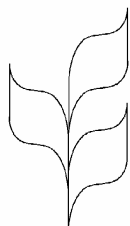




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**OPEN-ENDED INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING ON
THE MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK
FOR THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES UP
TO 2010**

Montreal, 17-20 March 2003

Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN:
INFORMATION FOR FUTURE EVALUATION OF PROGRESS**

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION:

1. In paragraph 4 of decision VI/26 and paragraph 13 of decision VI/27 A, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to provide appropriate information to Parties at an inter-sessional meeting for consideration of the future evaluation of progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan. In response to this request, the Executive Secretary invited Parties to submit proposals regarding modalities for the evaluation of progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan. As of November 2002, three submissions had been received. The present note has been prepared in response to paragraph 4 of decision VI/26 and takes into consideration suggestions and proposals received

2. The note is divided into four sections. Section II reviews the scope of the challenges inherent in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan, the weaknesses of existing implementation mechanisms, ongoing efforts at harmonization of reporting mechanisms, evaluation processes under other biodiversity-related conventions and parallels for implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Section III proposes a number of options for the future evaluation of progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan. Section IV outlines some recommendations for the consideration of the Open-ended Inter-Sessional Meeting with respect to the further review and follow-up of the proposed evaluation options.

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3. The 2010 target set by the Parties in the adoption of the Strategic Plan poses a serious challenge to the Parties, the Convention and its subsidiary bodies. Although existing mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention have registered considerable achievements, obstacles to the overall implementation process persist and it is not possible to provide a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and impacts of the measures taken by the Parties to implement the provisions of the Convention is not possible. Achieving this target may therefore require adjustments in existing procedures in order to overcome the identified obstacles to the implementation process. In particular, there is a need for additional financial resources and the strengthening of ongoing implementation measures complemented by innovative evaluation tools to ensure that progress towards the 2010 target is on course. It also calls for increased collaboration with key partners including the Rio conventions and other biodiversity-related conventions.

II. CHALLENGES

A. *Review of the need for mechanisms/tools for effective evaluation*

4. A number of reviews and studies have generated a substantial body of information on the major constraints that have impacted on the overall implementation process of the Convention on Biological Diversity since it was signed in 1992. Available documentation clearly indicates that the rate of biodiversity loss has not been reduced despite the large number of countries that have made commitments to implement the Convention. Against this background, the sixth meeting of the Conference of Parties placed a strong emphasis on the need for long-term cooperative efforts to address this challenge, through the adoption of the Strategic Plan. A key component of the Strategic Plan is the setting of a specific target that requires the commitment of the Parties to a more effective implementation of the three objectives of the Convention and to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss. This was confirmed by the Ministerial Declaration adopted during the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly. The achievement of this target calls for a fundamental change in the current procedures and practices in the implementation process including securing additional financial resources to support this process of change.

5. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation reinforces the 2010 target by calling for a more efficient and coherent implementation of the three objectives of the Convention and its provisions, including active follow-up of its work programmes and decisions. This Plan reiterates the relevant key decisions of the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties by calling for the integration of the objectives of the Convention into global, regional and national sectoral and cross-sectoral plans and the need for additional financial resources. It also recognizes the national biodiversity strategies and action plans as the primary framework for the implementation of the Convention.

6. This call is based on the recognition that there are inadequacies in the current implementation measures and, therefore, on the need to reorient existing approaches and commitments to ensure that the current rate of biodiversity loss is reversed and reduced significantly by 2010.

7. The Strategic Plan and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation represent a significant shift in emphasis from a policy-setting perspective to a more effective, action-oriented implementation approach. In the view of some of the Parties to the Convention, the development of such an approach is a matter of high priority and that the political support and momentum that emerged from the World Summit on Sustainable Development are likely to be diluted in terms of impact, if not lost all together, if the Parties to the Convention do not ensure that these measures are indeed effected in the context of achieving the 2010 targets.

8. Although the implementation of the Convention has registered considerable successes over the last ten years, it is still difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of the impacts of these achievements in terms of reducing rates of biodiversity loss, if at all. It is therefore, envisaged that strengthening the existing monitoring and feedback mechanisms complemented by innovative evaluation tools would enhance the generation of the kind of information from which to construct consistent and comprehensive assessments of the effectiveness of the measures taken to implement the Convention.

B. Weaknesses and gaps in the existing evaluation and reporting mechanisms

1. National reporting

9. The task of assessing the status of implementation of the Convention at the national level is dependent on the submission of information by the Parties on specific activities that they have carried out with the overall aim of achieving its objectives. Article 26 of the Convention provides the legal framework for the national-reporting process, which is intended, *inter alia*, to identify commitments that are being met, those are not, obstacles and constraints encountered and priorities for future action.

10. In addition to national reports, Parties are also requested to submit thematic reports on issues scheduled for in-depth consideration at forthcoming meetings of the Conference of the Parties. The Conference of the Parties has also issued guidance to the Parties in other decisions as to further information to be included in national reports on particular issues.

11. The national-reporting process is thus an essential feedback mechanism that is central to the overall assessment of the progress of implementation of the Convention. In spite of the wide recognition and acceptance of this essential role, a fairly large number of the 186 Parties to the Convention continue to encounter obstacles in the preparation and submission of their respective national and thematic reports. The number of Parties that have yet to submit their first national reports stands at 58 while those who have submitted their second national reports stands at slightly less than half (84) of the total contracting Parties as of November 2002. The response for thematic reports is even lower with the current rate of submission a modest 28 per cent or less. The available information might, therefore, be insufficient to give a global perspective of progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention.

12. Reasons advanced by the Parties for non-submission or late submission of national and thematic reports include, among others, lack of national-level capacity and resources to meet their reporting obligations particularly in the face of competing reporting requirements of other equally important regional and global agreements.

13. An additional problem related to the reporting process concerns the format and quality of the information contained in the national and thematic reports. The content of the reports is largely qualitative and in some cases subjective. The existing formats of the national and thematic reports, although vastly improved compared to earlier versions, do not make provision for the submission of quantitative time-series data and measurable indicators that would enable a presentation of trends in the achievement of the objectives of the Convention.

