

Feasibility Study for a Harmonised Information Management Infrastructure for Biodiversity-related Treaties

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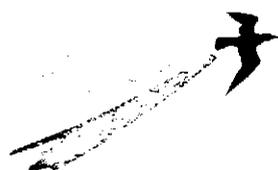
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (WHC),



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The five biodiversity-related treaty secretariats and UNEP commissioned WCMC to undertake a *Feasibility Study* to identify opportunities for harmonising information management. The study responds to the growing realisation that decisions on development and sustainability depend on access to well organised information, and that the secretariats could collaborate more closely to gain synergies, avoid duplication and reduce the burden of reporting carried out by the Parties to the conventions.

The *Feasibility Study* involved the Secretariats of: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS); Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat; (Ramsar) and the Convention Concerning the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (WHC). It considered effectiveness and efficiency in the gathering, handling, disseminating and sharing of information.

The *Feasibility Study* identified three programmes of work to improve information management:

- Development of a harmonised conventions information resource
- Streamlined national reporting to facilitate national reporting to, and implementation of, the Conventions
- Development of a shared lessons-learned network

They would be taken forward through:

- preparation of a GEF PDF (Project Development Funding) proposal addressing harmonised reporting requirements, and the development and pilot testing of integrated national reporting guidelines for the biodiversity related conventions
- development of funding proposals for considerations by bilateral agencies covering actions needed to develop an inter-convention web site and search engine, and the development of a lessons-learned network
- increased collaboration of the programme and technical staff of the secretariats to share experiences

Recognising the need for broader synergies, a follow-on study is recommended to involve the other Rio treaties and regional agreements.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Many nations have confirmed their commitment to the principles of Agenda 21 by ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other treaties related to biodiversity conservation such as the Conventions on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar) and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (WHC). They have also ratified treaties relating to broader environmental issues such as the Montreal Protocol and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC).

There is now a broad and growing realisation that decisions on development and sustainability depend on access to well organised **information** (such as inventories of biological resources, indicators of sustainable use and indigenous knowledge). The information that nations must organise and manage to respond to the specific and implied requirements of the treaties is complex and transcends conventional sectoral divisions. It places a demand on national implementing agencies and on those bodies that serve them to build capacity to manage information effectively.

The development of such enabling capacity is taxing to all nations, particularly developing countries. National information management infrastructure needs to be developed efficiently to serve both strategic and operational needs, as well as the reporting obligations to the relevant treaties. There is a growing demand for the ability to **combine and integrate** biodiversity-related data and to share the benefits of advanced technology deriving from a wide variety of publicly funded biodiversity initiatives.

Parties are seeking better access to each other's technology and data through such mechanisms as the CBD Clearing House Mechanism (CHM). Parties also seek feedback from treaty secretariats – comparative data from other parties that could contribute to early warning of regional problems, clarify priorities and provide the basis for monitoring progress towards objectives.

Submissions and reports from the parties constitute much of the information that secretariats manage. The secretariats have an obligation to be as efficient and responsive as possible in managing this information. Its application should facilitate national activities and be compatible with the approaches of associated agencies such as GEF, UNDP, UNEP and World Bank. Increasingly, parties are calling for secretariats to collaborate more closely to gain synergies and to avoid duplication. For example, Decision II/13 of the CBD Conference of Parties:

Requests the Executive Secretary to co-ordinate with the Secretariats of relevant biodiversity-related conventions, with a view to:

(a) facilitating exchange of information and experience;

- (b) *Exploring the possibility of recommending procedures for harmonising, to the extent desirable and practicable, the reporting requirements of Parties.....*

Responding to the interest and momentum evident in Decisions from CBD Conferences of the Parties (CoPs), the five biodiversity-related treaty secretariats (CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and World Heritage) and UNEP commissioned WCMC to undertake a *Feasibility Study* to identify opportunities for harmonising information management between the treaties. This report is the final output from the study.

1.2 Scope and purpose

The *Feasibility Study* considered approaches towards the development of a **harmonised information management infrastructure** for the biodiversity-related treaties within their existing defined mandates. Its purpose was to consider how the treaty secretariats could improve effectiveness and efficiency in the gathering, handling, disseminating and sharing of information. The Terms of Reference for the project are given in Appendix I, and an outline of the project methodology is given in Appendix II. The treaties involved were:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar)
- World Heritage Convention (WHC): Natural Sites

Recognising the close connections between the *Feasibility Study* and initiatives to explore synergies between the Rio treaties, the secretariats of the FCCC and the CCD were invited to participate as observers at the Workshop where options were reviewed.

The *Feasibility Study* did not extend to considering country-level activities. The study is however conceived as a key contribution to country-focussed capacity building, and the development of harmonised national reporting.

2 INFORMATION NEEDS AND INFORMATION FLOW ANALYSIS

2.1 Information needs implied by the convention articles and decisions

An increased understanding of the information requirements of each convention and an improved understanding of the linkages between them could lead to greater synergy. Activities taken primarily in response to the articles of one convention may equally be of significance to another convention. Where information is shared, a standard approach to the collection of such data would enable the data to be used easily for more than one convention. It would facilitate the production of cross convention summaries (where there are links) and may serve to encourage greater coordination between national agencies/focal points.

The articles of each convention together with the decisions and other documents relating to implementation were reviewed and the information requirements documented. This covered not only the information required in national reporting, but all the information required to implement the convention. A detailed table of the information requirements of each convention is given in Appendix III, and a summary is given below (Table 1).

CBD has broad information requirements. Ramsar has a focus on wetlands of international importance but its promotion of the wise use concept implies broad information requirements. Each of the other three conventions has a particular focus: CITES and CMS are clearly targeted at species while World Heritage is directed at sites. Commonalities would be expected between these pairs, and are indeed apparent. Table 1 illustrates that successful implementation of each convention relies upon a wide range of fundamental data sets. Certain data are unique to one convention, for example the permit details and trade data required for CITES. However, there are a number of fundamental data sets that are required by more than one convention and also a number required by all five conventions.

CBD requires information on the full spectrum of biodiversity: ecosystems and habitats, species and communities and described genomes and genes of social, scientific or economic importance. Of these, only species data are significantly required by the other conventions, although the habitat present at sites is also important for Ramsar and World Heritage.

CITES and CMS require species information and they share approximately 445 species. For CMS this represents approximately 25% of the species listed. Details are required by both conventions on the scientific name, conservation and protection status, range, distribution, population data (including size and trends), habitat requirements, threats and *in situ* conservation/management activities. The main area of difference concerns use of species, especially relating to trade. This is an important data set for CITES, but is less relevant to CMS.

CMS is implemented to a large extent through Agreements concluded under its auspices for large taxonomic groups, or in some case, individual species. Each of these Agreements has its own information requirements which may be much more specific than the more general requirements of the parent convention. (These Agreements were

not included in the *Feasibility Study*, although two are treated in Appendix III. A full listing of active agreements can be found on the CMS web site at <http://www.wcmc.org.uk>.

Table 1: Summary of main information requirements

Information	CBD	CITES	CMS	Ramsar	WHC
ECOSYSTEMS					
Ecosystems and habitats					
ecosystems	✓				
habitat types	✓			✓	✓
traditional use	✓				
SPECIES					
		#1	#2	#3	#4
Classification, names and identification					
higher taxonomy	✓	✓	✓	✓	
scientific name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
common names	✓	✓	✓	✓	
identification materials		✓	✓	✓	
Status					
conservation status	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
protection status (national and international)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ecology					
range and distribution	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
population data (size and trends)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
habitat requirements/availability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
migration routes	✓		✓	✓	
<i>In situ</i> and management activities					
legislation	✓	✓	✓		
<i>in situ</i> conservation and management activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Threats					
threats (direct, habitat destruction, indirect, etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
illegal trade		✓	✓		
invasive/exotic species	✓		✓		
Use					
use of species (medicinal, agricultural, economic etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
traditional knowledge	✓	✓	✓		
sustainable use (including levels and effect of trade)	✓	✓		✓	
number, quantity and type of specimens being traded		✓			
source/destination of specimens and permits details		✓			
trade in wetland products				✓	
waterfowl hunting statistics			✓	✓	
GENES					
Genes and genomes					
social, scientific or economic importance	✓				
legislative, administrative and policy measures	✓				
SITES					
		#5		#6	#7
Site details					
geographic location	✓	✓		✓	✓
site description	✓			✓	✓
boundaries and map				✓	✓
Ecology of site					
physical features	✓			✓	✓
<i>In situ</i> and management activities					
legislation	✓			✓	✓
conservation measures and management of site	✓			✓	✓
Threats					
threats	✓			✓	✓
Use					
land use	✓			✓	
hydrological values				✓	
social and cultural values	✓			✓	✓
land tenure/ownership	✓			✓	✓
economic value	✓			✓	
role of site to local communities	✓			✓	✓

Key:

#1 fauna and flora listed in the Appendices of CITES

#2 migratory species listed in Appendices of CMS

- #3 waterfowl and waders and any threatened/notable species of fauna or flora that occur on Ramsar sites
- #4 any threatened/notable species of fauna and flora that occur on World Heritage sites
- #5 protected sites for certain species (eg. Tiger)
- #6 internationally important wetlands
- #7 sites of cultural or natural importance

Sites can be designated using a range of criteria, including the occurrence of notable/threatened species or significant numbers of waterbirds. The most important species related data for Ramsar and World Heritage are range, distribution, population size (including size and trends) and habitat requirements. One of the key links shared by all the conventions relates to the status of species.

Ramsar and World Heritage require very similar information on sites. For example, each site must be described in a certain level of detail, its geographic location must be known, its social and cultural value must be understood, the occurrence of notable and/or threatened fauna and flora known, and threats (current and potential) must be documented. Furthermore, as with species, sites may be listed on both conventions. Much the same information is also required by CBD but in a more general sense – particularly what actions and legislation are in place.

There is no apparent requirement for site-related data for CMS (there is however a requirement for site-related data under a number of the CMS-related Agreements, but these were beyond the scope of this study) and only limited requirement for CITES with regard to particular species. However, the designation of suitable sites based on species criteria could form part of the *in situ* and legislative activities undertaken by Parties as part of their implementation. This implies that certain conservation-related activities, encouraged by the articles of one convention, could be significant for the others.

Information on the threats to species and sites is important. In many cases, the threats may be linked. For example, threat to a species through increased trade activities would raise concerns of the CITES community. Equally, the activities of traders could lead to significant habitat damage, localised pollution and general degradation of a fragile ecosystem present at a nationally/internationally designated site.

