national reports to be considered at its fifth meeting in the year 2000 or later, and that the date for submission be set for at least six months in advance of that meeting.

B. Revised guidelines

151. For the second national report, the Conference of the Parties is invited to request Parties to provide information on measures taken for the implementation of Article 7 (Identification and Monitoring). In addition, bearing in mind that most Parties have not completed the national biodiversity strategy and action plan process, Parties could also be invited to include in this report information on the completion of the process and on the experiences of implementation of the strategy and action plan.

152. As Parties vary considerably in size, biodiversity, capacity and capability, it is difficult to provide a precise definition of exactly what each should provide in its national report. The following 10 guiding principles were contained in an information paper on further guidelines for the preparation of national reports, distributed at the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/3/Inf.16). They may help in the development of future guidelines for national reporting:

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- (a) Base the report on information that is required already by the national focal point to ensure that the country is meeting the commitments taken on as a result of becoming a Party to the Convention;
- (b) Ensure that the report covers the priority areas identified by the Conference of the Parties in its decisions;
- (c) Cover what is relevant to implementation of the Convention, not just what is being done because the Convention has been ratified;
- (d) Emphasize progress in development and implementation of the national biodiversity strategy and/or national biodiversity action plan;
- (e) Summarize the current status and trends in biodiversity, biodiversity "services", use and threats, and progress in development of programmes to evaluate and monitor these;
- (f) Avoid repeating information from national biodiversity strategies and action plans, or national country studies and state-of-the-environment reports (they can be appended);
- (g) Concentrate on measurable progress since the last report, and identify the progress that is expected before the next report is due;
- (h) Use indicators to show progress in achieving targets set in the national biodiversity strategy and/or national biodiversity action plan, and in previous reports;
- (i) Emphasize information that will help other Parties in their implementation of the Convention, in particular both good practice and bad experience;
- (j) Design reports that are useful for multiple purposes with minimal modification, for example, as material for journalists or education.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

153. The Conference of the Parties is thus invited:

- (a) To welcome the number of first national reports submitted, to encourage those Parties that have submitted interim reports to submit a full report as soon as they are in a position to do so, and to encourage those that have yet to submit their first national report to do so as soon as they can;
- (b) To request the Executive Secretary to prepare an updated version of the present synthesis on the basis of all the first national reports received and other relevant information;
- (c) To decide upon the frequency of future national reports, the focus of the second national report and the date for its submission;
- (d) To provide advice to Parties on the preparation of the second national report. Such advice should cover both the nature of the information

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needed from Parties in order to assess the state of implementation of the Convention and recommendations on improving the reporting process. For the former, the Conference of the Parties is invited to provide guidance on format, style, length and treatment that ensure comparability between reports.

For the latter, the Conference of the Parties is invited to request the Executive Secretary to continue collaboration with the secretariats of other biodiversity-related convention secretariats, of the Rio conventions and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs on developing options for the harmonization of reporting;

(e) To consider the constraints and needs, financial and otherwise, identified by Parties, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition, in respect of the completion of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan process and to provide appropriate guidance to the Global Environment Facility, the Implementing Agencies and other competent institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental, as well as to Parties themselves, with a view to facilitating the completion of the strategy and planning cycle by all Parties;

(f) To request the Executive Secretary to take into full account the information provided in the national reports in the preparation of the Global Biodiversity Outlook;

(g) To make the review of information contained in national reports a standing item on agenda of the Conference of the Parties.

