

**CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL  
DIVERSITY**Distr.  
GENERALUNEP/CBD/COP/8/17/Add.1  
17 January 2006

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE  
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL  
DIVERSITY**

Eighth meeting

Curitiba, Brazil, 20-31 March 2006

Item 19 of the provisional agenda\*

**ELABORATION OF RELATIVE ROLES OF THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM IN  
DEALING WITH TAXONOMIC DATABASES INCLUDING: THE INTER-AMERICAN  
BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION NETWORK, BIONET, THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY  
INFORMATION FACILITY, SPECIES 2000, THE INTEGRATED TAXONOMIC  
INFORMATION SYSTEM AND NATURESERVE***Note by the Executive Secretary***I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The present note was drafted by the Executive Secretary, pursuant to paragraph 6 of decision VII/23, to report on the use of the clearing-house mechanism, in collaboration with the informal advisory committee, to continue to strengthen collaboration with international partners and organizations and to report on that collaboration, including an elaboration of the relative roles of the clearing-house mechanism and information facilities dealing in particular with taxonomic databases, including Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) hubs, BioNet Locally Owned and Operated Partnerships (LOOPs), NatureServe Centres for Data Conservation (CDCs), the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) nodes and the Catalogue of Life developed by Species 2000 and Integrated Taxonomic Information System's.

**II. REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PARAGRAPH 6 OF  
DECISION VII/23**

2. The merit in pursuing greater cooperation between the clearing-house mechanism and taxonomic initiatives was first spelled out at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. In paragraph 4 of decision VI/18, the Conference of the Parties endorsed the programme of work for the Global Taxonomy Initiative and emphasized the need to coordinate activities with other existing initiatives, such as the clearing-house mechanism and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

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\* UNEP/CBD/COP/8/1.

3. Decision VI/8 also set the stage for the participation of taxonomic initiatives in the Global Taxonomy Initiative by naming the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, Species 2000, the Integrated Taxonomic Information System and BioNET International, among others, in collaboration with the clearing-house mechanism, as actors in planned activity 7 of the programme of work for the Global Taxonomy Initiative, which deals with the development of a coordinated global taxonomy information system.

4. Subsequently, in paragraph 7 (e) of decision VII/9, the Conference of the Parties requested “the Executive Secretary to further facilitate the synergistic collaboration between existing initiatives, including the clearing-house mechanism, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, and regional and subregional taxonomic networks in order to develop more accessible information sources for countries on their biodiversity”.

5. By paragraph 6 of decision VII/23, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary “to use the clearing-house mechanism, in collaboration with the informal advisory committee, to continue to strengthen collaboration with international partners and organizations for review at the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and to report on that collaboration, including an elaboration of the relative roles of the clearing-house mechanism and information facilities dealing in particular with taxonomic databases including, IABIN (Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network) hubs, BioNet LOOPs (Locally Owned and Operated Partnerships), NatureServe CDCs (Centres for Data Conservation), nodes of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility and Species 2000 and the Integrated Taxonomic Information System's Catalogue of Life”.

6. Pursuant to the above-mentioned decisions, the Convention Secretariat has entered into collaborative agreements with a number of international partners with the aim of furthering the role of the clearing-house mechanism as a tool for information exchange, network development and technical and scientific cooperation. The Executive Secretary has signed memoranda of cooperation with the following organizations: NatureServe, the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility and BioNET-INTERNATIONAL. The Convention Secretariat remains open to the possibility of entering into cooperation agreements with Species 2000 and the Integrated Taxonomic Information Systems (ITIS). The following is a review of the initiatives taken to date.

#### *NatureServe*

7. NatureServe is a non-profit conservation organization founded in 1994 to provide the scientific information and tools needed to help guide effective conservation action. Formerly known as the Association for Biodiversity Information, NatureServe represents an international network of biological inventories—also called natural heritage programmes or conservation data centres (CDCs)—that operate in all 50 states of the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. These conservation data centres collect and manage detailed local information on plants, animals, and ecosystems, develop information products, data management tools, and conservation services to help meet local, national, and global conservation needs. NatureServe is a designated international thematic focal point for the clearing-house mechanism pursuant to annex II, paragraph (c) (iii), of decision V/14.