Between them, the five biodiversity-related conventions require a broad array of information. Although the requirements of all are different in certain respects, there are data sets that are fundamental to all five conventions. The opportunities to share these at appropriate levels, generating efficiency savings and synergies are worth exploring.

2.2 Information from contracting Parties (reporting requirements)

The primary source of information for each secretariat is the convention's contracting Parties. Each convention requires some form of reporting to its CoP (or equivalent) through its secretariat. The timing and frequency of reporting varies from annual to every six years (summarised in Table 2). In addition to periodic reports, Parties provide information on initial accession to certain of the treaties, in submissions for designation of sites, and in support of amendments to the treaty articles or annexes – especially with regard to listing of species.

With all reporting regimes, careful attention needs to be given to what is to be achieved and how the content of such reports will enable activities to be assessed and priorities for the future determined. Reporting guidelines are an important element of such processes and provide a framework to assist Parties with their submission. In addition, information received in a standard format will be easier to review and will facilitate the production of a report considering the efforts of all contracting Parties.

Guidance is provided to Parties on the form and content of the required information through the convention articles, decisions and resolutions of CoPs and operational guidelines of various kinds. Some of this guidance is very specific and requests quantitative information (e.g. the CITES annual report on trade statistics), or may be specific in terms of structure and general content, as in Ramsar site descriptions. In general, however, guidance to Parties is rather general; specific quantitative indicators or time-series attributes (such as species populations, areas under protection, etc.) are not mandatory, although they may be implied or required for successful implementation.

The fulfilment by contracting Parties of their reporting requirements is variable. For example, Ramsar indicated that they receive a high return of national reports and CITES also indicated that they receive a good number of annual reports. However, CITES has much lower rates of submission for its biennial report (legislative, regulatory and administrative measures to enforce the provisions of the convention) and CMS have encountered non-response rates of as much as 40%. Both the Ramsar national report and CITES annual report have clear guidelines, while the guidelines and conditions for submission of the CITES biennial report are less clear. This suggests that clear guidelines can encourage and contribute to high levels of compliance with regards to reporting. Although the reporting requirements differ between the conventions, as already illustrated, some of the information required is common to all conventions. By harmonising the reporting requirements and timing where possible, and encouraging a standard approach to data collection, the conventions may encourage national level coordination.

National level coordination is needed because information flow is not simply country-to-convention secretariat, but is between responsible national authorities and the convention secretariats. The national authorities for a given Party may be vested in different government departments for each of the treaties. Thus countries may have up to five different lines of communication with the biodiversity treaties. Currently, 37 countries are party to all five biodiversity-related treaties. Further analysis would be required of the national implementing agencies across the 185 countries that are party to one or more of the treaties (see Appendix IV).

Table 2: Summary of reporting requirements

Description	Frequency/Timing	Reference ¹
CBD		
Measures countries have taken to implement the provisions of the convention. Timing and content of reports to be decided by CoP.	to be decided by CoP	Article 26
Report on the implementation of Article 6 General Issues. General measures for conservation and sustainable use.	CoP4 (May 1998)	Decision II/17
CITES		
Annual report containing a summary of permits and trade in species included in Appendices I, II and III of the Convention	Annual; by 31 st October of the following year	Article VIII and Notif. No. 788
Biennial report on legislative, regulatory and administrative measures taken to enforce the provisions of the Convention	Biennial; no set rule or recommendation about timing, although the first report of a Party is expected to be submitted two years after the entry into force of the Convention and subsequent reports to be submitted every 2 years.	Article VIII
CMS		
Parties to provide the Secretariat with details of the migratory species listed in Appendices I and II the Parties consider themselves to be Range States.	On-going	Article VI
Parties to inform the Secretariat of measures they are taking to conserve migratory species in Appendices I and II.	Each CoP; next CoP in 1999	Article VI
Initial comprehensive report by Parties on accession to the convention	Upon signature	Article VI and Res. 4.1
Updating report by Parties	Each CoP; next CoP in 1999	Article VI and Res. 4.1
RAMSAR		
Completed Ramsar datasheet should be submitted to Bureau upon designation of site	Upon designation of each site. Updates every 6 years.	Article 2, Rec. 4.7 and Res. 5.3
Change in ecological character of a site Monitoring of sites on Montreux Record	As necessary As necessary	Article 3 Res. 5.4
Report for CoP 7	to Bureau by 1/9/1998; next CoP May, 1999	Notif. 1998/1
WORLD HERITAGE		
Every Party shall submit to the World Heritage Committee an inventory of property forming part of the cultural and natural heritage.	next meeting of the World Heritage Committee, Dec. 1998	Article 11-12 and Operational Guidelines
Parties shall in the reports they submit to the General Conference of UNESCO on dates and in a manner to be determined by it, give information on the legislative and administrative provisions which they have adopted and other action which they have taken for the application of this Convention		Article 29 and Operational Guidelines Currently under review WHC-98/CONF.201/2

¹ Please see Appendix III for details of information requirements

2.3 Information from other sources

The convention secretariats also receive information from a range of NGOs and international agencies. In some cases these are specifically designated supporting or advisory bodies, or data managers. In other cases the arrangements are more informal. The information that flows by this means is primarily scientific – for instance in support of taxonomies, reviews of species lists, species population statistics, site descriptions, etc. The flow is directed from these agencies to the separate secretariats, subsidiary bodies, committees and in some cases, direct to the Parties.

2.4 Information flow between conventions

All five convention secretariats within the scope of this study meet regularly (hosted by UNEP) to discuss issues of common interest. In addition, officials of secretariats routinely attend each others' CoPs and other major meetings, and exchange principal documents. At present, there is very little flow of scientific information between the conventions, apart from some exchange between Ramsar and WHC regarding sites common to both conventions.

During the *Feasibility Study*, secretariats expressed the need for improved inter-convention exchange, and a number of examples were given of information known to be held by one which would be of value to others and where there would be benefits of sharing scientific expertise. Information flow is hampered by lack of knowledge about the respective data holdings (metadata) of the conventions. An improved understanding of this should lead to a number of benefits.

Bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation exist between the CBD and each of Ramsar, CMS and CITES. There is also a bilateral MoU between Ramsar and CMS. None of these requires or implies information flow.

2.5 Information flow from secretariats to Parties

All of the secretariats are charged to provide assessments of the state of implementation of the convention, and to support Parties in implementing the convention. This is achieved in part by synthesising national reports (as undertaken by CITES and Ramsar routinely for each CoP, and by CBD for CoP4). CMS and WHC do not routinely summarise or synthesise national reports for CoPs. However, apart from administrative information, relatively little information flows from the secretariats to Parties.

All of the conventions recognised during the *Feasibility Study* the need to improve feedback of information to Parties, and to find methods to disseminate case studies (successes and failures) and good practices to Parties to support implementation of the provisions of the treaties. See Appendix V for comments from the secretariats on information management issues and needs.

3 NEED FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

3.1 Current capacity

Information technology in support of information management in the secretariats is variable. Typically a secretariat has a small number of PCs linked through a LAN, and would use Microsoft Office software - primarily for word processing. All secretariats have web sites, in some cases managed by external agencies.

In the main, the technologies are compatible across the secretariats, with some exceptions. CMS primarily uses Wordperfect (Corel Office Suite 8.0), but have MS-Word available. The use of email is common to all.

CITES possess a quantitative time-series database of species trade statistics, managed by WCMC using Ingres software, and Ramsar have a database of site information mainly in the form of structured narrative, managed by Wetlands International (currently being redesigned and to be implemented using Visual FoxPro).

Analytical capacity (software tools for modelling, time-series, trend analysis, GIS) in the secretariats is almost entirely absent.

The treaties' web sites contain a wealth of information, often in a number of languages, although they vary considerably in approach and information content. For example, CBD's site contains all the CoP papers and has a general search facility. CITES make available a large number of documents, including all the Decisions from the last two CoPs together with an online database (managed by WCMC) providing a range of information on the species listed on the Appendices. CMS provides a wide range of information in English, French and Spanish.

Most of the secretariats have in place an information management strategy or other plan to review or enhance information management. In all cases the availability of resources (especially human) limits the ability to implement these plans. Should the plans progress, consideration should be given to ensuring compatibility of database technology, and analytical tools such as modelling and GIS.

3.2 Common issues and needs

Comments from the secretariats on IT issues and needs are given in Appendix V.

Limited access to existing documents

It is recognised that reports and submissions from Parties as well as scientific reports and summaries from other sources held by the secretariats represent a potentially valuable information resource. In most cases these documents are neither indexed nor in digital form, and thus are difficult to access by the secretariat or contracting Parties.

Need for case studies and lessons-learned

All secretariats acknowledged a demand from Parties for information to assist in implementation of treaty provisions - including exemplary strategies and plans, case studies of various aspects of implementation, good practices and so on. With the exception of Ramsar, few of these are currently available through web sites. Also few

national reports or submissions are available in electronic form, so Parties do not have easy access to comparable information from neighbouring or ecologically similar countries

Need for improved linkages with other conventions

There is currently little communication between the information technology officers of the secretariats and little exchange of information management strategies, plans, common problems and experiences.

Limited human resources in IT

The human resources needed to effectively utilise modern information technology are extremely limited in each of the five secretariats. In addition secretariats need more experience and broader skills to make effective use of existing IT. Information management has not been a priority of CoPs, and the potential benefits of increased investment have not been well explained or understood.

Difficulty in responding to queries

Responding to queries from parties, as well as NGOs, press media, prospective Parties, etc. could be streamlined if access to relevant information was more efficient. In some cases, automated processes could provide easy access to information. One reason why this has not happened is that documentation for meetings tends to consume most of the resources available for information analysis and administration.

4 OPTIONS FOR HARMONISATION

Options were identified based on common information needs, constraints and functions. Five principal areas were identified:

- Harmonisation in support of the management of information supplied by Parties.
- Harmonisation in support of secretariat ‘business’.
- Harmonisation aimed at facilitating Parties in reporting and convention implementation.
- Harmonisation aimed at improving the capacity to assess the effectiveness of treaty implementation
- Process considerations for harmonisation

Outlines of these areas were presented to the secretariats as discussion papers (see Appendix VI).

A summary of the proposed short and medium term actions is given in Appendix VI.