Annex IPARTIES AND GOVERNMENTS WHICH HAVE
SUBMITTED NATIONAL REPORTS

1.	Algeria	44.	Madagascar
2.	Armenia	45.	Malawi
3.	Australia	46.	Malaysia
4.	Austria	47.	Maldives
5.	Bahamas	48.	Marshall Islands
6.	Belarus	49.	Mexico
7.	Belize	50.	Monaco
8.	Bhutan	51.	Mongolia
9.	Bolivia	52.	Mozambique
10.	Brazil	53.	Namibia
11.	Burkina Faso	54.	Nepal
12.	Cameroon	55.	Netherlands
13.	Canada	56.	New Zealand
14.	Cape Verde	57.	Niger
15.	China	58.	Norway
16.	Colombia	59.	Oman
17.	Costa Rica	60.	Panama
18.	Denmark	61.	Peru
19.	Djibouti	62.	Poland
20.	Dominican Republic	63.	Qatar
21.	Democratic Republic of the Congo	64.	Republic of Korea
22.	Ecuador	65.	Romania
23.	Egypt	66.	Russian Federation
24.	El Salvador	67.	Rwanda
25.	Equatorial Guinea	68.	Senegal
26.	Eritrea	69.	Slovenia
27.	European Community	70.	South Africa
28.	Fiji	71.	Spain
29.	Finland	72.	Sri Lanka
30.	France	73.	Swaziland
31.	Gambia	74.	Sweden
32.	Greece	75.	Switzerland
33.	Haiti	76.	Thailand
34.	Hungary	77.	Togo
35.	Indonesia	78.	Trinidad and Tobago
36.	Israel	79.	Turkey
37.	Jamaica	80.	Uganda
38.	Japan	81.	Ukraine
39.	Kazakstan	82.	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
40.	Kenya		
41.	Latvia	83.	Uruguay
42.	Lebanon	84.	Uzbekistan
43.	Lesotho	85.	Viet Nam
		86.	Zambia

Annex II

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

The table below contains information derived from national reports, information received from the Global Environment Facility and its Implementing Agencies, and from other sources. Parties and Governments are requested to review this information and to inform the Executive Secretary of amendments to be made to the table.

Country	National Report	GEF Support	Status of NBSAP
Albania	-	GEF-EA	B
Algeria	NR	GEF-EA	B
Antigua and Barbuda	-	GEF-EA	B
Argentina	-	GEF-EA	B
Armenia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Australia	NR	-	C
Austria	NR	-	B
Bahamas	NR	GEF-EA	C
Bahrain	-	-	A
Bangladesh	-	-	A
Barbados	-	GEF-EA	B
Belarus	NR	-	B
Belgium	-	-	A
Belize	NR	GEF-EA	C
Benin	-	GEF-EA	B
Bhutan	NR	GEF-EA	C
Bolivia	NR	-	B
Botswana	-	-	A
Brazil	NR	GEF-EA	B
Bulgaria	-	-	C
Burkina Faso	NR	GEF-EA	B
Burundi	-	-	A
Cambodia	-	-	A
Cameroon	NR	GEF-EA	B
Canada	NR	-	C
Cape Verde	NR	GEF-EA	B
Central African Republic	-	GEF-EA	B
Chad	NR	GEF-EA	B
Chile	-	-	A
China	NR	GEF-EA	C
Colombia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Comores	-	GEF-EA	B
Congo	-	GEF-EA	B
Cook Islands	-	-	A
Costa Rica	NR	GEF-EA	B
Cote d'Ivoire	-	GEF-EA	B

Croatia	-	GEF-EA	B
Cuba	-	GEF-EA	B
Cyprus	-	-	A
Czech Republic	-	GEF-EA	B
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	-	GEF-EA	B
Democratic Republic of the Congo	NR	GEF-EA	B
Denmark	NR	-	C
Djibouti	NR	GEF-EA	B
Dominica	-	GEF-EA	B
Dominican Republic	NR	-	B
Ecuador	NR	-	B
Egypt	NR	GEF-EA	B
El Salvador	NR	GEF-EA	B
Equatorial Guinea	NR	GEF-EA	B
Eritrea	NR	GEF-EA	B
Estonia	-	GEF-EA	B
Ethiopia	-	-	A
European Union	NR	-	C
Fiji	NR	GEF-EA	B
Finland	NR	-	C
France	NR	-	B
Gabon	NR	GEF-EA	B
Gambia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Georgia	-	GEF-EA	B
Germany	-	-	A
Ghana	-	-	A
Greece	NR	-	B
Grenada	-	-	A
Guatemala	-	GEF-EA	B
Guinea	-	GEF-EA	B
Guinea-Bissau	-	GEF-EA	B
Guyana	-	-	A
Haiti	NR	-	A
Honduras	-	GEF-EA	B
Hungary	NR	GEF-EA	B
Iceland	-	-	A
India	-	GEF-EA	B
Indonesia	NR	-	C
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	-	GEF-EA	B
Ireland	-	-	A
Israel	NR	-	C
Italy	-	-	A
Jamaica	NR	-	B
Japan	NR	-	C