14. Further, the information contained in the national reports does not distinguish the range of characteristics of the measures taken by the Parties nor permit an assessment of the practical value and impacts of these measures. This renders the national-reporting process rather inadequate in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the overall implementation process. In recognition of the limited number of available national and thematic reports, the Secretariat of the Convention, as required by the decisions of the Conference of the Parties, continues to solicit and encourage Parties to submit their national reports

and/or provide reasons for the lack of or late submission of these reports. The Secretariat has also spent considerable effort in further improvement of the design and formats of subsequent reports with the aim of minimizing the reporting burden without compromising the quality of information to be included in the reports.

15. The above difficulties and obstacle notwithstanding, the national-reporting process is still the most readily available source of information on the status of implementation of the Convention in those countries that have submitted their respective national and thematic reports.

2. National biodiversity strategies and action plans

16. Article 6 of the Convention requires Parties to develop national biodiversity strategies and action plans and mainstream biodiversity into all sectors. Indeed, development and adoption of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan is the foundation for national action for the implementation of the Convention. A national strategy will reflect how the country intends to fulfil the objectives of the Convention in light of its specific circumstances, and the related action plans will constitute the sequence of steps to be taken to meet these goals.

17. However, the development of these strategies has also encountered some obstacles. The number of strategies prepared stands at 91, of which 84 have been submitted to the Executive Secretary in final or draft format. As is the case with national and thematic reports, this number is clearly insufficient to provide a comprehensive assessment of progress, constraints and emerging issues in the implementation of the objectives of the Convention.

18. A more fundamental problem concerns the difficulties some Parties may well face in the actual implementation of the strategies and action plans once these have been adopted. The extent and level of implementation of the strategies and action plans and their linkages to financial support from the financial mechanism is unknown. It is entirely possible that most of the strategies and action plans from developing country Parties will remain unimplemented due to lack of adequate financial resources, which in turn will impact on the extent to which effective evaluation of the progress in the implementation of the Convention at the national level can be realized. The Convention's financial mechanism will be the instrument of choice to address this problem in the first instance, particularly in developing countries. The Secretariat continues to encourage Parties to leverage additional support from other sources, including by seeking complementarities from internal resources to address this and other related problems likely to impact on the abilities of the Parties to honour their obligations and commitments.

3. Case-studies

19. The compilation and analysis of case-studies are central to several areas of work of the Convention. To this end, a number of decisions of the various meetings of the Conference of the Parties call for the preparation and submission of case-studies on best practices and lessons learned under the thematic areas and cross-cutting issues of the Convention (decisions, V/3, V/5-8, V/24, VI/13) and also within the framework of the ecosystem approach (decision IV/7).

20. Despite these calls and several references in the decisions of the Conferences of the Parties, as well as subsequent notifications from the Executive Secretary to remind parties to incorporate some of the case-studies into the national reports, the available reports indicate that this information has not been provided in a consistently structured manner, and many Parties have yet to report on this issue.

4. *Global Biodiversity Outlook report series*

21. The *Global Biodiversity Outlook* report series represents another important source of information on the status of implementation of the Convention at national, regional and international levels. The mandate to produce this report series came from the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in 1995, which called for the preparation of a periodic report on biological diversity (the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*). In response to this call, the Secretariat initiated a process to produce the first edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* report, which was subsequently published in 2001.

22. The first edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* represents the first comprehensive attempt to date to assess the status of biodiversity and the state of implementation of the Convention at national, regional and international levels. It is the first in a series intended to assist policy makers and other stakeholders to measure progress, identify barriers to implementation and help chart the way forward toward meeting the objectives of the Convention. The *Global Biodiversity Outlook* is not a new assessment of the status and trends of global biodiversity, but draws on existing assessments in order to illustrate the urgency of the issue relating to the loss of biodiversity and how the Convention seeks to address these issues, thereby providing a basis for sustainable development.

23. At its sixth meeting, the Conference of the Parties requested, in its decision VI/25, that the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* continue to be prepared as a periodic report on biological diversity and implementation of the Convention, and that the second edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* be prepared for publication in 2004, drawing upon information contained in the second national reports, the thematic reports on the items for in-depth consideration at its sixth and seventh meetings, and on the review of progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan to be undertaken in 2003.

24. The strength of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* lies in pulling together information from a wide range of sources including national and thematic reports as well as other relevant national and international biodiversity assessments (World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), IUCN, etc.) and using this to present a broad perspective on the status of biodiversity and the implementation of the Convention at national, regional and global levels. However, this approach has some potential weaknesses stemming from insufficient numbers of national and thematic reports and the inadequate quality of information contained in these reports. Any weaknesses in the national-reporting process, as has been noted above, will obviously impact on the production process for the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* assessment. It is vital that the national-reporting processes be strengthened to ensure the timely availability of reliable and comparable information that will contribute to the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* assessment as an indispensable mechanism for presenting comprehensive analyses of the status of implementation of the Convention at various levels.

C. *Efforts at harmonization*

25. The different biodiversity-related conventions* each impose reporting requirements on their parties and also generate a significant need for information by their parties. Meeting these requirements can place a substantial burden on Governments, particularly those with limited resources.

* The Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), and the World Heritage Convention.

26. In addition, there are also concerns that the full value of the information gathered through the national reporting processes is not being utilized due to lack of comparability and to some extent due to limitations of accessibility. However, this issue has received considerable attention, and a number of decisions of the various conventions have endorsed recommendations to explore and develop mechanisms that would permit harmonization and streamlining of the various reporting process.

27. In its decision V/19, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to proceed with further development and implementation of proposals to streamline national reporting, in collaboration with the secretariats of the other biodiversity-related conventions. This position was further strengthened by decision VI/25, in which the Conference of the Parties encouraged continuation of efforts aimed at streamlining and harmonization of reporting whilst recognizing the need to ensure that this does not affect the ability of the Conference of the Parties to adjust national-reporting procedures under the Convention in order to better meet the needs of the Parties.

28. In response to these requests, WCMC, on behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions has been attempting to identify opportunities for harmonizing information management between the five conventions. Specifically, the focus of these activities is on the development of practical approaches to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in gathering, handling, disseminating and sharing information.

