



ASEAN WORKSHOP ON HARMONIZATION OF REPORTING TO BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS OUTPUT DOCUMENT

April 15-17, 2009
Fortuna Hotel, Ha Noi, Viet Nam

“An Action Plan for Harmonization of Reporting to Biodiversity-related Conventions in the ASEAN Region”

INTRODUCTION

Background to Harmonization

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) encourages members of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to harmonize the gathering and management of data for the biodiversity-related conventions (Paragraph 15 of decision VIII/14 of the CBD). The COP encouraged the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-related Conventions to give further consideration to issues of harmonization of reporting among the biodiversity-related conventions, and to develop proposals thereon (Paragraph 14 of decision VIII/14 of the CBD). In response, the Liaison Group discussed about relevant issues related to harmonization in February 2008.

The COP requested for collaboration with other biodiversity-related secretariats to develop proposals for streamlining reporting and reducing reporting burdens on Parties, and encouraged the Executive Secretary of the CBD to participate in the ongoing efforts in this regard. In the decisions relating to forest, dry land and inland waters biodiversity, the COP encouraged harmonization or synergies of reporting with other related conventions and forums. The CBD and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), with the support of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), are collaborating on the development of a joint reporting framework. Under the Committee for Review of Implementation of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), a coordination team involving various related multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) has started to look at options for harmonizing reporting related to dry land. For many years, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) has been addressing forest-related reporting under various conventions and mechanisms through its task force on streamlining forest-related reporting.

The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has requested its Secretariat to continue its collaboration with the secretariats of other biodiversity-related conventions, UNEP and other bodies, in order to facilitate the harmonization of national reporting. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) has invited its Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Biodiversity Liaison Group and UNEP, to advance the harmonization of reporting both within the UNEP-CMS ‘family’ of Agreements and between relevant conventions.





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The Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, through Resolution IX.5, requested its Secretary General to continue working with the UNEP Division of Environmental Law and Conventions and the secretariats of other biodiversity-related conventions and agreements concerning more effective convention implementation, with topics including, *inter alia*, harmonization of national reporting. In Resolution X.11, the COP of the Ramsar Convention requested its Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to continue to cooperate with the CBD Secretariat, UNEP, and UNEP-WCMC in the development of a framework for harmonized reporting on implementation on inland waters for the CBD and the Ramsar Convention.

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity's Initiatives

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) is a regional centre that facilitates cooperation and coordination among ASEAN Member States (AMS). It also provides technical assistance to AMS in the preparation of national reports in compliance to their obligations to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). To provide a venue to develop a framework to harmonize reporting to biodiversity-related conventions from national, regional to global levels, ACB conducted the ASEAN Workshop on Harmonization of Reporting to Biodiversity-related Conventions in Hanoi, Vietnam on 15-17 April 2009. The workshop brought about discussions and exchanges of national experiences, efforts and plans on harmonization of reporting. It also produced recommendations to various biodiversity-related secretariats and national agencies tasked to prepare, consolidate and harmonize reports.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document presents the outputs of the workshop in the form of observations and recommendations that call for actions from the AMS and convention secretariats. Specifically, this document aims to:

- Summarize discussions and recommendations arising from the workshop into two levels, national and global
- Outline key messages that will stimulate interest among convention secretariats, AMS, organizations, and donors enthused in harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions
- Demonstrate an action plan that will provide support to countries in their efforts to implement activities relevant to the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON HARMONIZATION OF REPORTING TO BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS

The following observations and recommendations regarding the national level are mainly the areas of concern of countries in the ASEAN region. Since the task of reporting lies heavily on the individual country, the contents under this section are directed to the country level.



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General Observations

There is a consensus among AMS that there is no single model for improved information management, collaboration, and harmonization as national circumstances vary between countries. Although AMS shared their own national efforts and experiences perceived to be valuable for other AMS to draw lessons from, they were not inclined to put forward a model for harmonization of reporting. For example, Thailand and the Philippines have one umbrella agency/bureau handling the national reporting tasks to biodiversity-related conventions. This kind of set up centralizes the preparations leading to reporting to conventions. This system, however, does not exist for the entire region. In the majority of AMS, reporting is decentralized into two or more agencies, which at times do not have coordinated efforts for reporting to the convention secretariats.

Among the purposes of national reporting to conventions are: (1) to demonstrate compliance to and implementation of provisions of the conventions and (2) to assess the effectiveness of the compliance and implementation processes. Thus, underlying any improvements for harmonization of reporting is the understanding that reporting is an output of information management of national implementation of the conventions. The national reporting aims to enable the decision-making of Parties to take stock of what they have done, what they are doing, and what they plan to do in accordance with the provisions of conventions. At the national level, convention secretariats encourage agencies involved in the reporting process to be cognizant of the importance of the need to obtain, gather, assemble, and report information.