Harmonisation options were refined at a Consultation Workshop (Geneva, 27-28 April 1998) with the five convention secretariats and UNEP. The Workshop was guided by the principles that opportunities selected should:

- Make it easier for Parties to report to and implement the conventions
- Provide for better and more accessible information to obtain a global picture of the effectiveness of the implementation of the conventions
- Increase the efficiency of the secretariats in the execution of their responsibilities
- Be practical to implement given current constraints and technology limitations of secretariats and contracting parties

A summary of the Workshop is included as Appendix VII. The recommendations for implementation are elaborated more fully in the following section.

5 IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

At the Workshop, three streams of action were agreed as feasible and of strategic value in further harmonised information management for the five biodiversity-related conventions. They were:

- Developing a harmonised convention information resource
- Streamlining national reporting to, and implementation of, conventions
- Developing a lessons-learned network

5.1 Developing a harmonised convention information resource

The aim is to establish an information resource covering all five biodiversity-related conventions that is accessible to the Parties. It would be based on reports and submissions provided by the Parties, but they would be managed in a structured and harmonised manner to enhance their value. The following benefits are expected:

- Improved access to information contained within national reports and submissions
- Simplification of standard reports such as overview reports on the implementation of each convention
- Improved feedback to parties on implementation
- Opportunities to develop additional reports
- Ability to conduct electronic searches, allowing users to tailor information retrieval to their needs
- Opportunities to archive documents and retain easy access

Synergistic benefits would be expected across the conventions assisted by search facility. This will also increase the operational efficiency of the secretariats.

Five priority areas of activity are needed (Figure 4). Each of these is elaborated below:

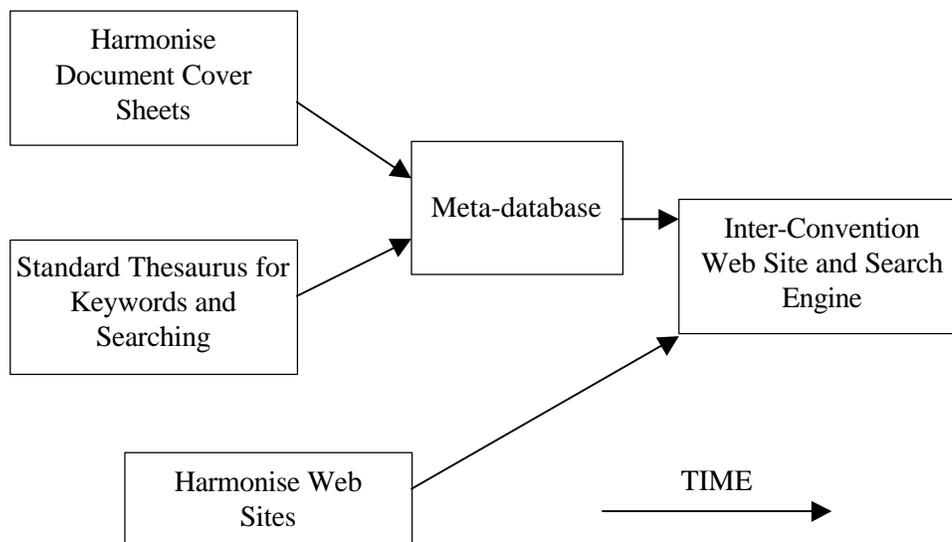


Figure 4. Development of a Harmonised Convention Information Resource

i) Harmonise document cover sheets

The purpose of the cover sheet is to provide standard information for all documents submitted by contracting Parties and generated by the secretariats across all five conventions. It would also serve as the entry for each document into the meta-database (see below).

The recommended minimum content for the cover sheet (Figure 5) is similar to that currently used by some of the conventions. The principal addition is of keywords and a brief summary or abstract (linked to the development of a standard thesaurus for key-wording and searching below). Standards must be adopted for a number of the fields in the cover sheet and these are indicated in italic font in the figure. Wherever possible these should apply ISO or other international standards and deviate as little as practical from existing practice. Consistency in the use items (such as country names) is essential to effective cross-convention searching.

<p>Information applying to all documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document title • <i>Document type</i> • <i>Name of the party</i> • Territory to which the convention applies • <i>Convention to which the document relates</i> • <i>Date of entry into force of the convention for the party</i> • National authority: name (of agency); address (incl. tel. fax, email, web site) • Designated focal point: (name of contact person); address (incl. tel. fax, email) • <i>Content keywords (selected from controlled vocabulary)</i> • Abstract: (brief description of contents and purpose of the document) <p>Reports of parties to the conventions should also add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Period covered by the report</i> • Agency responsible for preparing the report • Name: (of agency) • Address: (incl. tel. fax, email, web site) • Designated focal point: (name of contact person); address (incl. tel. fax, email) • Designated members of standing committees, panels, working groups, etc. (as appropriate to the specific convention) <p>Papers prepared by Secretariats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard reference code/number • Name of body for which paper is prepared • Language • Date
--

Figure 5. Recommended minimum contents for a harmonised document cover sheet

ii) Adopt a standard thesaurus for keywords and searching

The purpose is to adopt a standard thesaurus so that searching for keywords can be accomplished across the five conventions. It is recommended that the secretariats select a subset of the UNEP-Infoterra multi-lingual vocabulary ‘Envoc’. While recognised as incomplete for biodiversity, Envoc is a useful starting point for further development - the UK Clearing House Mechanism, for instance, uses 250 terms from Envoc. Its multi-lingual capability means that keywords selected in one language can be used to search in other languages both as structured keywords and in free text search of abstracts or entire documents.

iii) Harmonise web sites

As a means of facilitating use of web sites, it is recommended that, along with convention-specific material, each convention web site has a consistent minimum set of features (Figure 6). Harmonisation should not restrict the creativity or freedom of individual secretariats but recognise the unique aspects of each convention and deliver benefits from the identified minimum common elements.

<p>Main page:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • convention logo • overview of history and objectives of convention (text) • basic contact information <p>Buttons leading to separate pages for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Secretariat</i> linking to mandate, organisational structure, physical location, names and contact details of staff, supporting organisations - e.g. data management agencies, host organisation • <i>Text of treaty</i> • <i>Decisions in force</i> of Conference of Parties (or equivalent) • <i>Parties</i> linking to status, administrative authorities, focal points with contacts (incl. email and web sites) • <i>Reporting requirements</i> linking to timing, frequency, current reporting guidelines, sample reports • <i>Subsidiary bodies/committees</i> indicating: mandate; meeting frequency; membership policy; list of current members with names and contact information • <i>Events schedule</i>: including forthcoming meetings of CoP, subsidiary bodies and committees, and deadlines for submission of meeting documents etc. • <i>Documents</i>: a list or index of available documents, preferably with hotlinks to download via ftp • <i>Frequently Asked Questions</i> (based on secretariat experience) • <i>Hotlinks</i> to other related sites (with brief description of relationship): other related conventions; regional treaties and organisations; key information sources and databases; key NGOs and international agencies <p>Target for documents should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all CoP documents (agenda, background papers, proceedings, official country papers) • all subsidiary body and committee documents (agendas, background papers, minutes, proceedings, official national submissions) • all national reports and updates • descriptive summary of all designated sites - e.g. summary portion of national
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Figure 6. Recommended minimum web site features

iv) *Develop meta-database*

It is recommended that a meta-database be developed primarily to indicate the information that is available and where it is located. The meta-database should initially be implemented on the web site of each of the five convention secretariats, following standard protocols and software. The meta-database would essentially consist of digital versions of the ‘cover sheets’ available in a searchable form, with additional information on availability of the full document.

v) *Develop an inter-convention web site and search engine*

The development of an inter-convention web site and search engine is a logical follow-on to harmonised web sites and meta-databases in each of the secretariats. The inter-convention web site would be a single point of entry – in the sense of a gateway, rather than data entry – to the convention web sites, as is currently provided partly by the UNEP-IUC web site. The search engine would enable users

to interrogate and retrieve information from the meta-database covering the five conventions.

Process and resources required for implementation of Section 5.1

- *Total costs were estimated to be in the region of \$50-100K. This includes the design and implementation of the meta-database and harmonised web sites but excludes the highly variable cost of key-wording and entering cover sheets into the meta-database.*
- *Bilateral donors were the most probable source of support. Funding might be secured from the secretariats’ host countries especially if the case is made based on synergistic benefits from harmonisation across the five conventions.*

5.2 Streamlining national reporting to, and implementation of, conventions

The eventual purpose is to encourage and assist the development of co-ordinated biodiversity information resources at the national level. There are four necessary steps as shown in Figure 7.

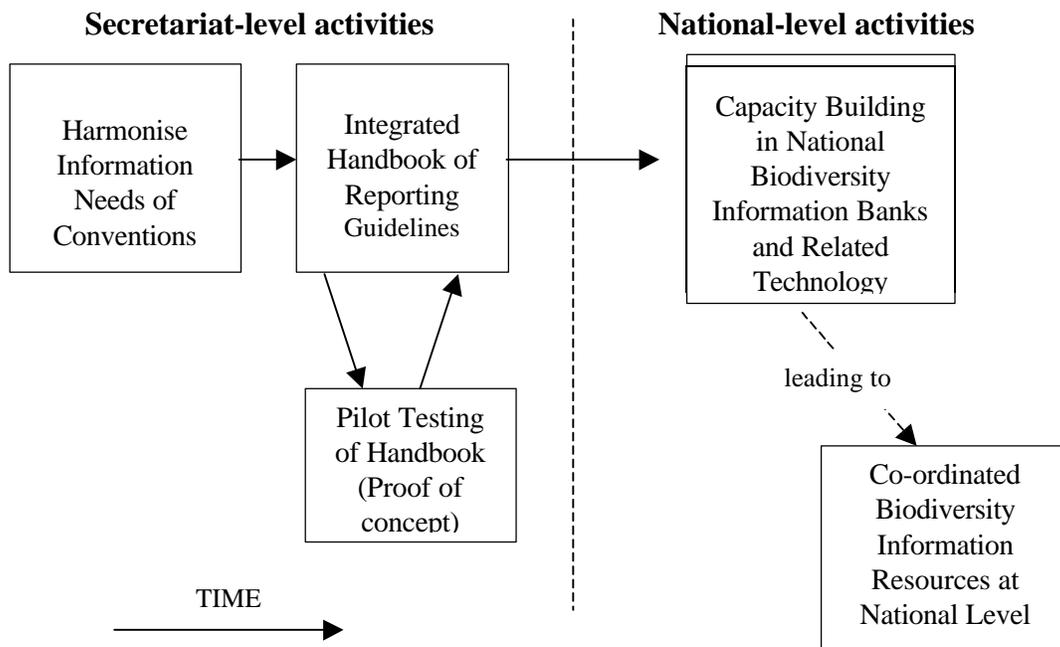


Figure 7. Streamlined national reporting to facilitate reporting to, and implementation of, conventions

i) Review and clarify reporting requirements of each convention

This phase calls for a detailed review of the reporting and submission requirements within each convention. It would build on the analysis of this *Feasibility Study* and

result in well-defined structured ‘modules’ of information required (the ‘information packets’ described in Discussion Paper 3, Appendix VI). Clarification is needed of requirements to report on sites that may be common to more than one convention (or governed by common legislation, strategies, action plans), and to report on species populations, threats and habitat loss.