29. A key outcome of the efforts of WCMC is a draft action plan with detailed recommendations and project proposals that represent a logical progression from the theoretical evaluation of difficulties experienced by national Governments and secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements to the more practical testing/refining and ultimately implementation of more harmonized and streamlined concepts and procedures.

30. In particular, the project proposals outlined in the draft action plan cover such important topics as national reporting to global biodiversity-related conventions; harmonization and integration of information management; improving institutional interlinkages; and supporting actions. The practical implementation of the proposed activities and projects will initially require the mobilization and allocation of financial and personnel resources (and in some cases capacity-building) to set up new procedures or change and revise existing ones, as appropriate. While better integrated approaches should lead to savings in the long term, resources will be needed in the short term to achieve this future integration. It is envisaged that once a certain degree of harmonization, streamlining and synergy has been achieved, the advantages and benefits for all stakeholders in the medium and long term will outweigh many times the initial resource investments.

D. Review of evaluation processes under other biodiversity-related conventions—parallels and experiences

31. The annex to the present note reviews existing procedures, practices and experiences of the other key biodiversity-related conventions specifically from the point of view of modalities they may have in place to evaluate the implementation of their respective conventions and strategic plans. The focus is primarily on:

(a) The evolution of the respective strategic plans of these conventions as well as their effectiveness, or lack thereof; and

(b) The existing reporting processes as management tools for monitoring performance, achievements and compliance with the reporting requirements.

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32. The review provides parallels and lessons from which to borrow some pointers for the formulation of a set of recommendations that will then guide the effective evaluation of the progress in implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Strategic Plan.

III. POSSIBLE EVALUATION OPTIONS AND APPROACHES

A. *Key principles*

33. The proposed evaluation options outlined in the following sections are intended to guide the development of methodologies and tools to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the status of implementation of the Convention, taking into consideration the relevance, effectiveness and impact of various aspects of the implementation process. These evaluation options are concerned with achievements and outcomes rather than with output delivery. This is a key principle that serves to place the proposed evaluation options in the context of demonstrating the status of progress toward achieving the 2010 target. However, a description of additional principles is given here to help guide further consideration and practical implementation of the proposed evaluation options.

(a) The proposed evaluation options need to be integrated, at the earliest opportunity, into the overall implementation process for the Convention. In particular, they need to be incorporated in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and, at lower levels, into the major elements of the thematic and cross-cutting programmes of work. Their effectiveness and potential impacts will be better realized if the evaluation options are appropriately anchored to the goals of the Strategic Plan and the objectives of the ongoing programme of work;

(b) To the extent possible, the application of the proposed evaluation options needs to enlist the participation of a wide range of stakeholders at national, regional and global levels. The obvious advantages and benefits of employing this approach include, among others, increased levels of commitment and contribution to the evaluation process and more specifically, better articulation of a broad range of achievements, perceptions, concerns and recommendations and the expectation that these will be accurately reflected in the findings of the evaluations. This approach will also ensure that the process is better understood, promote stakeholder acceptance of the evaluation results, and increase the likelihood of success in the use of the findings. In this regard, the proposed evaluation options and their application need to be targeted beyond the focal institutions of the Parties but also include other partners at national, regional and global levels;

(c) There is no single approach or methodology that will achieve the desired evaluation outcome on its own. A recommended approach is to use a combination of different evaluation options, while recognizing that some aspects of the implementation process for the Strategic Plan and the programmes of work may have unique characteristics and, hence, unique evaluation requirements. In this regard, a review of the comparative advantages and strengths of the individual and collective components of the proposed evaluation options will help determine the most appropriate approach to use. The proposed evaluation options should therefore be sufficiently flexible and dynamic to respond to the different needs and priorities of the implementation process for the Convention and the Strategic Plan;

(d) The proposed evaluation options should go beyond assessing progress and achievements and be innovative in recommending realistic and practical actions in the context of achieving the 2010 target. They should therefore be designed and applied to lead to concrete action.

B. Range of evaluation options for consideration

34. As the Strategic Plan provides the overall framework for a more effective and coherent implementation of the Convention, it would be to align and apply the proposed evaluation options with the **four** goals and structure of the Strategic Plan, keeping in mind the need to assess performance and progress. In view of the complex nature of the implementation process of the Convention and the Strategic Plan, the formulation of detailed evaluation actions and approaches should consider the following broad distinct but inter-related evaluation clusters:

- (a) Status and trends of biodiversity including pressures, impacts and responses;
- (b) Status of follow-up to the decisions of the Conferences of the Parties;
- (c) Status of implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan.

35. Each of these clusters will require a well defined set of evaluation tools that, ideally, should be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs and priorities of each cluster. Although the scope, focus and data requirements may be different for each of these clusters, their evaluation should not be viewed as being separate and distinct but rather as complementary approaches with each contributing “building blocks” required to construct a composite picture of the overall status of implementation of the Convention and more important, the progress achieved in moving toward the target set for 2010. The details of the evaluation options for the three clusters are discussed below.

1. Use of indicators as principal evaluation tools

36. In general terms, indicators represent a major tool in result-oriented strategic and programmatic management. They provide evidence of change, trends in implementation as well as progress achieved with respect to the set goals and objectives. In view of the different requirements for each of the three evaluation clusters, two sets of indicators are proposed here:

(a) *Status and trends indicators.* As the name implies, this set of indicators will be instrumental in assessing the status and trends of biodiversity including, pressures and underlying causes of biodiversity loss, as well as policy and institutional responses. This assessment, to be based on the driver-pressure-state-impact-response framework will be particularly useful in terms of providing a comprehensive analysis of the rates of biodiversity loss and thus, by inference, an assessment of the impact of the Convention in reducing the rates of loss;

(b) *Performance indicators.* This set of indicators will focus specifically on the performance of the Parties. The term “performance” is used here to include the effectiveness of the measures and related actions that the Parties have taken to implement the Convention, the Strategic Plan and follow-up to decisions of the Conferences of the Parties.

37. This distinction should not be viewed as a separation of approaches but as a guide to the formulation of detailed activities to develop a comprehensive list of indicators. It is envisaged that the application of a well-balanced mix of the two sets of indicators will therefore, enable Parties to gauge progress toward the achievement of “a significant reduction in the current rates of biodiversity loss by 2010”.

