



## Environmental Management Group (EMG)

6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Environmental Management Group

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### ISSUE MANAGEMENT GROUP HARMONIZATION OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING FOR BIODIVERSITY-RELATED TREATIES

1. At its first meeting on 22 January 2001, the Environmental Management Group (EMG) discussed the issue of harmonization of national reporting and agreed to establish an Issue Management Group (IMG) dealing with this issue (Decision 3). UNEP was invited to serve as task manager, focusing on biodiversity-related conventions while considering the relevance of biodiversity-related aspects of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The IMG was asked to look at this issue comprehensively, taking into account issues such as the best use of lessons learned, the composition of the group and the number of the countries to be used in a pilot phase. UNEP was asked to provide EMG with its recommendations at the next session.
2. Subsequently UNEP drafted a discussion paper on “harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related treaties” as the basis for an IMG teleconference, which took place 7 June 2001. A revised version of the discussion paper was then presented to the EMG at its meeting on 15 June 2001. A range of comments was received from participants, and UNEP was asked by the meeting to finalize the report, and to identify clear steps for implementing the recommendations that were emerging.
3. A revised version of the discussion paper was presented to the EMG at its meeting on 10 October 2001. Further to the request of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, this paper was also made available to the “Open-ended intersessional meeting on the Strategic Plan, National Reports and the implementation of the Convention” as an information paper which took place in Montreal, Canada, 19 - 21 November 2001.
4. Based on the advice of UNEP, as task manager for the Issue Management Group on harmonization of national reporting and information management, EMG recommended the following actions at its third meeting that:
  - UNEP should continue to hold informal discussions on the recommended actions with secretariats and other interested stakeholders;
  - UNEP should review the outcomes from those projects already under way, and in particular the national pilot projects already contracted in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles;
  - UNEP should draft an action plan for a more proactive approach to harmonization, based on the current paper and discussion, and the outcomes of the previous two activities; and that
  - UNEP should convene a further meetings and/or teleconferences to review and agree on the action plan, and to identify lead roles, participation and available resources.
5. Since the EMG discussions on this issue in 2001, the following actions have been taken that were specifically related to the EMG recommendations:
  - a) **Meetings and discussions:** Bilateral meetings on harmonization issues have been had with the secretariats of all the global biodiversity-related conventions, several regional agreements, and some international programmes. In some cases several meetings have taken place, both official and unofficial.

- b) **Increasing profile of the issue:** Harmonization as an issue has been raised at the scientific and governance meetings of a number of the agreements, and decisions have been passed supporting the harmonization initiatives being coordinated by UNEP and others.
  - c) **National pilot projects:** The harmonization pilot projects coordinated by UNEP have continued in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles, and have now all delivered results (the final reporting being received in December 2003). A progress report on these projects is provided in Annex 1.
  - d) **Harmonization action plan:** A draft harmonization action plan was developed, based on the previous discussion paper and the advice received, and subsequently circulated to international convention and programme secretariats for review and comment.
6. However, EMG did not meet again between October 2001 and July 2003, and a range of activities in the draft action plan were necessarily already underway or well into the planning stages before the plan had been reviewed by the EMG in draft form. These include UNEP's involvement in the following, working in collaborating with MEA secretariats in particular:
- a) Preparation for follow up to the **national pilot projects**, including analysis and summary of the reports from each of the pilot projects, identification of potential follow up actions, and consideration of convening a workshop to review the outcomes.
  - b) Review of the nomination and reporting formats and procedures for **site-based agreements and programmes**, with a view to identifying potential synergies and reducing duplication of effort.
  - c) Analysis of the reporting to the **Convention on Migratory Species and related agreements**, including development of a synthesis report and recommendations on future reporting formats and arrangements.
  - d) Active participation in the **task force on streamlining forest-related reporting** established by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF). This task force is seeking both to harmonize/streamline reporting processes, and to increase access to resulting information.
  - e) Establishment of a **website on harmonization** issues, including a discussion forum for the pilot projects, to facilitate the communication and exchange of information among the participating countries, MEA secretariats and other interested parties.
  - f) Review of and contribution to the **Reporting Obligations Database** being developed by the European Environment Agency, and in particular with respect to information on biodiversity-related reporting requirements.
  - g) Development of a **synoptic report** on harmonization and synergies that aims to briefly review all ongoing activities in this area in order to inform all stakeholders with the aim of promoting the sharing of information and reducing duplication.
  - h) Other related supporting activities included:
    - (i) Regular **interaction within UNEP** between the UNEP Division on Environmental Conventions (in Nairobi) and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (in Cambridge) on harmonization issues.
    - (ii) Establishment of regular liaison UNEP and the **United Nations University** to share experiences and discuss opportunities for collaboration, recognizing that there are opportunities for collaboration on activities concerning harmonization and synergies.