The CBD has yet to define regular reporting needs and, for the foreseeable future, required reports may continue to be thematic – focusing each time on different articles or aspects. Ways in which the needs of CBD can be met, at least in part, by defining and selecting appropriate modules from the other conventions should be examined in this phase.

ii) *Prepare an integrated handbook of national reporting*

The integrated handbook follows from the previous review and structuring of information reporting requirements. Guidelines for each convention would be assembled into a consolidated handbook (both hard-copy and electronic) with a common glossary and terminology set. The handbook would need to be updated to reflect changes in reporting requirements.

The handbook should particularly suggest how contracting Parties could most usefully organise national information systems and collection regimes to facilitate preparing reporting modules to the conventions while contributing to their own national policies, strategies and action plans.

iii) *Pilot testing of handbook (proof-of-concept)*

The handbook would be tested in approximately 10 countries. This would involve review by the implementing agencies for each of the conventions and an assessment by the agencies of the changes they would need to introduce at national level to implement integrated reporting.

Criteria for selecting participating countries could include:

- Convention membership
- Regional distribution
- Social, economic and cultural balance
- Size – include small island developing states (especially because their size and resources may imply a closer relationships between responsible national agencies than may occur in larger countries)
- Past involvement with related activities such as the UNEP/GEF *BDM Project* that may already have provided the basis for further capacity building.

The results of this pilot would be used to improve and refine the handbook, as well as defining the capacity building requirements at national level for full implementation of integrated reporting.

iv) *Capacity building in national biodiversity information banks and related technology*

Building capacity at national level to implement the integrated reporting guidelines would directly address the goal of developing co-ordinated national biodiversity information resources. The envisaged national biodiversity information banks would serve the needs of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and would also help nations to report to the conventions. A related goal for the development of 'virtual reporting' was regarded by the secretariats as unrealistic within the foreseeable future. However, the development of national biodiversity information banks could, in the long-term, facilitate virtual reporting.

A number of phases would occur such as selection of exemplary countries (similar to the proof-of-concept countries), the assessment of capacity building needs, pilot testing of implementation. Other elements would include institutional strengthening and development of a framework for biodiversity information which could be replicated and implemented in many countries.

Process and resources required for implementation of Section 5.2

- *For the review of information requirements both internal and external (cross-convention harmonisation) resources will be required. Estimate \$5,000-30,000 per secretariat. This will be highly variable, as some conventions already have very well-defined reporting guidelines (such as CITES trade statistics, and Ramsar data sheets), whereas others need to consider more structure and specification in light of secretariat needs. Funding sources could include bilaterals from host countries, and/or multi-laterals with emphasis on assisting Parties - easing the burden of multiple reporting.*
- *GEF PDF B funding was proposed for the development and proof-of-concept testing of the integrated reporting handbook - \$250,000 estimated.*
- *Later stages of capacity building and pilot country-driven implementation would require \$2-5m. GEF would seem the most likely source. Final costing will depend on the outcome of the pilot projects.*

5.3 Developing a lessons-learned network

The objective is to encourage the sharing of experience from beneficial case studies whether positive success stories or examples of what to avoid. It could, for instance, include examples spanning field projects in species re-introduction, experience on invasive species, habitat rehabilitation through to policies and guidelines for sustainable use. There are five main activities, as noted in Figure 8.

i) *Select lessons-learned from existing secretariat documents*

This requires an internal review in each secretariat to select appropriate material from project files and national reports. These would be posted on a special section of the convention web site. (Ramsar has already done this.) It

would be useful to consider a more specialised key-wording vocabulary for these lessons learned – for instance, incorporating a standard taxonomy and more detailed terms related to habitat rehabilitation, management plans, threat mitigation and other specific items.

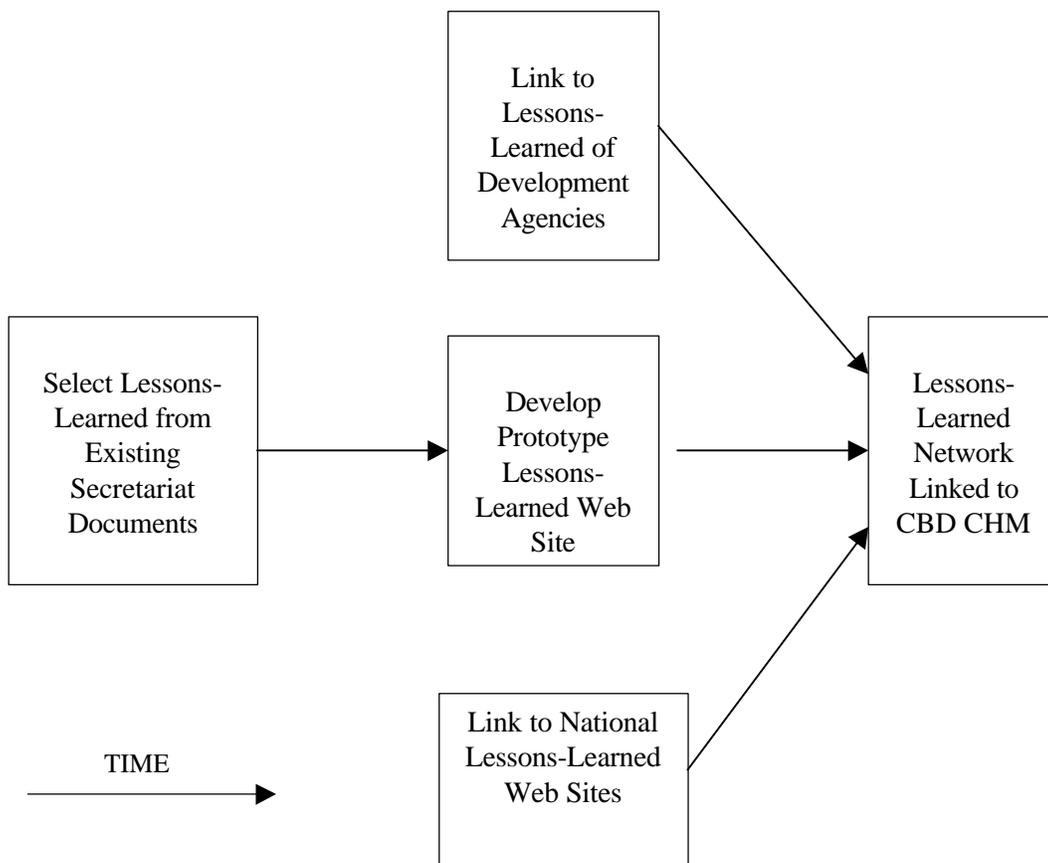


Figure 8. Stages in development of the lessons-learned network

ii) *Develop prototype lessons-learned web site*

This could be developed as a separate web site or as part of the inter-convention web site and would serve to test the methodology and delivery of information, and to attract input from other agencies.

iii) *Establish links to lessons-learned of development agencies, and national lessons-learned web sites.*

The most valuable lessons-learned will be from national activities. It may take time for these lessons-learned case studies to appear on national sites. Until this happens, a set of themes could be drawn up (eg. for Best Practice Guidelines for CITES implementation for new parties and others) and efforts would be made to collect relevant material from the Parties in the short term. From the experience of Ramsar, once a prototype site is established, national and

international agencies are willing to submit additional material and/or provide links to existing sites with case studies and examples of good practice. Guidelines must be developed for acceptance of lessons-learned or links.

iv) *Link lessons-learned network to CBD-CHM.*

This is the fully operational stage. It follows the testing of the prototype and adjustment according to experience. The ultimate goal is that the lessons-learned network becomes a useful node in the overall CBD Clearing House Mechanism.

Process and resources required for implementation of Section 5.3

- *The Workshop suggested bilateral donors with secretariats best placed to make the case to their host countries based on synergistic benefits.*
- *Total cost to develop the prototype lessons-learned web site was estimated in region of \$50,000-100,000.*
- *No estimate of ongoing running costs has been made, but these are envisaged as low.*

6 OVERALL PROCESS ISSUES

Achieving harmonisation of information management through the proposed projects will require active collaboration between the five participating conventions. To help achieve this, three processes were identified:

- high level harmonisation steering committee
- joint scientific panel
- joint information technology working group

It was acknowledged that there was a need for closer collaboration between the information management and technology staff of the secretariats. The CMS Secretariat offered to convene and host a first meeting of such a group, to begin to discuss the issue of harmonisation of web sites, document cover sheets and the standard thesaurus.

Collaboration on scientific issues, including species lists and vocabulary was seen as more difficult. The possibility was raised of having a single joint scientific panel, but there were believed to be too few issues in common for this to be worthwhile across all five treaties. The existing well-defined CITES standard taxonomies were identified as a useful base that could be expanded to include standardised species lists for Ramsar and CMS. It was recognised that coordination between the chairs of the CMS Scientific Council and the CITES Nomenclature Committee would be beneficial.

Actions and decisions requiring coordination were identified as follows:

- adoption of standards (including document types, country names, dates)
- selection/adoption of high-level keyword vocabulary
- minimum content of harmonised web sites
- coordination on meta-database design
- input to design of central web site and search engine
- collaboration in the identification of information packets
- design of integrated handbook
- harmonisation of terminology
- selection of proof-of-concept countries
- species lists and taxonomies
- lower-level key-wording vocabulary for lessons-learned

There was concern that the current meeting workload of the secretariats was already very high. Apart from the considerations above, no firm commitment was made to form additional working groups or committees at this time. WCMC was asked to continue to develop ideas and proposals in support of the secretariats.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The *Feasibility Study* succeeded in identifying specific areas for harmonisation between the five conventions.