38. Indicator development is not new to the Convention process, and work on the subject has been ongoing to various decisions of the Conferences of the Parties. The proposed approach therefore should

build on the ongoing work and also take into consideration the various global, regional and national level initiatives in biodiversity indicator development.

39. A number of Parties and some regional organizations (e.g., the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)) are actively involved in further work on indicator development most of it applicable in the context of the decisions of the Conferences of the Parties. The approaches adopted and the systems in place indicate that the Parties are at different levels in the development of biodiversity indicators, and the primary driving force for this work seems to vary from one Party to another. There are cases where the process is driven by national priorities or is part of related initiatives such as state-of-the-environment reporting. In other cases, indicators are being developed in response to specific requirements of other agreements and conventions.

40. Thus, there appears to be a considerable body of information and processes in place that could serve as the basis for the development of a more comprehensive list of indicators that encompasses the proposed two sets (status and trends indicators as well as performance indicators). In addition, the ongoing work has resulted in a set of draft Guiding Principles for Developing of National-Level Monitoring Programmes and Choice of Indicators. Although these draft Guiding Principles were developed specifically to support status and trends indicators, they have been formulated in such a way they could also be applied to the development of performance indicators.

41. The Secretariat, through the Expert Group on Indicators, has spent considerable effort in the preparatory work on the development and application of status and trends indicators to monitor and assess the status and trends in biodiversity, pressures and underlying causes of biodiversity loss as well as policy and institutional responses that have been initiated and effected at national, regional and international levels. The foundation established by this preparatory process should be used as a basis for carrying out additional activities aimed at identifying and developing performance indicators, to serve as a tool in evaluating the performance of the Parties in the implementation of the Convention.

42. In view of the momentum generated from the ongoing work, the dynamic established by the Indicator Expert Group, and taking into account the benefits of applying economies of scale as well as the fact that this Group has yet to complete its tasks, one option might be for it to coordinate the proposed development of performance indicators.

43. In practical terms, the Expert Group on Indicators could develop a broad framework for indicator selection that will be responsive to the needs and priorities of the ongoing indicator work related to the various decisions of the Conference of the Parties and SBSTTA recommendations, on the one hand, and to efforts required to develop appropriate methodologies for more effective evaluation of the implementation of the Convention, on the other. The combined value and results of the two approaches within a unified broad framework would be particularly effective in terms of gauging progress toward the achievement of the targets set for 2010 and beyond.

44. The proposed framework should also articulate realistic modalities required to enable Parties to start practical work on the selection and development of national level indicators where these do not already exist or strengthen existing indicator development initiatives, wherever appropriate. The timing for this is very crucial in view of the need to have a clear picture of progress toward achieving the 2010 target. The Expert Group should therefore consider formulating and incorporating an appropriate Indicator Development Action Plan with clear timelines and milestones to guide the Parties in their respective indicator development work.

45. In addition, the proposed framework should also incorporate appropriate enabling activities, including access to and provision of the necessary financial support to strengthen the capabilities of the Parties to develop suitable indicators in support of evaluation of the three broad clusters outlined in paragraph 34 above. However, this should not preclude Parties from making optimal use of existing regional and international indicator development resources and practices as these may reduce the costs related to indicator development at the national level. In addition, the framework should also incorporate elements that address issues of reporting including formats and periodicity, review process, adoption, application and integration into national efforts, evaluation and feedback on impacts and thus appropriateness in terms of meeting the 2010 target and beyond.

46. The overall coordination at the global level will be crucial to the success of this effort. Whereas policy issues related to follow-up and monitoring progress of indicator development will remain the responsibility of SBSTTA, the Inter-Sessional Meeting may wish to recommend expanding the mandate of the existing Expert Group to address the technical aspects of the proposed follow up work particularly the practical application of the identified indicators at the national level. In this regard, the timeframe for these additional responsibilities should therefore be built into the proposed Indicator Development Action Plan.

47. It is envisaged that national and thematic reports will serve as the most appropriate channels for reporting on the status of application and integration of the identified indicators into relevant sectoral programmes and initiatives as well as any impacts that are likely to emerge from these efforts. Consideration should therefore be given to the revision of the existing formats of the national and thematic reports to accommodate reporting requirements on indicators, particularly in as far as they relate to performance, status and trends in the three broad clusters described above.

48. In view of the value attached to the development and implementation of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans, consideration should also be given to the use of this process as an important means of incorporating indicators into national processes and sectoral programmes. The national reports on progress on implementation of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans should also serve as the long-term reporting feedback mechanisms for progress on implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan well beyond the 2010 target.

2. Strengthening reporting processes and their contribution to the evaluation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan

49. The detailed overview of the current reporting processes (see section II above) highlights the value of the reporting processes as indispensable mechanisms for conducting self-assessments of the implementation process through which Parties identify and document achievements and problems encountered, and thus provide a basis for setting priorities for the future. There are number of problems associated with the reporting process and, despite efforts by the Conference of the Parties and the Secretariat to address them from time to time, some Parties continue to face and/or express difficulties in meeting their reporting obligations. Lack of political will and national level capacity are often cited as the major impediments to the reporting processes. In addition, the quality of the information contained in the reports is also a source of concern in terms of providing a basis for presenting a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Convention.

50. Clearly, this level of inadequacy must be addressed as part of the overall process for developing effective methodologies for future evaluation of progress. From the foregoing, the areas that require urgent attention include, *inter alia*:

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(a) Further efforts at improving the national reporting processes and in particular, the formats and guidelines of the national and thematic reports to ensure that both qualitative and quantitative information is contained in these reports to enable analyses of time-series data and the presentation of trends in the status of biodiversity and, hence, the impact of measures taken by the Parties to implement the provisions of the Convention and the Strategic Plan;

(b) The identification and incorporation of appropriate status and trends indicators as well as performance indicators in the national and thematic reporting formats will strengthen the overall reporting process and thus enable Parties to have a better assessment of progress achieved in meeting the 2010 target and beyond. The benefits of applying indicators in the reporting process have been well articulated above;

(c) The ongoing efforts to harmonize and streamline the various reporting processes of the biodiversity-related conventions are especially appropriate in terms of reducing the reporting burden, which must be overcome by the Parties if they are to make any headway in meeting their reporting obligations. The harmonization efforts should therefore be encouraged and promoted and their implementation integrated into the overall process for developing effective evaluation methodologies and tools for the Convention and the Strategic Plan;