8. NatureServe and the Convention Secretariat signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2001, whereby the latter agreed to make available its information on biological diversity, to facilitate access to relevant thematic information held by its conservation data centres, and to collaborate on scientific initiatives within the work programme of SBSTTA.

9. NatureServe also agreed to facilitate cooperation between the conservation data centres and national focal points for the clearing-house mechanism, to assist in the evaluation and expansion of

information networking projects throughout the Western Hemisphere and to collaborate with the clearing-house mechanism in the development of data standards and protocols, analytical tools and information delivery systems targeted towards biodiversity needs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

10. The Secretariat agreed in return to collaborate with NatureServe in its development as an international thematic focal point, pursuant to paragraph (c) in annex II to decision V/14, under the clearing-house mechanism and in the expansion of information networking initiatives in the countries and regions where NatureServe works, and to assist in building the capacity of NatureServe and participating countries in the collection, management and sharing of biodiversity information.

11. In addition, the Secretariat committed itself to facilitating participation by NatureServe in the joint initiative of the Convention on Biological Diversity/Global Invasive Species Programme, in the Global Taxonomy Initiative and, as appropriate, in the thematic areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention.

#### *Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network*

12. The Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) was created in 1996 in the context of the Summit of the Americas. It is both an Internet-based information resource with common infrastructure and content, interoperable through the use of common standards, and a forum for institutions and individuals to discuss the issues related to sharing and exchange of biodiversity information. IABIN is currently a member of the informal advisory committee of the clearing-house mechanism.

13. The Convention Secretariat and the IABIN Council signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2002 with the objective of establishing a framework for collaboration between IABIN and the clearing-house mechanism with a view to facilitating the development and implementation of technologies and best practices necessary in order to share knowledge and information relevant to biodiversity conservation and sustainable management. The activities carried out within this framework aim to promote the exchange of scientific and technical knowledge and augment scientific and technical information capabilities of the Parties and their constituents.

14. IABIN and the Secretariat agreed to work collaboratively to develop plans for the implementation of IABIN as a regional initiative supporting the objectives of the clearing-house mechanism. The parties undertook to co-operate to promote adoption of interoperability standards for the exchange of data and technical information and to elaborate, develop and implement programmes pertaining to the promotion and use of biodiversity information and management tools. Mutual participation in workshops, working groups and other activities addressing capacity-building, technical approaches and policy issues was also envisaged. In addition, IABIN and the Secretariat agreed to foster cooperative research, training activities, technical exchange of specialists, to share expertise pertaining to distributed interoperable networks and metadata and to promote awareness of the IABIN and the clearing-house mechanism.

15. The Secretariat and IABIN have developed an extensive collaborative relationship. The parties have worked together to promote joint regional workshops, such as the Joint Latin America and Caribbean Regional Meeting on the Clearing-house Mechanism and the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network: Building Partnerships Through Effective Networking, held in Cancún, Mexico, 12-14 August 2003. The meeting provided an opportunity for countries of the region to express their needs and expectations with regard to efforts by the clearing-house mechanism and IABIN to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation, particularly in collaboration with established international thematic focal points and other relevant international initiatives and organizations.

16. The regional meeting issued a number of recommendations regarding future joint initiatives between the clearing-house mechanism and IABIN. In the area of invasive alien species, participants

recommended that the clearing-house mechanism collaborate with IABIN's Invasives Information Network (I3N) project, pursuant to paragraph 22 of decision VI/23. Participants also agreed on the need for the clearing-house mechanism, IABIN and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility to optimize resources and to harmonize activities, with the purpose of assisting Parties to overcome the taxonomic impediment with a view towards the implementation of the Global Taxonomy Initiative. It was stressed that regional initiatives should harmonize as much as possible information exchange architectures. It was also recommended that the clearing-house mechanism collaborate with IABIN in the areas of classification of ecosystems, the standardization of classifications and in the development of information tools on pollinators.

17. The relationship between IABIN and the Secretariat is expected to be strengthened further should the Conference of the Parties, at its eighth meeting, adopt recommendation X/7 made at the tenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) that the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the informal advisory committee for the clearing-house mechanism, collaborate, to the extent possible, with existing information exchange initiatives, such as IABIN, to promote greater interoperability of data, exchange of information and capacity-building initiatives in support of the 2010 target.