There are significant areas where the five conventions need information on the same sectors of biodiversity and there are practical steps that can be taken towards harmonising information management. Most notable areas of commonality are the species information data required by CITES and CMS, and the site-based information needed by Ramsar and WHC. There is considerable scope within these to harmonise information management and the information requirements from national reports to improve efficiency and gain greater benefits from efforts at all levels.

Information flow could be managed and directed to greater effect. This is especially the case from the secretariats to the Parties where information disseminated is currently largely administrative but could be extended to include more scientific and analytical information or more sharing of experience. Information flow and co-ordination are impeded by the multiple channels that reflect the diversity of agencies charged with implementation at national level. Greater coordination at national level would be beneficial.

The five secretariats share challenges relating to IT and information management. Their responses to these challenges would benefit from improved communication and sharing of experience.

Of the range of options proposed by WCMC some such as virtual reporting were seen as impractical at least in the short-medium term and so are excluded from the recommended immediate actions. Options of this type are worthy for reconsideration once the more immediate steps have been taken.

Feasible steps agreed by the secretariats as both pragmatic and of strategic value to improve harmonisation are to:

- develop a harmonised conventions information resource
- streamline reporting to conventions
- develop a lesson-learned network

These steps will now be taken forward through the development of funding proposals by WCMC, at the request of, and in close consultation with, the convention secretariats.

During implementation of the *Feasibility Study*, there was considerable interest from other treaties notably the FCCC and CCD. A broader study embracing these and other treaties would be beneficial and timely.

APPENDIX I – TERMS OF REFERENCE

PROPOSAL

Summary

Scope

This proposal is for a feasibility study for the first phase of a harmonised information management infrastructure for biodiversity-related treaties, namely:

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar)
- World Heritage Convention (WHC)

This Study is an essential prerequisite for country-focused capacity building and development of harmonised reporting and information management activities. However, country-level activities are beyond the scope of the current proposal.

The Study will examine the needs and the current situation in the above treaties, and provide costed options for developing and implementing a harmonised approach to information management.

Products of the Study

The final Feasibility Study Report will contain the following:

Information Flow Analysis:

the ways in which the treaties need to link and share information with each other; the common linkages with external international and national agencies, and the relationship between reporting schedules.

Assessment of Information Needs:

information needs for each treaty secretariat, as well as an overview analysis of commonalities.

Assessment of the Needs for Information Management Capacity:

processing and analysis needs for each treaty secretariat, and an overview of commonalities.

Opportunity Evaluation:

- potential advantages of harmonisation
- current strengths which can be utilised
- the most likely areas of gain for both the treaties and their contracting parties.

Implementation Alternatives:

costed alternatives for a harmonised infrastructure with a range of options from common principles and exchange formats, through harmonised hardware/software and common data elements, information management, common (or at least interlinked) information services, to full integration. The selected alternative can then be followed up by a programme of helping countries to work more efficiently and effectively with the treaties.

BACKGROUND

Rationale

The majority of nations have now confirmed their commitment to the principles of Agenda 21 by becoming Parties to the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, to other treaties related to biodiversity conservation, to treaties such as the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa*, and to others directed at stabilisation of the global environment, such as the *Framework Convention on Climate Change* (FCCC) and the *Montreal Protocol*. Nations recognise their wider regional and global responsibilities, as well as the need to manage their own environment sustainably. Biological diversity, in particular, has become a concern of central significance as a measure of the sustainability of development patterns.

In addition to the defined reporting requirements of global and regional treaties, nations now realise that strategy development and wise decision-making on the sustainable use of biological resources and the equitable sharing of benefits depends on having systematically organised **information**. The information which nations must organise and manage, in order to respond to specific and implied requirements of these treaties, is complex and transcends conventional sectoral divisions.

The development of such enabling capabilities is taxing to all nations, but particularly strains the capacity of developing countries. It is important, therefore, that national information management infrastructure be developed as efficiently as possible - to serve both national strategic and operational needs, as well as the reporting obligations to all the relevant treaties. There is a growing demand for the ability to **combine and integrate** biodiversity-related data and to share the benefits of advanced technology deriving from a wide variety of publicly-funded biodiversity initiatives. One result is that countries are seeking better access to technology and data from others (through, for example, the CBD Clearing-house Mechanism), and are also seeking feedback from treaty secretariats of comparative data from other parties. These will contribute to early warning of regional problems, clarify priorities and monitor progress towards objectives.

The secretariats of the biodiversity-related treaties have an obligation to be as efficient and responsive as possible in managing their information - much of which will be provided by reports from parties - in such a way that facilitates national information management. It is also desirable that information handling be compatible with the approaches of the various associated agencies, such as UNEP, UNDP, World Bank and GEF. Increasingly, there is a call from parties for secretariats to collaborate more closely, to gain synergies and to avoid duplication. For example, Decision III/21 of the CBD Conference of Parties

Requests the Executive Secretary to continue to coordinate with the secretariats of relevant biodiversity-related conventions, institutions, and processes, with a view to: facilitating exchange of information and

experience; exploring the possibility of recommending procedures for harmonising, to the extent desirable and practicable, the reporting requirements of Parties under those instruments and conventions; exploring the possibility of coordinating their respective programmes of work; and consulting on how such conventions and other international legal instruments can contribute to the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity;

Towards this end memoranda of cooperation have been entered into between the CBD and each of CITES, the CMS and the Ramsar Convention.

In essence, there are two primary needs to be addressed:

- for countries to be enabled to provide information to the secretariats effectively and efficiently, and to facilitate the development of harmonised national information management infrastructure
- for secretariats to be as efficient as possible in the management and sharing of information, and in responding to needs of the parties and prospective parties.

The time is opportune for consideration of harmonised information management amongst the treaties - to capitalise on current interest and momentum, and rapidly evolving technology, before incompatible parallel developments create expensive barriers to future integration.

Benefits

To the Conventions:

- improved ability to achieve treaty objectives through process improvement
- improved efficiency (reduced cost) of information management, including ability to respond to queries
- reduced cost of information technology implementation
- jointly improved analysis capacity and ability to coordinate programmes of work, through sharing of information and experience
- improved information quality, consistency and transparency
- improved linkages with international environmental monitoring agencies, major data custodians, and regional treaties
- improved image and attractiveness to prospective parties.

To the parties:

- reduced cost of meeting reporting requirements of treaties, through co-ordinated schedules and standards
- improved information feedback from secretariats and comparability with other countries
- increased ability to develop and use clearing house mechanisms and integrated indicators of sustainability
- improved access to best practices in information management, including standards, data quality assurance and effective use of technology.

In subsequent phases, parties could be assisted to:

- improve efficiency and effectiveness through building national biodiversity information systems which will support national strategy and policy development, and consequent implementation
- improve ability to implement country-driven actions in support of treaty commitments, such as conservation and sustainable use.

Elements of the feasibility study

The feasibility study is composed of four basic elements: an assessment of the **needs**, an assessment of the **current strengths and capacities**, an **analysis of findings**, and the development of **options**. Each of these elements is described below:

Needs Assessment

This will comprise an evaluation of the treaty documents and formal decisions and recommendations of the bodies responsible for treaty implementation, e.g. Conferences of the Parties. It will determine:

a) What **data and information** are needed

- by the treaty parties to:
 - manage, monitor and improve treaty implementation.
- by the treaty secretariats to:
 - support parties and subsidiary and other advisory bodies
 - respond to queries from parties, international agencies, NGOs, and the media
 - manage the data resulting from national reporting
 - conduct forward planning
- from the treaty secretariats by national governments to:
 - effectively implement the treaty
 - understand their obligations

- improve their current level of compliance
- share experience and make appropriate comparisons to other countries
- meet reporting requirements efficiently.

b) What **linkages** are needed between the treaties and with other international organisations, NGOs, networks and "clearing houses" (e.g. IUCN's Environmental Law Centre, WCMC, etc.), in order to share information and most efficiently implement the treaties.

c) Which **activities** are currently duplicated at secretariat or contracting party level, and which are carried out for one treaty that would directly support the work of others.

d) What **information analysis capabilities** are needed, that is, the capacity to process and analyze data, such as statistical analysis, scientific analysis and modelling, GIS, time series and trend analysis, forecasting and so on. Of particular interest would be needs of this nature which are common amongst the treaties.

Assessment of Current Secretariat Capacities

This element examines and documents the current situation in the secretariats with respect to the same four aspects as the **Needs Assessment**, namely current data and information and its use, the nature and extent of linkages and agreements, current activities and resources and tools available for managing and analyzing information.

Analysis of Findings

The analysis of findings will assemble a view of the current and potential information flow within and between the treaties, and present an opportunity evaluation derived from common needs and existing strengths. Consideration will be given to:

- the extent to which there are information management and analysis needs in common
- opportunities for improvements through synchronisation of reporting schedules
- potential benefits of adopting common standards (including definitions of terms, processes and data items)
- opportunities for common or shared software and database structures
- how current strengths can best be utilised
- how any gaps or deficiencies can be identified and rectified
- what level of harmonisation would be most beneficial for treaty support services
- what are likely future needs and trends for which there should be preparation
- benefits and limitations of a harmonised approach, from the over-riding perspective of improving the effectiveness of treaty implementation.

With regard to linkages the analysis will consider, for example, what activities are currently duplicated at secretariat or contracting party level, and which activities carried out for one treaty would support the work of another.

Development of Options

This element will develop a number of alternative practical plans for implementation at different levels of integration and harmonisation, including implementing common standards, common or inter-linked information services, harmonised World Wide Web sites on the Internet, etc. The alternatives will be developed from the perspective of opportunity evaluation - to maximize the benefits of existing strengths and expertise, and tools. Each of the alternatives will be fully described and evaluated according to:

- benefits and limitations
- one-time and on-going costs
- training and human development implications.

An implementation plan and schedule for each option will be prepared.

Approach

The principles of the approach are to be iterative and consultative. The study will encourage the secretariats to review their obligations, objectives and requirements for data and information, and to link the study to existing standing committee or expert committee processes. A stepwise approach is proposed involving workshops and flexible opportunities for consultation and refinement of ideas.

The planned steps are as follows:

1. Documentation Review

For each of the designated treaties, review treaty articles and all formal decisions or recommendations in order to identify any data and information resources required to support their implementation. Review current and proposed reporting requirements on parties to those treaties. Identify current data and information management procedures and documentation. Review information-related aspects of Memoranda of Understanding and other collaborative agreements. Identify any information resources that would be of potential value to more than one treaty. Build an information base that would underpin subsequent steps, paying particular attention to those information resources that support actions identified by the treaty parties as being of high priority.