Information Management for National Reporting

National reports contain information on the status and trends of the environment and natural resources in general and biodiversity in particular. Because of the value of this information in setting the tone for the national reports, it is important to establish a mechanism to ensure the accuracy and smooth flow of information to the national agency/bureau organizing the national reports. A well-organized information management system plays a key role in ensuring that reports contain updated and accurate information.

Depending on national circumstances, a fully operational (meta) data warehouse such as the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) or National Biodiversity Information Network (NBIN) covering all biodiversity-related conventions could be established to facilitate national collaboration and sharing of information among and between national stakeholders. Another function of this (meta) data warehouse would be to develop information modules on a regular basis, independent from the national reporting process, in order to provide information that national focal points of each convention can call upon at any time for producing the national reports. This is the national modular approach to harmonization, as reviewed by a UNEP pilot project on harmonization of reporting in Indonesia.

It should be noted that vital information necessary for national reporting can come from credible sources outside of the government agencies in charge of organizing and submitting the national reports. Thus, there is a need to involve stakeholders (e.g. non-governmental organizations, universities, private think tanks) that hold such information. In some cases, Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) will be helpful to clarify issues of data ownership and use for purposes of national reporting. AMS agree that the inclusionary and extensive





method of information-gathering from relevant stakeholders is essential to the output of national reporting.

In this information age, online tools can help shape national reports. These tools are useful to inform and guide users in the preparation of national reports. In a huge way, these online tools lessen the reporting burden of Parties. They also facilitate standardization of outputs and information sharing if these outputs become available online. However, these tools are yet to be popularized and maximized. Besides, the capacity to use these online tools remains to be developed in many countries as member states in the region are at different levels of technological advancement. Some countries are well-advanced and at par with far developed Western states, whereas some countries are still at their infancy stages in terms of internet and communication technology.

Collaboration between National Focal Points and Agencies

Institutional and Administrative Framework

Each AMS has its own structure and system related to implementing and reporting. In view of this, AMS should keep under review the institutional and administrative arrangements for implementing and reporting to the biodiversity-related conventions to check the effectiveness of such arrangements. Well-structured and coordinated institutional and administrative frameworks provide solid ground for individuals and organizations involved in the reporting process.

At times, national focal points of different conventions work independently of each other in organizing their national reports. Some of these national focal points hardly know each other. For those in close contact with one another, they seldom meet to talk about what they are doing relative to national reporting. In recognition of this concern, it is important for national focal points to share information between and among themselves on a regular basis. Information-sharing can be in the form of informal and formal meetings, and enhanced online communication (e.g. e-mails, blog, forum, or an intranet). By knowing each other personally, these national focal points can help immensely in establishing formal and informal interactions between and among themselves.

Legal Framework

Dependent on national circumstances, a national (biodiversity) policy or relevant legal framework can help in establishing a national reporting system which will define the roles and responsibilities of concerned agencies/organizations and other stakeholders. This system can be useful for evaluation and accountability of those agencies/organizations and other stakeholders. By having this legal framework, the national reporting process would have a uniform basis which stakeholders can use as they collect, organize, analyze, and report information.

Collaborative Mechanism

Another useful option to facilitate reporting is setting up of formal collaborative mechanisms such as a steering committee for all relevant conventions. Such collaborative mechanisms require agreement on a lead ministry, agency, or institution to centrally coordinate collaboration of work. Such a lead ministry/agency/institution might also be identified for specific aspects of implementation and reporting themes (e.g. wetlands, forests, agriculture, sustainable use, etc). A complementary option is to identify overlapping issues between different conventions (e.g. inland waters/wetlands for Ramsar and CBD and CBD Global





Strategy for Plant Conservation targets and CITES) and strengthen cooperation between the relevant focal points on these specific issues.

Cooperation and collaboration between and among stakeholders play a key role in the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions. AMS agree that there is a need to enhance cooperation, be it bilateral, sub-regional and regional, between and among focal points. The presence of an existing regional cooperation through regional organizations such as ACB and ASEAN Secretariat and international cooperation through the convention secretariats can encourage and guide collaboration in the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions. Giving a high-level authority on these organizations can be explored to assist and persuade countries to collaborate.