#### *Global Biodiversity Information Facility*

18. The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) was established in 2001 with the aim of facilitating digitization and global dissemination of primary biodiversity data. Global Biodiversity Information Facility's objective is to make possible for policy- and decision-makers, research scientists and the general public worldwide to electronically access the world's supply of primary scientific data on biodiversity. The majority of the work of GBIF is carried out by the participating nodes and their data providers. GBIF is currently a member of the informal advisory committee of the clearing-house mechanism.

19. In 2003 the Convention and the GBIF secretariats signed a Memorandum of Cooperation establishing a framework of collaboration between the two organizations with the objective of facilitating the development and implementation of approaches, technologies and best practices necessary to access, share and disseminate biodiversity data at the species, ecosystem and genetic levels via the Internet. Areas of cooperation could include, among others, matters related to scientific and technical cooperation and the clearing-house mechanisms, the Global Taxonomy Initiative, the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, the Global Invasive Species Programme, and the 2010 initiative to achieve a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss.

20. The Secretariat has endeavoured to enhance cooperation with Global Biodiversity Information Facility in a number of fronts. It is an ex-officio member of the GBIF Governing Board and has actively participated in its outreach and capacity-building committee, in its Expert Group for Information and Communications Technologies and in the work of the Electronic Catalogue of Names of Known Organisms.

21. The Joint Latin America and Caribbean Regional Meeting on the Clearing-house Mechanism and the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network: Building partnerships Through Effective Networking, held in Cancún, Mexico, from 12 to 14 August 2003, recommended that the clearing-house mechanism and the GBIF nodes organize training workshops and seminars.

22. In decision VII/4, on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems, the Conference of the Parties assigned GBIF a collaborating role in the supporting activities of the Executive Secretary related to goal 3.1 of programme element 3 of the revised programme of work on inland water biological diversity. Goal 3.1 deals specifically with developing an improved understanding of the biodiversity found in inland

water ecosystems, how these systems function, their ecosystem goods and services and the values they can provide.

23. Should the recommendations made by SBSTTA at its tenth meeting be adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its eighth meeting, they will have implications on the relationship between GBIF and the Convention Secretariat. SBSTTA recommended that the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the informal advisory committee for the clearing-house mechanism, collaborate, to the extent possible, with existing information exchange initiatives, such as GBIF, to promote greater interoperability of data, exchange of information and capacity-building initiatives in support of the 2010 target. Furthermore, in its recommendation X/12, on the Global Taxonomy Initiative, SBSTTA recognized that potential synergies between the GTI programme of work and activities carried out by other organizations at a global/regional level, such as GBIF in taxonomic information management and sharing, among others, could provide practical support for national and regional implementation.

#### *BioNET-INTERNATIONAL*

24. BioNET-INTERNATIONAL is dedicated to supporting sustainable development by helping developing countries to overcome the taxonomic impediment by becoming self-reliant in taxonomy. BioNET-INTERNATIONAL is particularly focused on helping countries implement the various environmental conventions, such as the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity, especially its taxonomic capacity-building component, and the GTI. BioNet LOOPS are technical co-operation networks of institutions and individuals that either use or provide taxonomic expertise, information and resources. Their goal is to help build taxonomic capacity to enable developing countries to achieve sustainable development.

25. The Secretariat and BioNET-INTERNATIONAL signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2004 with the objective of promoting and facilitating taxonomic capacity building and related technical and scientific cooperation and technology development and transfer. The collaborative activities envisaged cover scientific and technical cooperation related to the Global Taxonomy Initiative, the clearing-house mechanism, biosafety, transfer of technology and technology cooperation, the 2010 target and promotion of capacity-building.

26. Under this framework, BioNET-INTERNATIONAL took on the task to act as a key agency for the implementation of the programme of work of the Global Taxonomy Initiative, in accordance with decision VI/8 of the Conference of the Parties.

27. Among other activities foreseen by the memorandum of cooperation, BioNET-INTERNATIONAL agreed to the following: to establish and administer GTI seed money programme for capacity-building in taxonomy, with money raised through fundraising; to promote the delivery of rapidly and locally accessible taxonomic expertise and information in forms appropriate for achieving the objectives of the Convention; to promote technology transfer through partnerships between users and providers of technology, information-sharing and through the development of appropriate tools; to facilitate, as appropriate, the effective participation of the Convention Secretariat in BioNET-INTERNATIONAL activities, particularly in the LOOP formulation workshops, global taxonomy workshops and Bio-NET-INTERNATIONAL Board meetings; to provide relevant information to the CBD Secretariat for dissemination through the clearing-house mechanism; to work with the clearing-house mechanism to facilitate and promote technical and scientific cooperation; to facilitate access to information and expertise found in LOOPS by GTI and clearing-house mechanism focal points and promote the overall objectives and implementation of the Convention in all relevant forums and as a basis for taxonomic capacity-building activities.