2. Survey of Needs

Consultation with secretariats leading to a focussed workshop. This would be used to raise awareness and understanding of the issues amongst the key actors. The objective of this step would be to derive a preliminary overview data model, identifying commonalities and differences, and a plan for the information gathering approach for a more detailed needs study. The data model and plan will be made available for review and comment.

3. Detailed Needs Study

Consultations to follow-up the preliminary findings and the workshops, including visits to individual secretariats. The focus will be to extend the findings and, in particular, to identify common information and data analysis needs.

4. Development of Alternatives

Elaborate a range of alternatives with different levels of harmonisation and integration, in consultation with the secretariats and other actors. It should be noted that benefits are perceived even if harmonisation among the treaties proceeds in a partial or stepwise fashion. For each feasible alternative a costed implementation plan will be developed, with consideration of the principles of improving the effectiveness of treaty implementation, efficiency of secretariat services, and minimising the burden on reporting parties.

5. Costing of Alternatives

Cost estimates will consider the **practical** implementation considerations of options, as well as how to take advantage of existing infrastructure and expertise. Cost estimates will include human resources, training, hardware, software, and on-going operations.

6. Consultation and Feedback

Drafts of alternative implementation plans will be provided to all participants in the study for review.

7. Feasibility Study Report

The Feasibility Study Report will integrate all comments and feedback. The Report will be presented at a further meeting of secretariats for agreement on next steps.

APPENDIX II – PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Preliminary discussions with executives of the treaty secretariats quickly revealed that a routine, information technology data model approach to the *Feasibility Study* was inappropriate. Instead it was important to identify areas of potential opportunity for harmonisation, directed at a long-term vision of cooperative and harmonised treaties which benefited both the secretariats in conducting their business, and the contracting parties in implementing the provisions of the treaties. The study team was invited to be radical and visionary; to stimulate progress with a broad range of options.

The study, therefore, adopted an opportunity analysis approach, rather than systematically reviewing computer systems and data items for overlap and commonalities. In the opportunity analysis approach a number of long term visions are suggested and, within each, a range of possible beneficial harmonisation actions are identified - and subsequently discussed, refined, and prioritised to a shortlist of feasible actions. These highest priority most-likely-to-succeed actions were then costed. The principal stages in the study were:

- 1) Review of the information needs of the conventions as indicated or implied by the articles of the treaties and subsequent formal decisions of the parties.
- 2) Review of the information needs of the conventions as identified in directives and guidelines for national reports and submissions.
- 3) On-site consultations and structured interviews with key secretariat officials of each of the conventions.

Information sought during these consultations included:

- reporting required from Parties
- management and maintenance of information submitted to the secretariats
- managing information on the administration of the conventions
- standards and guidelines used
- management of responses (information dissemination)
- linkages and interactions between the conventions
- future directions and plans in information management and technology
- views on harmonisation opportunities

- 4) Synthesis of preliminary findings on commonalities of constraints, information requirements and information management functions.

This synthesis was circulated to the secretariats in December 1997 as a discussion document entitled "Towards the harmonisation of Information Management of the Biodiversity Treaties - Discussion Points for a Workshop".

5) Consultation on opportunity areas

The original intent was to discuss and refine the opportunities at a Workshop in Geneva scheduled for 5/6 February 1998. This Workshop was postponed and the consultation was performed through the circulation of five discussion papers. Four discussion papers elaborated the four opportunities. A fifth discussion paper addressed potential process considerations, that is, the committees, working groups and other joint arrangements needed to move forward with harmonisation.

The discussion papers were distributed February 1998.

6) Workshop on harmonisation actions

The initial harmonisation opportunities were refined based on feedback from the Secretariats. A Framework for Action was developed as a basis of discussion at a consultative Workshop, 27/28 April 1998. The Workshop resulted in agreement on multi-step projects towards harmonisation with indicative costs and possible funding sources.

7) Final report

The results of the Workshop and the previous steps of the Study were compiled into the Feasibility Study Report.

APPENDIX III – INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE CONVENTIONS

[Click here](#) to link to Appendix III.

APPENDIX IV – PARTIES TO THE CONVENTIONS

Major global Conventions relevant to biodiversity as at May 1998

	CBD	CITES	CMS	RAMSAR	WHC
Afghanistan	s	R	-	-	R
Albania	R	-	-	R	R
Algeria	R	R	-	R	R
Andorra	-	-	-	-	R
Angola	s	-	-	-	R
Antigua & Barbuda	R	R	-	-	R
Argentina	R	R	R	R	R
Armenia	R	-	-	R	R
Australia	R	R	R	R	R
Austria	R	R	-	R	R
Azerbaijan	s	-	-	-	R
Bahamas	R	R	-	R	-
Bahrain	R	-	-	R	R
Bangladesh	R	R	-	R	R
Barbados	R	R	-	-	-
Belarus	R	R	-	-	R
Belgium	R	R	R	R	R
Belize	R	R	-	-	R
Benin	R	R	R	-	R
Bhutan	R	-	-	-	-
Bolivia	R	R	-	R	R
Bosnia & Herzegovina	-	-	-	-	R
Botswana	R	R	-	R	-
Brazil	R	R	-	R	R
Brunei	-	R	-	-	-
Bulgaria	R	R	-	R	R
Burkina Faso	R	R	R	R	R
Burundi	R	R	-	-	R
Cambodia	R	R	-	-	R
Cameroon	R	R	R	-	R
Canada	R	R	-	R	R
Cape Verde	R	-	-	-	R
Central African Republic	R	R	s	-	R
Chad	R	R	R	R	-
Chile	R	R	R	R	R
China	R	R	-	R	R
Colombia	R	R	-	-	R
Comoros	R	R	-	R	-
Congo, D.R.	R	R	R	R	R
Congo, Republic	R	R	-	-	R
Costa Rica	R	R	-	R	R
Côte d'Ivoire	R	R	s	R	R
Croatia	R	-	-	R	R
Cuba	R	R	-	-	R

	CBD	CITES	CMS	RAMSAR	WHC
Cyprus	R	R	-	-	R
Czech Republic	R	R	R	R	R
Denmark	R	R	R	R	R
Djibouti	R	R	-	-	-
Dominica	R	R	-	-	R
Dominican Republic	R	R	-	-	R
Ecuador	R	R	-	R	R
Egypt	R	R	R	R	R
El Salvador	R	R	-	-	R
Equatorial Guinea	R	R	-	-	-
Eritrea	R	R	-	-	-
Estonia	R	R	-	R	R
Ethiopia	R	R	-	-	R
F.S. Micronesia	R	-	-	-	-
Fiji	R	R	-	-	R
Finland	R	R	R	R	R
France	R	R	R	R	R
Gabon	R	R	-	R	R
Gambia	R	R	-	R	R
Georgia	R	R	-	R	R
Germany	R	R	R	R	R
Ghana	R	R	R	R	R
Greece	R	R	s	R	R
Grenada	R	-	-	-	-
Guatemala	R	R	-	R	R
Guinea	R	R	R	R	R
Guinea-Bissau	R	R	R	R	-
Guyana	R	R	-	-	R
Haiti	R	-	-	-	R
Honduras	R	R	-	R	R
Hungary	R	R	R	R	R
Iceland	R	-	-	R	R
India	R	R	R	R	R
Indonesia	R	R	-	R	R
Iran	R	R	-	R	R
Iraq	-	-	-	-	R
Ireland	R	-	R	R	R
Israel	R	R	R	R	-
Italy	R	R	R	R	R
Jamaica	R	R	s	R	R
Japan	R	R	-	R	R
Jordan	R	R	-	R	R
Kazakhstan	R	-	-	-	R
Kenya	R	R	-	R	R
Kiribati	R	-	-	-	-
Korea, D.P.R.	R	-	-	-	-
Korea, Republic	R	R	-	R	R
Kuwait	s	-	-	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	R	-	-	-	R
Laos	R	-	-	-	R

	CBD	CITES	CMS	RAMSAR	WHC
Latvia	R	R	-	R	R
Lebanon	R	-	-	-	R
Lesotho	R	-	-	-	-
Liberia	s	R	-	-	-
Libya	s	-	-	-	R
Liechtenstein	R	R	-	R	-
Lithuania	R	-	-	R	R
Luxembourg	R	R	R	-	R
Macedonia F.Y.R.	R	-	-	R	R
Madagascar	R	R	s	-	R
Malawi	R	R	-	R	R
Malaysia	R	R	-	R	R
Maldives	R	-	-	-	R
Mali	R	R	R	R	R
Malta	s	R	-	R	R
Marshall Islands	R	-	-	-	-
Mauritania	R	-	-	R	R
Mauritius	R	R	-	-	R
Mexico	R	R	-	R	R
Moldova	R	-	-	-	-
Monaco	R	R	R	R	R
Mongolia	R	R	-	R	R
Morocco	R	R	R	R	R
Mozambique	R	R	-	-	R
Myanmar	R	R	-	-	R
Namibia	R	R	-	R	-
Nauru	R	-	-	-	-
Nepal	R	R	-	R	R
Netherlands	R	R	R	R	R
New Zealand	R	R	-	R	R
Nicaragua	R	R	-	R	R
Niger	R	R	R	R	R
Nigeria	R	R	R	-	R
Norway	R	R	R	R	R
Oman	R	-	-	-	R
Pakistan	R	R	R	R	R
Palau	-	-	-	-	-
Panama	R	R	R	R	R
Papua New Guinea	R	R	-	R	R
Paraguay	R	R	s	R	R
Peru	R	R	R	R	R
Philippines	R	R	R	R	R
Poland	R	R	R	R	R
Portugal	R	R	R	R	R
Qatar	R	-	-	-	R
Romania	R	R	-	R	R
Russia	R	R	-	R	R
Rwanda	R	R	-	-	-
San Marino	R	-	-	-	R
São Tomé & Príncipe	s	-	-	-	-