(iii) Systematic review of national-level implementation of the ***CBD Clearing-House Mechanism***, which aims in part to promote a more coordinated response to the sharing of information (report to be tabled at the forthcoming CBD Conference of Parties).

(iv) Discussion with the ***ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation*** concerning harmonization of reporting in the countries of the South East Asian region, and the potential for a regional meeting on this issue.

7. Also over this period of time, there have been significant changes in the international agenda as it relates to biodiversity and reporting, and the issue of reporting has been addressed further in MEA advisory and governance meetings. Developments include *inter alia*:

a) In 2002 the CBD Conference of Parties adopted the ***2010 target*** of achieving significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss. The same target was also adopted by environment ministers meeting during the CBD COP, and subsequently endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in its Plan of Implementation. This is significant as it is likely to become a driver for outcome reporting, and to become a focus for reporting by a wide range of international initiatives.

b) MEAs have continued to ***review reporting formats*** and to make adjustments. Some, such as the Convention on Wetlands, have also been paying further attention to means to assess success in implementation, and both the Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Migratory Species have been considering how they can contribute to assessment of progress in achieving the 2010 target.

c) All of this has led to an increased focus on ***indicators*** and the need for international acceptance of suites of indicators that will allow assessment of progress in achieving internationally adopted targets. This is particularly relevant to the CBD Conference of Parties in February 2004, which will discuss targets and indicators in the context of follow up to WSSD. This discussion is directly relevant to both reporting, and the underlying information management at both national and international levels.

d) The ***World Database on Protected Areas*** has been adopted by participants and the World Parks Congress as a major instrument in assessing one of the key measures for achieving biodiversity conservation, and the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice has recommended that COP invites UNEP-WCMC and the consortium of international organizations working with it to further develop the database to assist in monitoring progress. Such global databases, serving multiple purposes and multiple stakeholders, are an increasing focus for harmonization.

8. As a result of the ongoing actions identified in paragraph 6, and the issues raised in paragraph 7, the draft harmonization action plan drafted at the request of the EMG in 2001 was already out of date by the time that the EMG met again in July 2003. UNEP therefore felt that it was inappropriate for the existing draft to be placed before the full EMG meeting (while noting that those working on biodiversity issues had already seen and commented on earlier drafts). UNEP had hoped to review and revise the action plan during the second half of 2003, and to submit it for further review by the IMG, but this has proved impractical within the time and budgets available.

9. UNEP therefore submits to EMG the following broad recommendations, based on the discussions that have taken place with MEA secretariats and others over the past 2-3 years. These draw substantially on previous versions of the EMG harmonization action plan, but have not yet been discussed with key stakeholders including the MEA secretariats.

a) ***Secretariat liaison meetings***: Regular liaison meetings between those responsible for reporting and information management matters within MEA secretariats should be re-established to help, *inter alia*: in promoting harmonization in reporting; in analysis, synthesis and use of reports; in

associated information management and use; and in the sharing of information between secretariats.

- b) ***Collaborative task forces and/or workshops:*** Appropriate use of task forces and workshops on reporting and information management issues of relevance to a range of international conventions and programmes will help to address key issues in a synergistic manner. Issues to be addressed in this manner might include, for example, nomination and reporting formats and processes for site-based treaties, or harmonized taxonomies for international conventions and programmes with species annexes/appendices.
  - c) ***National level approaches:*** Testing harmonization approaches at the national level, and sharing the results in the form of lessons learnt, assessments of the value of different approaches, and guidelines to help others in developing more integrated approaches, will help to build national mechanisms that can respond more effectively to the need for information to be used in a more effective manner to support implementation and reporting on a range of international agreements and programmes.
  - d) ***Direct support to nations in reporting:*** It has been suggested in various fora that some streamlining of the reporting agenda, and improved access to information that will support reporting (including reporting formats, previous reports and any relevant handbooks and guidelines), will help countries in responding to reporting requirements. This might include advice on information management to support implementation and reporting processes.
  - e) ***Information dissemination:*** Mechanisms should be developed and promoted to ensure the more efficient sharing of information and experience on harmonization. This could be in the form of improvements in the existing website and its wider promotion and use, wide dissemination of the synoptic report, and through workshops and seminars in appropriate international fora.
  - f) ***Future approaches:*** While there is currently a reluctance to consider use of this approach, various international fora and national pilot projects have shown interest in the potential of *virtual reporting*, and this should be investigated further. This is where a nation would put information on a national website that would then constitute its report (or part of its report) to an international agreement on a particular issue. Such an investigation would be purely exploratory at this stage.
10. Also appended to this report is a progress report on the national pilot projects that UNEP has been supporting in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles.