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Jordan	-	GEF-EA	B
Kazakstan	NR	GEF-EA	B
Kenya	NR	GEF-EA	B
Kiribati	-	-	A
Kyrgystan		GEF-EA	B
Lao People's Democratic Republic	-	-	A
Latvia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Lebanon	NR	GEF-EA	B
Lesotho	NR	GEF-EA	B
Liechtenstein	-	-	A
Lithuania	-	GEF-EA	C
Luxembourg	-	-	A
Madagascar	NR	GEF-EA	B
Malawi	NR	GEF-EA	B
Malaysia	NR	GEF-EA	C
Maldives	NR	GEF-EA	B
Mali	NR	GEF-EA	B
Marshall Islands	NR	GEF-EA	B
Mauritania	-	GEF-EA	B
Mauritius	-	GEF-EA	B
Mexico	NR	GEF-EA	B
Micronesia, Federated States of	-	-	A
Monaco	NR	-	C
Mongolia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Morocco	-	GEF-EA	B
Mozambique	NR	GEF-EA	B
Namibia	NR	-	B
Nauru	-	-	A
Nepal	NR	-	A
Netherlands	NR	-	C
New Zealand	NR	-	B
Nicaragua	-	-	A
Niger	NR	GEF-EA	B
Nigeria	-	-	A
Niue	-	-	A
Norway	NR	-	B
Oman	NR	GEF-EA	B
Pakistan	-	-	A
Panama	NR	GEF-EA	B
Papua New Guinea	-	-	A
Paraguay	-	-	A
Peru	NR	GEF-EA	B
Philippines	-	-	A
Poland	NR	GEF-EA	B

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Portugal	-	-	A
Qatar	NR	-	A
Republic of Korea	NR	-	A
Republic of Moldova	-	-	A
Romania	NR	-	C
Russian Federation	NR	GEF-EA	B
Rwanda	NR	-	A
Saint Kitts and Nevis	-	GEF-EA	B
Saint Lucia	-	-	A
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	-	GEF-EA	B
Samoa	-	-	A
San Marino	-	-	A
Senegal	NR	GEF-EA	B
Seychelles	NR	GEF-EA	A
Sierra Leone	-	-	A
Singapore	NR	-	A
Slovakia	-	GEF-EA	C
Slovenia	NR	-	B
Soloman Islands	-	GEF-EA	B
South Africa	NR	GEF-EA	B
Spain	NR	-	B
Sri Lanka	NR	-	C
Sudan	-	GEF-EA	B
Suriname	-	GEF-EA	B
Swaziland	NR	GEF-EA	B
Sweden	NR	-	B
Switzerland	NR	-	B
Syrian Arab Republic	-	GEF-EA	B
Tajikistan	-	-	B
Thailand	NR	-	B
Togo	NR	-	B
Trinidad and Tobago	NR	GEF-EA	B
Tunisia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Turkey	NR	-	B
Turkmenistan	-	-	B
Uganda	NR	GEF-EA	B
Ukraine	NR	GEF-EA	B
United Kingdom	NR	-	C
United Republic of Tanzania	-	-	A
Uruguay	NR	GEF-EA	BZ

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Uzbekistan	NR	GEF-EA	B
Vanuatu	-	GEF-EA	B
Venezuela	-	GEF-EA	B
Viet Nam	NR	-	C
Yemen	-	GEF-EA	B
Zambia	NR	GEF-EA	B
Zimbabwe	-	GEF-EA	B

Key
A - no information
B - planned or in preparation
C - completed and approved