	CBD	CITES	CMS	RAMSAR	WHC
Saudi Arabia	-	R	R	-	R
Senegal	R	R	R	R	R
Seychelles	R	R	-	-	R
Sierra Leone	R	R	-	-	-
Singapore	R	R	-	-	-
Slovakia	R	R	R	R	R
Slovenia	R	-	-	R	R
Solomon Islands	R	-	-	-	R
Somalia	-	R	R	-	-
South Africa	R	R	R	R	R
Spain	R	R	R	R	R
Sri Lanka	R	R	R	R	R
St Kitts-Nevis	R	R	-	-	-
St Lucia	R	R	-	-	R
St Vincent	R	R	-	-	-
Sudan	R	R	-	-	R
Suriname	R	R	-	R	R
Swaziland	R	R	-	-	-
Sweden	R	R	R	R	R
Switzerland	R	R	R	R	R
Syria	R	-	-	-	R
Tajikistan	R	-	-	-	R
Tanzania	R	R	-	-	R
Thailand	s	R	-	-	R
Togo	R	R	R	R	-
Tonga	-	-	-	-	-
Trinidad & Tobago	R	R	-	R	-
Tunisia	R	R	R	R	R
Turkey	R	R	-	R	R
Turkmenistan	R	-	-	-	R
Tuvalu	s	-	-	-	-
Uganda	R	R	s	R	R
Ukraine	R	-	-	R	R
United Arab Emirates	s	R	-	-	-
United Kingdom	R	R	R	R	R
Uruguay	R	R	R	R	R
USA	s	R	-	R	R
Uzbekistan	R	R	-	-	R
Vanuatu	R	R	-	-	-
Venezuela	R	R	-	R	R
Viet Nam	R	R	-	R	R
Western Samoa	R	-	-	-	-
Yemen	R	R	-	-	R
Yugoslavia	s	-	-	R	R
Zambia	R	R	-	R	R
Zimbabwe	R	R	-	-	R

Notes. ‘**R**’ = states Party to the relevant convention, ie. have ratified, accepted, acceded or approved. ‘s’ non-Party states that have signed the convention but not yet ratified. Information as at March 1998. **CBD** Convention on Biological Diversity, **CITES** Convention on International Trade in

Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, **CMS** Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, **RAMSAR** Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, **WHC** Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage,. Shaded areas indicate membership of all five biodiversity-related conventions.

APPENDIX V – COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIATS ON INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND NEEDS

CBD:

- availability of IT staff extremely limited
- no index or metadata of documents - retrieved by file naming convention
- massive job to manage meeting documents, means little capacity to analyse

CITES

- field project information is not structured and is hard to access
- analysis of legislation (by ELC) is not used by Parties
- need to be able to: analyse trends in species, track non-CITES species for early warning, get a global picture about factors affecting species population
- difficult to align data fields with Interpol and WTO
- need more analysis capacity to assess effectiveness of Convention
- need a lessons-learned file (not just successes)

CMS:

- limited internal IT capacity - need more staff
- web page needs improvements, e.g. links to agreements
- information in past country reports is virtually inaccessible - not indexed, not digital
- lack information on the effectiveness of the Convention and Agreements
- need information on non-Parties as well, to get global picture
- need to use additional information sources, e.g. WCMC, BCIS
- need examples of effective implementation of information management to help Parties
- future need for spatial analysis (GIS)

Ramsar:

- directory of site descriptions last printed in 1993 - needs to be automated and maintained on web
- in general information is not “easy to use”
- maps provided are poor and not digitised
- need links to Protected Areas Database (IUCN/WCMC)
- regional directories of wetlands need harmonisation
- need to improve information sharing with other conventions, especially CMS
- need analytical capacity - e.g. which Ramsar sites are critical to listed CMS species
- need a clearing house of success stories on successful management practice, habitat rehabilitation, etc.
- need a clearing house of national and site management plans
- current database is difficult to use and results of queries are hard for Parties to understand
- paper files submitted by Parties (Annexes) are not indexed, so difficult to use
- need connections to Wetlands International waterbird census data

WHC:

- national reports difficult to access - not indexed, not digital
- need better links to CMS (e.g. Siberian Cranes)
- need improved links to CITES and Ramsar
- difficult to extract information on projects conducted on sites
- overall need for case studies to be available for site managers, local and national committees
- need better access to all nomination documents
- progress limited by resources - “too busy” for reflection or analysis

APPENDIX VI – WORKSHOP DISCUSSION PAPERS

[Click here](#) to link to Appendix VI.

TABLE OF SHORT AND LONG TERM OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity Area	Ultimate Vision	Short / Medium Term Actions
<p>1. Managing Information Provided by Parties - Improving access for effective use and sharing</p>	<p>1.1 Interlinked Accessible Information Resource of reports and national submissions</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 1.1.1 Develop standard cover sheet (digital) to use for all national documents and standard format for elements to be incorporated into a database 1.1.2 Encourage and facilitate digital submission of reports <i>Medium Term:</i> 1.1.3 Develop standard terminology (thesaurus) for keywording the content of documents 1.1.4 Develop a shared catalogue (Metadatabase) of Documents (standard cover sheet, terminology, taxonomy) 1.1.5 Selected key documents available on Convention web sites 1.1.6 Identify the information needs of a range of user groups 1.1.7 Use the above to identify which elements of the text-based reports could be extracted and incorporated into a database</p>
<p>2. Management and Communication of Secretariat Business</p>	<p>2.1 Linked Harmonised web sites with a shared point of entry</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 2.1.1 Standardise the look and basic minimum information on each web site 2.1.2 Add FAQ section to each web site <i>Medium Term:</i> 2.1.3 Develop a shared catalogue/metadatabase of all official documents (keyworded according to standard thesaurus) 2.1.4 Implement a First-point-of-entry web site with search engine to explore across all convention official and national documents</p>

Opportunity Area	Ultimate Vision	Short / Medium Term Actions
<p>2. Management and Communication of Secretariat Business</p>	<p>2.2 Paperless exchange and dissemination of all business documents</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 2.2.1 Implement a shared on-line meeting schedule and shared database of parties.</p> <p><i>Medium Term:</i> 2.2.2 Harmonise methods of document management and archiving – consider shared archive or clearing house (machine readable as much as possible)</p> <p>2.2.3 Develop procedures for the automated exchange and dissemination of relevant documents</p>
<p>3. Facilitating Parties to Implement Treaties and Report.</p>	<p>3.1 Modular Reporting</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 3.1.1 <i>Proforma</i> machine readable report formats distributed on diskette</p> <p>3.1.2 Use standard report cover sheets as catalogue/metadatabase entries</p> <p><i>Medium Term:</i> 3.1.3 Rationalisation of national authorities</p> <p>3.1.4 Merge or share committees and advisory groups where possible</p> <p>3.1.5 Develop capacity building starter kits for parties</p> <p>3.1.6 Review reporting requirements and divide into structured information packets, and distribute to parties an overview of joint reporting requirements</p> <p>3.1.7 Establish a single co-ordinating focal point for submission of information packets (e.g. in an international information management agency)</p>

Opportunity Area	Ultimate Vision	Short / Medium Term Actions
<p>3. Facilitating Parties to Implement Treaties and Report.</p>	<p>3.2 Lessons Learned Library</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 3.2.1 Select and provide case-studies or lessons-learned from existing archives to establish a preliminary site</p> <p><i>Medium Term:</i> 3.2.2 Use shared web site to make available the shared Lessons -Learned Library</p> <p>3.2.3 Encourage and facilitate submission of national case studies to Lessons-Learned Library.</p>
<p>4. Assessing the Effectiveness of Treaty Implementation</p>	<p>4.1 Virtual Reporting</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 4.1.1 Improve structure, content and consistency of national reports based on information needs of the convention – including basic attributes or indicators which can be used to establish trends</p> <p><i>Medium Term:</i> 4.1.2 Simplify reporting requirements to include only that information relevant to assessing the implementation of the treaty or of benefit to parties.</p> <p>4.1.3 Capacity building in developing national biodiversity information bases</p> <p>4.1.4 Pilot projects in Virtual Reporting</p>
<p>4. Assessing the Effectiveness of Treaty Implementation</p>	<p>4.2 Networking with international data custodians, major databanks and other treaties</p>	<p><i>Short Term:</i> 4.2.1 Summarisation of national reports and state-of-implementation assessment at each CoP</p> <p><i>Medium Term:</i> 4.2.2 Share the use of international data custodians for access to additional non-party information</p>

APPENDIX VII – WORKSHOP OUTPUTS

Summary Report from the Feasibility Study Workshop
Harmonising Information Management of the Biodiversity Treaties
Geneva, Switzerland, 27-28 April, 1998

1. Workshop aims:

- to agree on actions that could be taken towards harmonising information management of the five biodiversity-related conventions;
- to outline a funding and implementation strategy for each action; and
- to agree remaining tasks for WCMC to complete the *Feasibility Study*.

2. Background

Prior to the Workshop, the *Feasibility Study* had involved:

- Reviewing the information needs of the Conventions as implied by their articles and related decisions
- Summarising national reporting requirements
- Consulting with senior officials of all five conventions
- Analysing opportunities for potential harmonisation – embodied in five discussion papers circulated to the five convention secretariats for comment
- Synthesising comments on these discussion papers to identify priorities in the form of a Framework for Action

Summary of discussions

3. Visions

i) Conventions information resource

An information resource accessible to parties of the biodiversity-related conventions was agreed as a desirable ultimate vision.

ii) Paperless business within the conventions

"Paperless" convention business was not seen as an ideal goal in itself. Secretariats should seek to optimise the efficiency of their operations. This might include a reduction in paper and increase in the use of electronic communications.

iii) Virtual reporting

It was noted that such an approach served to integrate reporting to conventions with national strategies, policies and actions plans, and was similar to proposals

put forward by the CSD in regard to national sustainable development web sites.

Some concerns, however, were raised about the feasibility or desirability of the "Virtual Reporting" vision as described in the Discussion Papers. Several participants felt that it would always be necessary for parties to provide additional analysis and national assessment specific to treaty requirements, and this could not be achieved entirely through the "Virtual Reporting" process. It was better therefore to describe the vision as leading towards a national biodiversity information resource which could serve the dual purposes of supporting national strategies and plans, as well as facilitate reporting to the conventions. An ancillary benefit from this approach was that it would encourage the better coordination and integration of activities to implement the various conventions at national level.

iv) Open-Access Lessons-Learned Library

The vision of a "Lessons-Learned Library" on treaty implementation was well supported, but it was emphasised that the concept should be one of a linked **network** or clearing house rather than a central repository. There were concerns expressed about the willingness of parties to contribute lessons learned, but note was taken of the experience of the Ramsar Bureau – following an initial posting of examples contributions flowed in rapidly.