## Annex - Report on the UNEP harmonization pilot projects

1. In October 2000, UNEP convened a workshop in Cambridge to review the issue of harmonization of national reporting to biodiversity-related treaties. This workshop, attended by representatives of eight countries and eight convention secretariats, discussed possible actions for achieving harmonization, and recommended a series of national pilot projects to test various approaches.
2. Following this workshop, UNEP established pilot projects in four countries to test the approaches to harmonization for biodiversity-related conventions, with special focus on institutional co-ordination mechanisms and inter-linkages at national and international levels. The pilot projects are being coordinated by the UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions with the technical support of the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre.
3. As well as reviewing the reporting processes at the national level and delivering these reports, each pilot project has a unique task to test one of the harmonization concepts recommended by the Cambridge workshop:
  - Ghana** Assessing the possibility of linking national reporting to the State of the Environment (SoE) reporting process.
  - Indonesia** Identifying common information modules and using this as a basis for developing a modular approach to national reporting.
  - Panama** Exploring potential regional support mechanisms for national information management and reporting.
  - Seychelles** Assessing the potential for producing a consolidated national report responding to the needs of several conventions.
4. The reports of the pilot projects were finally all available at the end of 2003, and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre has begun to review them with a view to drawing out the lessons learnt and recommendations, and to preparing preliminary guidelines for coordinated reporting at the national level. A document outlining recommendations for consideration at the international level will also be prepared. It is envisaged that the international-level recommendations will be considered by the secretariats and eventually by the COPs of the biodiversity-related conventions involved.
5. While the review and analysis of results is not yet complete, analysis to date has already provided useful observations and recommendations based on national experience. It was noted that some of these recommendations go beyond the issue of reporting and information management. Examples of recommendations arising include:

Related to the international level:

- a) A significant barrier to streamlining procedures for reporting at the national level would appear to be the differences in the timing and frequency of the reporting cycles established under the various biodiversity-related conventions. This suggests that a synchronization of national reporting cycles at the international level should be considered.
- b) On the basis of the CBD national reporting requirements, it is possible to establish an overarching modular framework, which can accommodate the reporting requirements of most, if not all, biodiversity-related MEAs.
- c) Definition of information modules and their successful, multi-purpose use in reporting to several biodiversity-related MEAs would greatly benefit from a more harmonized way in which questions in the respective reporting formats are phrased. The use of standardized nomenclature and terminology of scientific and common terms/concepts would ease their reference and application.
- d) The development of a consolidated "Biodiversity Reporting Manual" should be considered, either on the regional and/or the global level. Located on the internet and distributed via CD-ROM, as

appropriate, such a manual would be an essential tool for national focal points and policy makers to access information on biodiversity-related reporting requirements.

- e) Potential exists for developing and implementing broader joint programmes of work between and among biodiversity-related MEAs to tackle common themes such as international co-operation (including capacity building), policies and strategies, identification and monitoring and in-situ conservation. This would inevitably lead to greater integration and a more harmonized approach.
- f) The results and experiences gained in the harmonization and streamlining of the national reporting to biodiversity-related MEAs should be evaluated with a view to identifying those which could be of benefit for the reporting to other environmental conventions and agreements.

Related to the national level:

- g) Reporting to biodiversity-related MEAs can be significantly eased and made more effective by using a "modular approach" which defines concrete and unique pieces of data/information and arranges national management procedures so that each of these pieces or modules is produced only once but used in the reporting to several conventions. This avoids duplication, streamlines the flow of information within the country, reduces the financial and personnel resources required for national reporting and ultimately improves the "on-ground" implementation of the respective conventions.
  - h) The efficient operation of the modular approach at the national level requires a close collaboration between national agencies and focal points of the conventions, in particular for those modules which they "share".
  - i) Implementation of, and national reporting to, biodiversity-related MEAs could be facilitated by creating a national coordination unit and a joint scientific committee for the management, compilation and quality control of the required scientific data and information.
  - j) State of the Environment reports should be clearly linked to and make clear reference to relevant work programmes and decisions of other conventions.
  - k) Reports submitted to one convention should be made available to all focal points of biodiversity-related agreements as a matter of course, and preferably made available via the Internet to a wide range of stakeholders.
  - l) Making data and information available on the internet (i.e. virtual reporting) could ease the national reporting processes. In this context, the use of modern IT facilities and standardised, cost-free software / operating systems and programmes should be explored.
  - m) The creation of a national biodiversity database and/or information network will support both implementation and reporting, if appropriately established.
  - n) The establishment of an operational framework for biodiversity stakeholder interaction will help ensure effective involvement of stakeholders in implementation and reporting.
  - o) Incorporation of objectively verifiable indicators which relate to convention implementation into projects will enable more rapid and accurate reporting.
6. It is expected that a draft report of the project will be available in early February for initial review by those participating in the project. It is hoped that a workshop will be convened later in the year to review the experiences gained and proposed follow up.