(d) The proposed set of harmonization activities need to be fully embedded into relevant ongoing national programmes and initiatives in order to be accorded the necessary policy level support to ensure that these activities are addressed and acted on. Although the political will to support the harmonization of the reporting processes does seem to exist especially at the global level, consideration should be given to the development of proactive approaches to secure national level commitments that go beyond expressions of political support for the harmonization efforts;

(e) Addressing the issue of lack of national-reporting capacity constitutes a critical success factor for any efforts aimed at developing effective evaluation methodologies and tools for the Convention and the Strategic Plan. Going by past experiences, any initiatives designed to strengthen national reporting capacities will require the application of more innovative approaches to ensure that the necessary enabling activities are in place, particularly for those Parties in the developing world. There are opportunities for accessing resources from the Convention's financial mechanism, but previous (and current) attempts to access these resources have not always been particularly successful, and alternative approaches should therefore be explored including seeking support and synergies from the internal resources of the Parties;

(f) The incorporation, in the reporting process, of case-studies documenting successes of the implementation process serve as valuable tools in reorienting future activities, evaluating opportunities for replication in other areas, reassessing targets and setting new priorities for action. They should therefore be further promoted in all the thematic and cross-cutting areas of the programmes of work and guidelines for their development be formulated in light of the need to assess progress toward meeting the 2010 target;

(g) In adopting the Strategic Plan, the Conference of the Parties placed particular emphasis on national biodiversity strategies and action plans as one of the essential mechanisms for the implementation of the Strategic Plan. In particular, goal 3 of the Plan recognizes national biodiversity strategies and action plans as the principle framework for the integration of biodiversity concerns into national sectors and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies. Activities to strengthen the integration efforts and reporting processes on the status of implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans will be particularly useful in contributing to the overall evaluation process and thus the global biodiversity agenda. The difficulties identified by Parties in the development and subsequent implementation of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans need to be addressed very much

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along the lines of the proposed actions for enhancing national and thematic reporting processes, but this needs to be done in an integrated manner;

(h) At its fifth meeting, the Conference of the Parties, in its decision V/20, requested Parties to undertake, on a voluntary basis, a review of national programmes and needs related to the implementation of the Convention. Although this was not followed up at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, national performance reviews of individual Parties, if carried out objectively using a consistent approach, could nonetheless be an additional effective tool to gain knowledge on the progress of implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan. The national biodiversity strategies and action plans (or lack thereof) would be an important element in these reviews. With this in mind, the national performance reviews should be actively promoted and modalities for practical follow-up work be elaborated and supported along the lines of the proposed support measures for case-studies;

(i) The *Global Biodiversity Outlook* (GBO) report series will continue to be a key component of the evaluation mechanism for the implementation of the convention in view of its distinct attribute of presenting a consolidated global perspective based on national and regional inputs and which places the GBO assessments in a unique position to significantly influence policy setting for the Convention at the global level. The production of the GBO report series should therefore be strengthened and to the extent possible, incorporate opportunities for wider stakeholder involvement to engender a sense of representative participation by the Parties in the overall evaluation process. In the long term, this approach will ensure that the national perspectives of the Parties and other key partners are adequately reflected in the global report series and its potential impact on the global biodiversity agenda will be a true reflection of these perspectives.

C. Modalities for the application of the proposed evaluation options and approaches

51. The development of effective methodologies and tools for future evaluation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan within the framework of the set of options outlined above will need to be carried out in an integrated way, combining the various elements of the proposed options while making optimal use of their individual strengths as well as realizing maximum returns from their collective capital and impacts. The success of this approach will depend on securing strong political will and support from all the Parties, but this on its own will not be enough. The integrated approach will need to incorporate concrete and realistic actions to demonstrate a fundamental shift that goes well beyond expressions of political support and commitments. With this in mind, consideration should be given to the development of a suite of appropriate *evaluation modules* each designed to function as an essential part of an integrated package but still retain sufficient flexibility to respond to and address specific needs of the individual aspects of the required evaluation methodologies and tools.

52. The integrated approach should further incorporate enabling activities, including the application of innovative measures for leveraging the necessary resources from external and internal sources as well as provision of support to enhance national level capacity wherever appropriate. The approach should also articulate a comprehensive Integrated Evaluation Action Plan with clear delineation of implementation phases, key deliverables, timelines and milestones for the major components of the proposed modules within the framework of the proposed evaluation options. In addition, the approach should reflect a balance in roles and responsibilities between national and international levels for each phase and also ensure that these roles are mutually supportive. Although 2010 is a significant milestone in the overall process, consideration should also be given to the elaboration of a timeframe that goes well beyond 2010 and to the extent possible attempt to align the generation of the key deliverables to coincide with the hosting of future meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010 and beyond) in order to monitor progress beyond the 2010 target.

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IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

53. The Inter-Sessional Meeting may wish to consider recommending for further consideration of the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting the proposed evaluation options and approaches as a basis for further development of the future evaluation of the progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan. It may also may wish to consider the following suggestions for follow-up actions leading up to the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

54. With guidance from the Inter-Sessional Meeting on the basis of its consideration of this note, the Secretariat could elaborate a comprehensive framework to guide the development of detailed evaluation methodologies and tools for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting. The proposed framework should be structured in such a way that the following major elements are given detailed consideration:

(a) Broad categories of the most appropriate evaluation methodologies and tools, inter-linkages, strengths and contribution to various aspects of the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan;

(b) Application of the identified methodologies and tools (modules), their potential impacts on the overall evaluation process, supporting mechanisms (financial and related enabling activities), operational and procedural matters (timeframes, deliverables) etc.;

(c) Institutional arrangements (Conference of the Parties, Bureau of the Conference of the Parties, SBSTTA, inter-sessional meetings, expert group(s), Parties, the Secretariat, etc.);

(d) Progress toward 2010 targets and the implications for further consideration by future Conferences of the Parties;

(e) Perspectives beyond 2010 and implications for the Parties, Convention and the global biodiversity agenda;

(f) Commitments of the Parties and other partners in the immediate, medium and long term

55. It is envisaged that the actual development and possible application of detailed evaluation methodologies and tools would be decided by the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting, based on the recommendations of the Inter-Sessional Meeting.

