

# The Clearing-House Mechanism

## An Information System that Promotes Cooperation



Foto: al-Janabi

### What is a Clearing-House Mechanism?

The term 'clearing-house' comes originally from the field of banking, where it denotes a central body that settles indebtedness between various financial institutions.

In relation to the convention, it was initially planned to set up an agency supplying information on biodiversity. But the idea of actively 'brokering' information proved unrealistic. Hence, rather than being a gigantic data-bank, the CHM is an information network made up of electronic and non-electronic media.

### Tasks of the CHM

Article 18.3 of the convention commits the contracting parties to establishing a Clearing-House Mechanism to facilitate and promote technical and scientific co-operation.

The task of the CHM is to provide necessary information, or to indicate where such information is available and of what quality it is. The CHM helps avoid duplication of work, promotes the transfer of technology, and enables formulated objectives to be achieved more quickly.

In order to be able to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity, contracting states, non-governmental organizations, and all the other bodies supporting the convention need a great deal of knowledge and information. Much of this knowledge and information is already available somewhere in the world, in the form of biodiversity surveys, research findings, data on sustainable use, regulations on access to genetic resources, national biosafety-legislation, and management methods for protected areas. Other sources include: allocation guidelines for projects, expert data-banks, meetings, and training courses. The Biodiversity Convention Clearing-House Mechanism was set up to facilitate access to data, to create transparency, and to point up factors relevant to implementation. It is a decentralized needs-oriented system that assists decision-making and improves co-ordination on such things as projects.

Key elements of the CHM are:

- Information exchange – a global mechanism for the exchange of information on biodiversity
- Co-operation – improving scientific and technical co-operation
- Network development – development of national CHM Focal Points, their partners, and the worldwide network
- Transparency – availability of national, regional, and local data.

### The CHM in the Convention on Biodiversity

At the first Conference of the Parties (COP) in December 1994, it was decided that a Clearing-House Mechanism should be set up, under the authority of the contracting states. There are now 152 National Focal Points in convention countries; 117 of these have e-mail facilities and 20 have their own web site (as of May 2001). The CBD Secretariat plays a central co-ordinating role. A whole host of instruments, services, and modes of co-operation have now been developed. These include: partnerships between industrial and developing countries in establishing National Focal Points; a functioning electronic network; list-servers; a 'toolbox' to help contracting states with website construction; and booklets, a newsletter, and other information material.

A key aspect in the development of the CHM is accessibility of information within member states. This is assured via a series of 'sub-networks'. Some of these already exist—library networks, for example—and they are then linked up to the CHM. In other cases new information-systems have to be set up at national level.



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## Contribution of the project 'Implementing the Biodiversity Convention'

The BIODIV Project is helping to speed up implementation of the Biodiversity Convention in development co-operation and promoting the further development of the convention itself and of its various instruments and bodies. As part of the project, developing countries are given assistance in implementing the convention, through individual measures.

Columbia and Cameroon, for example, are being given assistance in setting up their National Focal Points. This is happening, amongst other things, via training courses and the provision of technical equipment to the Focal Points in close collaboration with the German CHM. As a result of the projects, dialogue between Columbia, Cameroon, and Germany is intensifying, and this is making it possible to identify demand for and supplies of information. These measures are complemented by concrete practical activities that support implementation of the convention in the countries concerned. One example is the 'idea bank' for co-operation in research-projects, which offers a starting-point for the practical realization of scientific and technical co-operation.

## Biodiversity and the Convention on Biodiversity

The term "biological diversity", or short "biodiversity", encompasses the diversity of life on earth, ranging from genetic diversity and diversity of species to the diversity of ecosystems. The Convention on Biodiversity adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 comprises three elements: the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use and the equitable distribution of benefits arising from its use. In the meantime, 179 countries and the European Union have joined the Convention. By signing the Convention, Germany has agreed not only to conserve biodiversity on its own territory but also to support developing countries in implementing necessary measures.

## Priorities for action

The CHM design-process is not complete; it is constantly being refined on the basis of experiences gathered. The areas in which action is required are essentially as follows:

- Understanding of the needs of member states and individual interest-groups must be improved
- The role and benefits of the CHM in CBD implementation need to be demonstrated and communicated
- More must be done to incorporate local and indigenous knowledge
- Synergy and co-operation with other conventions, partners, and initiatives must be improved
- Support to National Focal Points must be increased
- A clear strategy must be defined for information management, and a monitoring system must be set up
- Alongside the Internet greater use must be made of other media (e.g. printed publications, local media, workshops)

## Further Information

CHM of the Convention on Biological Diversity:  
<http://www.biodiv.org/chm>

CHM Germany: <http://www.dainet.de/bmu-cbd/>

Report of the Independent Review of the Pilot Phase of the Clearing-House Mechanism, UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/2

and

Clearing-House Mechanism's Longer-Term Programme of Work, UNEP/CBD/COP/5/INF/4:

<http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.asp?wg=cop-05&tab=1>

CHM Colombia: <http://www.humboldt.org.co/chmcolombia>



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## Imprint

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