The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the first-ever global agreement to cover all aspects of biological diversity – from genetic resources to species and ecosystems. It is also the first to recognize that conserving biological diversity is “a common concern of humankind” and a fundamental part of sustainable development.

The Convention’s ambitious mandate and work programme can only be realized if governments have the necessary resources. Funding is vital for strengthening institutions and skills and for carrying out national projects with global biodiversity benefits. The Convention therefore makes a great effort to attract more financial resources for biodiversity activities.

Another essential resource is information. Information on biodiversity activities and best practices is gathered through national reports as a way of assessing the Convention’s overall effectiveness. Further information is disseminated by the Convention Secretariat through a documentation center and the Clearing-House Mechanism.

Public awareness and support for the Convention’s goals is no less important. Governments need to do much more to educate and inform the general public and key stakeholders about the value of biodiversity and the opportunities offered by the Convention.

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The International Day for Biological Diversity – 22 May

On 20 December 2000, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 22 May, the date the Convention was adopted, as the International Day for Biological Diversity.
The Convention on Biological Diversity provides that governments should periodically share information on their efforts to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and promote the equitable sharing of benefits gained from the exploitation of genetic resources.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) uses these national reports to evaluate lessons learned, identify gaps in capabilities, and determine needs for technical and financial support. The reports also give the COP a basis for formulating guidance to the subsidiary bodies, the Secretariat, the financial mechanism, and other organizations with relevant expertise. Each government can use its own report for evaluating national progress and identifying opportunities and constraints. Reports are to be prepared on the basis of consultations involving all relevant stakeholders.

Parties also submit thematic reports for in-depth consideration in each cycle of the Convention's work programme. For the 2000-2002 cycle, for example, governments produced thematic reports on invasive alien species, benefit-sharing and forest ecosystems. All national reports are posted at www.biodiv.org/world/reports.asp; a tool for analysing the information they contain is available at www.biodiv.org/reports/ir-02.asp.

Based on the national reports, the Convention Secretariat analyses the status of implementation for the Conference of the Parties. It also works with other agencies to assist countries with developing national biodiversity strategies, actions plans and human and institutional capacity. Key initiatives include UNDP’s Biodiversity Planning Support Programme (www.undp.org/bpp) and the Capacity Development Initiative of the Global Environment Facility (www.gdei.org). The CHM also assists in the development of the Biosafety Clearing-House for the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Information services

The Convention establishes a Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) to facilitate technical and scientific cooperation amongst all regions of the world.

With the conclusion of its information-exchange pilot phase, the CHM is now focusing on active collaboration. Working with international initiatives such as the Global Invasive Species Program (with a mandate to assist countries in the prevention and management of invasive alien species) and the Global Taxonomy Initiative (set up to create an inventory of biological resources), the CHM is fostering cooperation in six key areas: decision-making tools and processes, training and capacity building, research, funding, access to and transfer of technology and repatriation of information.

The CHM's goal is being pursued through Memoranda of Cooperation with other international initiatives and organizations. In addition, regional workshops have been organized by the CHM in Africa and Latin America to ensure equitable participation by developing regions in new biodiversity projects. The CHM is also assisting in the development of the Biosafety Clearing-House for the Cartagena Protocol. For more information on the CHM, see www.biodiv.org/chm/.

The Secretariat is also promoting information sharing through its Montreal-based documentation center. The center collects, registers, and disseminates information on all aspects of biological diversity. It is helping the CHM foster linkages among different initiatives for biodiversity information exchange.

The CHM promotes and coordinates initiatives for the exchange, sharing, and repatriation of information. It also assists in the development of technical and scientific cooperation and establishes facilties.

Public awareness and education

Public awareness and education are fundamental for enabling governments to integrate biological diversity into their national development and environment strategies. A shift in public attitudes towards nature and biological resources, including changes in behavior and lifestyles, can only take place if information is available to make biodiversity issues better understood.

Governments are collaborating on this challenge through the Global Initiative on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA). An interagency Consultative Group of Experts convened by the Secretariat and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has proposed three programme elements for the Global Initiative's start-up phase:

1. Establish, manage and stimulate global CEPA networks and create synergies amongst existing networks. This will involve establishing an Internet platform to share ideas and know-how, identifying potential partners and stakeholders, and developing the networks further.

2. Enhance professional exchange, development and innovation. Proposed actions include asking Parties to document relevant activities in their national reports, collecting and exchanging information on projects, case studies, and good practices; and providing copyright-free graphics and materials that can be adapted at the national or local level.

3. Develop capabilities for marketing biodiversity values and engaging educators and communicators. Key activities include creating training programmes, linking theory and practice, developing tool kits, establishing partnerships with the mass media, and fund-raising.