Annex

**REVIEW OF EVALUATION PROCESSES OF OTHER BIODIVERSITY RELATED
CONVENTIONS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE STRATEGIC PLANS**

***A. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild
Flora and Fauna (CITES) - 1973***

1. The Strategic Plan for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) emerged out of a review commissioned by the ninth meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties (1994), specifically to evaluate the extent to which the Convention had achieved its objectives, the progress made since CITES came into being and, most importantly, to identify deficiencies and requirements necessary to strengthen the Convention and help plan for the future.

2. The CITES Strategic Plan, which was adopted at the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2000), presents the CITES strategic vision through 2005 with the overall purpose of improving the working of the Convention so that international trade in wild flora and fauna is increasingly and consistently conducted at sustainable levels. To achieve this purpose, the Strategic Plan, outlines seven specific goals to meet the Convention's mission, and identifies specific objectives to be realised to meet these goals. It thus serves to provide a unified focus to the Parties in their implementation of the Convention and also as guidance to the Conference of the Parties, its commitments and the Secretariat.

3. A particularly noteworthy aspect of the CITES Strategic Plan is the fact that it is regarded as a continually evolving instrument and accordingly, Parties must continue to evaluate progress towards the identified goals and modify the Plan over time. In addition, the Strategic Plan makes provisions for the development of measurable performance indicators for each of the seven major goals to help identify progress toward their successful implementation.

4. While the Strategic Plan presents an effective framework to guide the convention through 2005, delivery of the framework requires detailed actions by the Parties, the Secretariat and the three Permanent Committees of the Conference of the Parties. In response, CITES developed an Action Plan to provide better focus on these actions and also coordinate their implementation. More recently, the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties made recommendations concerning further actions on the Strategic Plan as well as the Action Plan, including a thorough review of the Action Plan and identification of the changes that are necessary as well as development of an evaluation tool or strategy using performance indicators to assess the achievements of the goals of the Strategic Plan.

5. The annual reports compiled by the Parties are recognized by the Conference of the Parties as the "only available means" of monitoring the implementation of the Convention. The reports conform to standard guidelines that ensure a certain level of data quality, assistance with report preparation, methods for analysing and using data compiled from the reports, the need to link annual reports to other reports and means for improving compliance with this key Convention requirement.

6. In spite of the universal acceptance of the reporting process as being essential to the overall implementation of the Convention and the fact that this practice has been in place since the Convention's adoption, a number of problems related to the preparation and submission of the annual reports still persist. Reporting still appears to be viewed as a burdensome obligation rather than a useful management tool at national level to the extent that a number of parties do not submit their annual reports or do so with considerable difficulties and delays. Under the circumstances, lack of a complete set of reports for all the parties makes it difficult to carry out a comprehensive comparative analysis and provide a composite

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picture of the status of implementation of the Convention, significant developments and trends, the achievements accomplished, gaps to be filled, priority problems to be addressed and identification of remedial action for implementation in the future. Unfortunately, facilitative and punitive measures introduced over the years have not managed to bring about the consistent submission of timely and high-quality annual reports.

7. Accordingly, the Secretariat believes fresh thinking about the issue is needed, particularly to identify, analyse and address the causes of variable reporting. It is envisaged that a comprehensive review of CITES reporting requirements will also build upon and integrate the various initiatives already being undertaken to streamline reporting and make it more meaningful.

8. The above review does indicate that despite its earlier lead time in the development and application of the Strategic Plan as well as the review of the reporting mechanism, CITES has not progressed much further in terms of demonstrating the success and effectiveness of the measures they have put in place for evaluating the progress in the implementation of the Convention. The target set for 2005 is approaching fast and it remains to be seen how CITES will establish that significant changes have indeed occurred to ensure that actions to meet this target are on course.

B. Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (The Ramsar Convention) - 1971

9. The Ramsar Convention adopted the first Strategic Plan (1997-2002) as the basis for the implementation of the Convention. Since its adoption, the implementation of the Strategic Plan has permitted a more coherent and effective implementation of the convention and in the process, registered significant achievements during the period of implementation. However, despite these achievements, there remain many and increasing challenges to achieving globally consistent delivery of wetland conservation and wise use.

10. In response to these challenges, the Conference of Parties, at its eighth meeting (2002), adopted the second Strategic Plan for the application of the Convention for the period 2003 -2008. The second Strategic Plan builds on the successes and lessons of the first Strategic Plan and recognizes the need for a more integrated approach as being crucial to achieving full application of the Convention. It also takes into consideration the results of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as those of recent major events concerning water resources management.

11. In terms of content and structure, the second Strategic Plan outlines five general objectives (goals), specific articles of the Convention to be delivered by each general objective and describes the operational objectives that address 21 areas of activity, and the specific actions to deliver them that together should achieve the goals of the Plan.

12. A significant point of departure for the Ramsar Convention concerns the identification of national targets for each triennium as a basis for establishing global and regional targets for the Convention's work plans. This is indeed a bold step and its success could well serve as a point of reference for the other conventions in establishing and incorporating specific targets in their respective Strategic Plans.

13. Another significant difference in the Ramsar Strategic Plan concerns the recognition that each contracting party is free to choose the extent to which it will implement the Strategic Plan, the resources it will allocate to the implementation and the timeframe to be used. This level of flexibility will obviously have a number of far reaching implications in terms of presenting a consistent and comparable assessment of the achievements related to the implementation of the Convention.

14. The National Planning Tool and the National Reporting Process are recognized as effective means of national level planning for implementing the provisions of the Convention. The National Planning Tool provides a standard format for national reporting to the Conference of the Parties as well as a procedure for Parties, through the national committees, to determine their priorities and targets for action under the relevant objectives and actions of the Strategic Plan.

15. The submission of timely and detailed national reports is of vital importance for the purpose of monitoring implementation of the Convention and also for sharing information on wetlands conservation. This practice is now well established and indeed is included among the commitments of the contracting Parties in the "Framework for the Implementation of the Ramsar Convention".