Based on these discussions, the vision statements were revised to be as follows:

- *Harmonised conventions information resource*
- *Optimised efficiency of secretariat operations*
- *Streamlined national reporting to facilitate reporting to, and implementation of conventions*
- *A lessons-learned network*

4. Short and Medium Term Actions in support of Secretariats

The proposed actions were discussed according to the "boxes" in the Framework for Action (included for reference at Appendix II), and briefly summarised as follows:

i) Standard Cover Sheet

This was seen as a useful step towards building harmonised meta-databases to assist in accessing and sharing information. The principal implication was the need to adopt consistent standards for such items as country names, document types, dates and so on.

ii) Standard thesaurus for key-wording

A standard limited vocabulary expressed as keywords on each document cover sheet would be a significant aid to document access and retrieval, and a necessary pre-cursor to creating an inter-convention search engine. A multi-lingual thesaurus such as Envoc (UNEP-Infoterra) would further assist in the ability to locate valuable information in a different language. The example was given of the use of a selected sub-set of Envoc in the UK CHM. It was agreed that such a thesaurus should be kept at a high level of terminology (relatively few terms) in order to be easy to use and effective for searching. Concern was expressed over the level of manpower required to keyword documents, particularly retrospectively. Individual secretariats would consider to what extent previous reports and documents should be key-worded.

iii) Accessible shared meta-database of all documents

The phrase "all documents" was considered to be excessive, rather the meta-database should include the most relevant documents, and again the issue of retrospective inclusion would depend on available resources. The action was therefore abbreviated to be simply "meta-database".

iv) Shared document archive

This idea was generally agreed to be impractical and unnecessary and was deleted from the actions.

v) Harmonised secretariat web sites

The principal concern was not to overly restrict the freedom of secretariats to present their conventions and information in creative and appropriate ways. It was agreed that this would be a beneficial action, but should be restricted to identifying minimum common elements and linkages so that users could easily find the same basic information available at each site, while recognising there would be aspects unique to each treaty.

vi) Shared meeting schedule, and convention documents available on web sites

These two actions were regarded as sub-steps which are part of the action to harmonise the web sites. For simplification of the action streams these were therefore subsumed into that one action.

vii) Central entry site and inter-convention search engine

These two actions were seen as integral and thus should appear as a single action. It was clarified that entry did not refer to data entry, but rather a single gateway for the convenience of users searching for information across conventions. UNEP suggested that the current IUC site could be a possible host for the entry site and search engine.

viii) Automated document distribution

Automated document distribution was seen as potentially problematical and difficult to harmonise between conventions, and thus was removed from the action stream.

The two streams of action depicted in this section of the Framework leading towards the visions of a *conventions information resource*, and *optimised efficiency of secretariat operations* had many linkages and interactions, and would best be integrated as one action stream.

The result of this discussion was the single Action Stream 1 depicted in the agreed Actions Streams of Appendix III.

It was agreed that WCMC would in its Feasibility Study Report make recommendations on:

- aspects of the web sites which should be harmonised (minimum content)
- the minimum content of a standard document coversheet
- thesaurus selection for key-wording and searching the meta-database

5. Short and medium term actions for the contracting parties

As above these are discussed relative to the action boxes in the Framework (included for reference at Appendix II).

i) Review of information needs of the conventions

It was acknowledged that the review was part of the *Feasibility Study*. WCMC will describe more closely the reporting requirements of the conventions and identify information needs, overlaps and synergies for the final report.

ii) Blank or proforma reports

The Ramsar Bureau commented favourably on their experience with this approach. In general it was agreed that this was a pre-requisite for the preparation of an integrated reporting handbook. For simplification, it was removed from the action stream.

iii) Handbook of reporting guidelines

The proposed handbook would be an integrated guideline for national reporting which would assist countries to prepare reports as a series of modules. It was believed vital to engage in a number of "proof-of-concept" pilot tests with an appropriate range of countries, in order to refine the handbook. This pilot testing was added as a separate action.

iv) Capacity building in national biodiversity information banks and related technology

Concern was expressed that capacity building was not strictly speaking a harmonisation activity, although it would assist towards the desirable goal of harmonised national information resources in biodiversity. Again a pilot phase would be needed before proceeding to full implementation.

v) Select lesson learned from existing secretariat documents

It was pointed out that the lessons learned library was not entirely a "country-driven" activity, although national inputs, or linkages to national lessons-learned were to be sought at later stages. Many similarities were noted as well to the meta-database building proposed for the conventions information resource - for instance similar issues of vocabulary for key-wording may arise. It was agreed, however that it should remain as a separately described stream that should be closely allied with the meta-database development, and linked to the CBD CHM efforts.

The successful model of the Ramsar Bureau began with this step and the action stream was adjusted to incorporate their experience.

vi) Prototype lesson learned web site

Following the Ramsar example, it was recognised that this might be simply an additional page on existing secretariat web sites.

vii) Solicit lessons learned from development agencies and parties

Concern was expressed at the implied burden of entry and maintenance of such documents. Instead it was agreed that the lessons-learned concept should be implemented as a network. In this manner, links would be made to national lessons learned files, and similarly to the experiences and best practices of development agencies.

viii) Lessons learned library site linked to the CBD CHM

This is the ultimate outcome, and will depend on the evolution of the CBD CHM.

6. Revised Framework for Action

Based on the above discussions, a revised Framework was prepared with modified long term visions and with three (rather than four) simplified streams of action (attached - Appendix III). Subsequent discussion on funding and next steps were based on the improved Framework.

7. Funding for proposed actions

Each major project was discussed in turn to consider likely funding sources:

i) Meta-database development, harmonising web sites, leading to an inter-convention web site and search engine

- Bilateral donors were suggested as the most probable source of support
- Many secretariats felt that bilateral funding could be obtained from their host countries
- There was discussion over whether individual secretariats should approach bilateral agencies on their own behalf or on behalf of all five treaties. It was agreed that the latter was more likely to attract support.
- Total costs were estimated to be \$50-100K not including the highly variable cost of key-wording and entering "cover sheets" into the meta-database.

ii) Lesson learned network:

- Bilateral donors were suggested on same basis as i) above.
- Total costs to develop the prototype lessons learned web site was estimated in region of \$50,000-100,000.

iii) Co-ordinated biodiversity information resources at the national level:

This was seen as a much more substantial undertaking. A phased approach was agreed involving the following:

- Review and clarify reporting requirements of each convention;
- Prepare an integrated handbook for national reporting;
- In-country testing of the handbook (proof-of-concept);
- Pilot implementation in a range of countries to determine scale and nature of required capacity building
- Wider implementation.

8. Criteria were suggested for selecting appropriate countries, including:

- Countries should be party to all five conventions;
- Countries could be selected to achieve a reasonable distribution across the different regional in use by the conventions;
- Achieve a balance between developed and developing;
- Include small island developing states (especially because their size and resources may imply a closer relationships between responsible national agencies than may occur in larger countries);
- UNEP/GEF *BDM Project* has established some of the groundwork needed and so participating countries should be considered.

GEF PDF B funding was proposed for the development and proof of concept testing of the integrated reporting handbook - \$250,000 estimated.

Later stages of capacity building and pilot country-driven implementation would require \$2-5m. GEF would seem the most likely source, but costing will depend on the outcome of the pilot projects.

9. Process considerations

Three on-going processes were suggested by WCMC:

- high level harmonisation steering committee
- joint scientific panel
- joint information technology working group

It was acknowledged that there was a need for closer collaboration of the information management and technology staff of the secretariats. *CMS offered to convene and host a first meeting of such a group, to begin to discuss the issue of harmonisation of web sites.*

Collaboration on scientific issues, including species lists and vocabulary was seen as more difficult. The possibility was raised of having a single joint scientific panel, but there were believed to be too few issues in common for this to be worthwhile across all five treaties. The existing well defined CITES standard taxonomies were identified as a useful base that could be expanded to include standardised species lists for Ramsar and CMS. It was recognised that coordination between the chairs of the CMS Scientific Council and the CITES Nomenclature Committees would be beneficial.

There was concern that the current meeting workload of the secretariats was already very high. Apart from the considerations above, no firm commitment was made to form additional working groups or committees at this time. For the time being, it was hoped that WCMC could continue to move the ideas forward.

10. Workshop statement

The attached statement summarising the results of the Workshop was prepared and agreed by participants. This was primarily to assist in supporting information items at the CBD CoP in Bratislava that followed shortly after the Workshop, but could also serve as a useful summary for the participating and observing conventions.

11. Completion of the Feasibility Study

The participants indicated that the *Feasibility Study* report should contain:

- An analysis of current demands for national reporting, indicating overlap between information needs.
- Recommendations on harmonised web site contents to include: outline of a standard coversheet, options for selection of a controlled vocabulary for key-wording and searching.

- Recommended actions based on the workshop with an outline of project steps and costs.

Costing of a range of alternatives as originally specified in the terms of reference was not needed now that the options had been selected and refined through the consultation process.

The report should be completed in draft form in late May to leave sufficient time for comment and finalisation before the Convention Secretariats Meeting, scheduled for mid-June. It was agreed that WCMC should present the report to this meeting and also present to the secretariats a funding proposal to develop the project documents needed to implement the identified next steps. A proposal for WCMC to develop the meta-database would be welcomed for consideration within this package.

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Feasibility Study: Workshop Statement

Background

The Secretariats of the five biodiversity-related conventions – CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and World Heritage, and UNEP jointly commissioned the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) to undertake a Feasibility Study on harmonising information management among the biodiversity-related conventions. The initiative contributes to the delivery of synergies among environmental treaties.

WCMC convened a workshop with representatives of the Secretariats of the biodiversity-related conventions, UNEP and observers from the Convention to Combat Desertification to review recommendations on harmonisation opportunities developed through consultation with individual secretariats.

Identified priorities

There was consensus to pursue three programmes of work:

- Streamlined national reporting to facilitate national reporting to, and implementation of, the Conventions
- Development of a harmonised conventions information resource
- Development of a shared lessons-learned network

Next Steps

It was agreed to take forward these programme areas through the following actions:

- Preparation of a GEF PDF (Project Development Funding) proposal addressing harmonised reporting requirements, and the development and pilot testing of integrated national reporting guidelines for the biodiversity related conventions.
- Development of funding proposals for considerations by bilateral agencies covering actions needed to develop an inter-convention web site and search engine, and the development of a lessons-learned network.
- Increased collaboration of the programme and technical staff of the secretariats to share experiences.

The Feasibility Study Report will be made available to the 8th Meeting of the Convention Secretariats.