Supplementary Strokes of Action from Donor Agencies and Institutions

Despite the technological development that each AMS is going through, the importance of human interaction in the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions is irreplaceable. Thus, regular consultations/dialogues with counterparts and stakeholders (e.g. vertical-horizontal consultations) are essential in the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions. Integrating information and awareness campaigns into regular activities of stakeholders will build up the effectiveness of national reporting and efforts for the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions.

Donor agencies and institutions with special interest in the harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions should be informed about the efforts in the AMS. The contents of this output document will be useful to communicate to these agencies and institutions the need by the AMS to enhance its collaborative mechanisms and the engagement of technical assistance as well as the establishment and long-term maintenance of the national data warehouse (e.g. the CHM).

The usefulness of existing tools for reporting and harmonization cannot and should not be understated. However, there is an underutilization of these implementation support tools such as the Tematea (<http://www.tematea.org/>). Opportunities for training in the use of these tools should be explored and promoted.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HARMONIZATION: BEYOND THE AMS BORDERS

Harmonization at the global level, to a large extent, is the concern of convention bodies. Although countries set and implement supporting policies for the different conventions, the direction for reporting to conventions and its harmonization is shaped by COPs, Standing Committees, Secretariats and other convention bodies, as appropriate. Hence, it is important to recognize that concerted efforts at the national and international levels should be established.

Drawing from the rich experiences and constructive efforts of countries, convention secretariats can strive to simulate models for harmonization of national reporting between the biodiversity-related conventions. The simulation of models can be further explored, including the following approaches:





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- Standardization of reporting formats including standardization of definition such as those for species taxonomy and common terminologies
- Complementarity between reporting formats (e.g. Ramsar report covers aspects of the CBD programmes of work, with CBD not requesting that information through their report)
- Modular reporting which entails a set of themes/categories in which information and data will be collected in line with those themes/categories from relevant agencies and focal points that provide the information and data as required in the reporting
- Core reporting which requires identification of common themes in biodiversity-related conventions to comprise the template of the common core document

AMS also agree that there is a need for clear and practical guidance from the convention secretariats to the Parties for the preparation of national reporting and harmonization of reporting to conventions. It should be pointed out that the harmonization of reporting processes helps minimize time and resources because of streamlining of reporting and avoidance of duplication of data gathering. Furthermore, harmonization of reporting fosters teambuilding and teamwork among focal points and agencies.

Online reporting systems for global biodiversity-related conventions appears to be very helpful but the lack of reliable technological access and capacity to use online tools in many countries currently do not allow for full utilization of online reporting. Tools such as Tematea are encouraged to include clear linkages between implementation activities and national report commitments.

GENERAL PLAN OF ACTION

This section identifies and summarizes the steps the AMS intend to take over the next one to five years to assist governments, convention secretariats, and interested institutions in establishing national priorities on the area of harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions. The plan of action for harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions with national and global perspectives proceeds with calls for immediate and short-term actions directed to AMS, convention secretariats, regional organizations such as ACB, the ASEAN Secretariat, and other relevant institutions.

Short-Term Action

For immediate actions, recognizing the usefulness of this document, it is imperative for those who took part in the discussion resulting to and drafting of this document to:

National Level

- Disseminate the workshop results as widely as possible to governments/institutions/agencies/donors/individuals involved and interested in the work of harmonization of reporting to biodiversity-related conventions.
- Assess usefulness of readily available online tools such as Tematea to the national needs and pilot implementation of the online tools for countries with adequate technological capacity and facilities.
- Discuss between and among national focal points and agencies the establishment of collaborative mechanisms including operational data warehouse.



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- Review the effectiveness of current institutional and administrative arrangements of agencies tasked for national reporting.

Secretariat Level

- Provide clear and practical guidance to countries with backlogs of reporting obligations.

Long-Term Action

For long-term actions, considering the challenges of harmonization of reporting, the following can be undertaken:

National Level

- Review existing enabling policies that will expedite institutionalization of the harmonization process *i.e.* institutionalization of national policy that defines national reporting system and roles and accountabilities of agencies/organizations and other stakeholders in the reporting obligations.
- Inform and invite organizations and institutions with regional or international mandates to take an active part of the endeavor to harmonize reporting.
- Place a petition to the relevant governmental bodies such as the ASEAN Working Group on MEA to have special interest in the biodiversity cluster of MEAs.

Secretariat Level

- Pursue the standardization of reporting formats.
- Assist in developing national capacity including technological facilities and skills to demonstrate compliance to convention requirements.
- Evaluate and review on a regular basis the impact and effectiveness of actions taken on harmonization. ACB may take the lead at the regional level with support from the secretariats, countries, and donor/funding institutions

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