16. The national reports provide by far the most detailed and authoritative body of information on the Convention and its operation within the individual contracting parties, as well as providing a framework for discussions at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties. Although a format for the national reports has been provided, some parties have in the past presented their national reports in a narrative fashion. The degree of detail varies considerably from one report to another with some providing detailed content based on wide consultations and others with brief highlights of the main features of their respective implementation of the Convention.

17. A revision of the national-report format has been undertaken specifically to improve and enhance the reporting process in terms of allowing consistent comparisons and analyses to be made between countries and also facilitate the production of valuable information that can be shared globally. In addition, the aim of the revised version of the national report format is to enable the Convention to compare and draw an overview of the achievements, challenges and the way forward at national, regional and global levels. Further it is hoped that the new format will also promote wider stakeholder involvement particularly if used as a monitoring tool in wetlands conservation and wise use.

18. As the reports are not based on the structure of the Strategic Plan but rather on the 21 thematic areas, it will be necessary to complement this monitoring tool with additional measures to have a more comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the Convention. The 21 thematic areas have now been included in the second Strategic Plan (2003–2008).

19. A recent review of the reporting process has raised some concerns about the fact that the national-report format was not sufficiently used as a planning tool to guide the implementation of the work plan 2000-2002 adopted at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties. These concerns raise, once more the question of the political will and national capacity for effective implementation of the Convention. It would appear therefore, that the reporting requirement continues to be perceived by the parties as a burden more than a tool for action.

20. In addition, the review has revealed that in spite of the emphasis placed on the need to prepare the national reports through a process of wide and transparent participation of all stakeholders, it seems that few parties were able to do so for the triennium 2000-2002. In some cases, the national reports do not reflect the true and full picture of all the positive actions that have taken place in the country concerned and in other cases the reports present an excessively positive picture of the situation, with limited reference to actions required to address some important problems related to national capacity.

21. However, a recent positive development that merits special mention concerns the creation of relational database to store and analyse the information provided by the parties in their national reports for the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The database includes 135 indicators related to the implementation status of the actions included in the Convention work plan for the period 2000-2002.

Nearly 70 of these indicators are classified as “main indicators” and have been used in the preparation of regional implementation reports.

22. The underlying thinking in the design of the “COP-8 National Reports Database” and indicators is the definition of a “baseline” that will allow in the future – for the first time – an assessment of the progress in the Convention’s implementation during periods longer than three years. Later the information in the “COP-8 National Reports Database” will be transferred to the a new system and standardized according to the revised list of implementation indicators in light of the new Strategic Plan for the period 2003-2008 and its application in the next triennium.

23. Another development that is also worth noting concerns the production of “country fact sheets” consisting of a subset of key “indicators” or “items” offering a “condensed” overview of the implementation process. This approach is likely to be expanded to the regional and global analysis.

24. In addition, the Ramsar Bureau has recommended the preparation of a series of key indicators in relation to the effective implementation of the Strategic Plan in the next triennium to be used as part of the national-report format. These indicators could then be used for the preparation of national reports for submission for the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2005.

25. An additional recommendation concerns encouraging further consideration and trial by parties of “joint reporting” in relation to other multilateral environmental agreements, building on the experience and outcomes of the current UNEP pilot projects on streamlining national reporting to multilateral environmental agreements. Furthermore, the Bureau recommends the revision of a national report format for the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to include, *inter alia*

- (a) Codified questions on priorities and progress in implementation;
- (b) Precise indicators for the status of, and progress in, implementation; and
- (c) Explanatory text fields for reporting implementation progress since the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

26. These are all positive developments that have parallels for consideration by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

C. World Heritage Convention (WHC) - 1972

27. Since the adoption of the World Heritage Convention (WHC) in 1972, considerable effort has gone into identifying ways of ensuring the representativeness, credibility and integrity of the World Heritage List, a central pillar of the Convention. Up until 1994, there was no all-encompassing, systematic approach to the comparative evaluation of the implementation of the Convention. In response to this shortcoming, the WHC adopted the Global Strategy in 1994 as a framework and operational methodology for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. The Strategy relies on regional and thematic definitions of categories of heritage, which have outstanding universal value, to ensure a more balanced and representative World Heritage List.

28. The World Heritage Committee has chosen a regional approach to periodic reporting on the progress of implementation of the Convention and more specifically as a means to promote regional collaboration and also to be able to respond to the specific characteristics of each region.

29. The provisions of the Convention and the Global Strategy oblige State parties to take appropriate provisions and actions for the application of the Convention and to put in place on-site monitoring arrangements as an integral component of the day-to-day conservation and management of the sites. Accordingly, State parties are required to submit, every six years, periodic reports on overall implementation of the Convention, including factors affecting the property and monitoring arrangements. These reports therefore serve as the knowledge base for the efficient implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

30. Since the adoption and application of the Global Strategy in 1994, the overall awareness of the World Heritage Convention and its implementation has increased although activities undertaken have not resulted in a more balanced and representative World Heritage List. There are several reasons for this imbalance but the major ones include, among others:

- (a) Absence or inadequacy of legal protection in some countries;
- (b) Lack of inventories;
- (c) Weaknesses of national institutions in charge of heritage conservation;
- (d) Insufficient understanding of the conservation process; and
- (e) Scarce financial and human resources

31. However, these shortcomings have led to a reorientation of regional approaches to the implementation of the Global Strategy with the aim that in the long-term, consistent conservation policies backed by substantial financial resources and training strategies will bear results.

D. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)—1979

32. Subsequent to the adoption of the Strategic Plan for the CMS Convention at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 1999, the Secretariat has prepared on a regular basis a rolling document that serves to review progress in the implementation of the Plan (2000-2005). The review embraces the concept of “performance indicators” as advocated by the Performance Working Group, whereby a measurable performance indicator has been identified for each operation objective. These indicators have been further elaborated since the most recent meeting of the Standing Committee in December 2001.

33. The review also attempts to go beyond documenting the activities undertaken and including in the documentation the outcomes or results of the measures taken to implement the Strategic Plan. In principle it is not difficult to document what has been undertaken within the framework of the Convention as this information is readily available or supplied in a timely manner through national reports. It is much more difficult to measure consequences of those actions, which are vitally important in determining whether or not the objectives of the Strategic Plan are being met.