28. The Secretariat agreed, in return, to collaborate with BioNET-INTERNATIONAL in the implementation of the programme of work of the GTI; to disseminate relevant information received from BioNET-INTERNATIONAL to Parties, Governments, relevant international organizations, and the general public, as appropriate; to raise awareness among Parties of activities carried out by BioNET-INTERNATIONAL by making relevant information available on the Convention's website; to participate, as appropriate, in BioNET-INTERNATIONAL activities; to promote cooperation between GTI and clearing-house mechanism national focal points and BioNET-INTERNATIONAL with a view to promoting the enhancement of capacities, technical and scientific cooperation and exchange of information; and to assist with fund-raising, as appropriate, to support implementation of the GTI programme of work and its seed-money programme for capacity-building in taxonomy.

29. The Joint Latin America and Caribbean Regional Meeting on the Clearing-house Mechanism and the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (see para. 21 above) recommended that national clearing-house mechanisms link with BioNET LOOPS and that the clearing-house mechanism cooperate with BioNET, among other organizations, in the development of GTI-related capacity-building activities (pursuant to operational objectives of decision VI/8).

30. In addition to GBIF (see para. 22 above), decision VII/4 also assigned BioNET-INTERNATIONAL a collaborating role in the supporting activities of the Executive Secretary related to goal 3.1 of programme element 3 of the revised programme of work on inland water biological diversity.

31. In its consideration of the Global Taxonomy Initiative, the tenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice recognized that potential synergies between the GTI programme of work and activities carried out by other organizations at a global/regional level, for example, BioNET-INTERNATIONAL, among others, could provide practical support for national and regional implementation.

#### *Species 2000*

32. The Species 2000 Programme was established by the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS), in co-operation with the Committee on Data for Science and Technology (CODATA) and the International Union of Microbiological Societies (IUMS) in September 1994. Species 2000 is a "federation" of database organizations working closely with users, taxonomists and sponsoring agencies. The goal of Species 2000 is to provide a uniform and validated quality index of names of all known species for use as a practical tool.

33. The clearing-house mechanism continues to endorse the work of Species 2000 and its collaboration with the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, to develop the Catalogue of Life, an index to the world's known species. The Catalogue of Life provides an invaluable taxonomic resource to the Global Taxonomy Initiative.

34. Moreover, Species 2000 is a former member of the informal advisory committee for the clearing-house mechanism, and continues to take an active interest in the organization of joint activities and programmes to eliminate the taxonomic impediment.

#### *Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS)*

33. The Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS) has its origins in a partnership between United States federal agencies formed to satisfy their mutual needs for scientifically credible taxonomic information. The system now includes Canadian and Mexican agencies (ITIS-North America), as well as

other organizations and taxonomic specialists. ITIS is a partner of Species 2000 in the Catalogue of Life and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) in the Electronic Catalog of Names of Known Organisms.

35. The clearing-house mechanism continues to endorse the work of ITIS and its collaboration with Species 2000, to develop the Catalogue of Life, an index to the world's known species. The Catalogue of Life provides an invaluable taxonomic resource to the Global Taxonomy Initiative.

### III. CONCLUSION

36. The clearing-house mechanism continues to forge collaborative agreements with international initiatives and organizations, particularly those involved in and supportive of the Global Taxonomy Initiative.

37. Most importantly, the clearing-house mechanism attempts to synergize the activities among the different focal points, LOOPs, CDCs, and nodes, with a view to optimizing resources at the national and regional levels, sharing expertise and eliminating duplication of tasks and activities. The participation of IABIN and GBIF to develop a species profile schema in support of the global invasive species information network is a case in point.

38. The clearing-house mechanism will continue to reach out to initiatives and organizations to ensure that the best possible expertise is made available to Parties and that resources are utilized optimally in support of the programme areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention.

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