34. To date, the reports submitted by parties have contained little information upon which to assess their implementation of the Strategic Plan in certain key areas. The historically low response rate and, in particular, the minimal information provided by some parties, still do not provide an adequate basis on which to make substantive recommendations with regard to the implementation of activities in support of migratory species. The strength of the CMS Information System and the conclusions of the synthesis of party reports depend critically on the comprehensiveness and timeliness of information submitted by all

parties. It is expected that the proposed new format for national reports, which many parties have adopted, will address this shortcoming.

E. Synthesis – review of the experiences of the work of other conventions

35. The foregoing review of the work of the other biodiversity related conventions clearly reveals some common features as well as considerable differences all of which have a significant bearing on the approach to be adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity in the development of effective tools for evaluating the progress of implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan.

36. The review reveals that the four conventions, just like Convention on Biological Diversity, have all adopted the application of strategic plans as key instruments for implementation of the conventions, and more specifically to monitor progress achieved in meeting the aims of the conventions. In all cases, the major goal of the strategic plans is to serve as more focused frameworks for the overall implementation process in a more coherent, integrated and effective fashion.

37. The evolution of the strategic plans for these four conventions has more or less followed similar approaches, with most of the plans emerging out of review processes commissioned by the conventions with the specific aim of establishing a clear understanding of progress achieved by the conventions in meeting their respective objectives while others emerged out of the need to have a more focused and holistic implementation of the convention as the primary driving force.

38. The review also reveals that there are no major differences between the strategic plans of the four conventions in terms of structure and scope. At the higher level, the goals and broad objectives constitute the strategic focus of the Plans while at the lower level, the operational objective serve to guide the elaboration of detailed activities required to meet the overall goals or objectives. A major difference worthy of note is the level of detail in the formulation of the operational objectives with some of the plans going into greater detail whilst others are much broader in scope. A defining feature of one of the conventions (Ramsar) is the setting of national targets as a basis for establishing regional and global targets for the implementation of the convention and the strategic plan.

39. The time frames for the evolution of the strategic plans for the four conventions differ from convention to convention with some having been initiated much earlier than others and thus appeared to have made significant progress in terms of implementation and institutionalization. However, by and large, the degree of achievement in terms of effectiveness and impacts of the implementation processes seems to be relatively low for all the conventions despite the lead-time in the start up of the development of the strategic plan.

40. The mode of implementation is more or less the same with the parties being required to assume responsibility for the implementation of the strategic plan although one of the conventions has out of recognition of the unique conditions and circumstances of each party, exercised some flexibility about the level of commitment in the implementation process. For example, in the Ramsar Convention, each party is free to choose the extent to which it will implement the strategic plan, including resources it will commit to this process and the timeframe for the implementation of the plan.

41. A common feature of the implementation processes of the four conventions is the elaboration of action plans as central components of the strategic plans. The aim of the action plans is to translate the operational objectives of the strategic plans into practical measures to be applied by the parties in the implementation of the strategic plans. The action plans are at various stages of development and

implementation and the level of detail varies from Convention to Convention in terms of scope, number of activities, outcomes, timeframe, key actors and their respective roles and responsibilities.

42. In all the four conventions, national reporting is recognized as an essential component of the overall implementation process and more specifically as an indispensable tool to evaluate the progress of implementation of the strategic plans. At the international level, there is recognition that the national reports provide a basis for comparison and synthesis on which the conferences of the parties base their decisions on substantive and procedural aspects of the conventions and their strategic plans. National reports are therefore unanimously recognized as crucial monitoring and management tools.

43. Not surprisingly, there are major differences between the reporting processes of the four conventions in terms of formats, content, periodicity, approach and to some extent the specific use made of the information contained in the reports. For example the World Heritage Convention has chosen a regional approach to periodic reporting with a six-year reporting cycle. CITES, on the other hand, prepares, in addition to annual reports, biennial reports, species-specific reports, ECOMESSAGES, and other special reports, a process that places significant constraints and burdens on the parties. What is universal to all the reports, however, is the mandatory requirement for the parties to assume responsibility for the preparation of their national reports while the secretariats provide an analysis of the national reports and produce a synthesis for the consideration of the governing bodies or Conferences of the parties in a timely manner.

44. The preparation and submission of national reports in conformity with the set guidelines and in a timely manner are still hampered by a number of obstacles the majority of which seems to relate to lack of strong political will and lack of capacities in handling the burden of producing reports for the various conventions and other agreements.

45. Harmonization and streamlining of the reporting processes are important aspects that seem to have gained recognition and wide acceptance by all the four conventions, not surprisingly due to expressions of the burdensome effort required of the parties to comply with the many reporting obligations. The conventions favour a harmonization implementation approach that would assist the parties in the delivery of their respective commitments to all the related multilateral environment agreements and minimize the duplication of efforts without impacting drastically on the quality and unique character of the information required by each convention.

46. Although the reporting processes have been in place for quite sometime now and are clearly well established for some of the conventions as an essential component of the overall implementation process, there is still considerable inadequacy in the information contained in the reports to the extent that it is rather difficult if not impossible to use this information to provide a comprehensive picture of whether or not the conventions are successful in meeting their respective targets, goals and objectives. Recommendations from subsidiary bodies of the conventions and subsequent decisions from the conferences of the parties calling for regular reviews and subsequent revisions of the formats for the national reports are a clear demonstration of this level of inadequacy.

47. In view of the foregoing concern about the level of inadequacy with respect to evaluating the effectiveness of the conventions in meeting their aims, there has been wide acceptance of the need to develop and incorporate "performance indicators" to enhance the overall evaluation processes. It is envisaged that this will be achieved through the establishment of a comprehensive knowledge base comprising measurable and objectively verifiable indicators. In this regard, conventions have made a start at developing and applying "performance indicators" with the process far advanced in some while others

are at the stage of adoption of recommendations to incorporate performance indicators into the respective reporting processes.

48. The foregoing has a number of implications for the way forward for the Convention on Biological Diversity with regard to future evaluation of progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan. The experiences of the other four biodiversity-related conventions provide a number of important parallels for the evolution and more specifically the identification and development of appropriate mechanisms and tools required to enhance the evaluation of the successes and achievements of the Convention and progress toward meeting the 2010 target.
