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[DRAFT] ACTION PLAN FOR HARMONIZATION AND STREAMLINING OF NATIONAL REPORTING AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS

Note by the Executive Director

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I. Introduction

1. At its first meeting in 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. 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 the harmonization 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 its next session.
2. At its third meeting in October 2001, EMG examined a background paper on the "*Harmonization of Information Management and Reporting for Biodiversity-Related Treaties*" prepared by UNEP on behalf of the IMG. This document provided a comprehensive overview and summary of the background, rationale, mandate, needs and benefits of harmonizing and streamlining information management and reporting to MEAs, with special focus on the five global biodiversity-related conventions.
3. In addition to outlining harmonization-related activities and agreements made in previous years in various international organizations and treaties, the document also contained:
 - a) an evaluation of the barriers to harmonization and the strategic and pragmatic approaches to overcome these;

- b) an outline of ongoing activities;
 - c) proposals for future harmonization and streamlining work in form of:
 - recommended actions, including potential supporting and demonstration actions;
 - mechanisms for improving (i) national co-ordination mechanisms and (ii) institutional interlinkages at the international level.
4. Following discussion, EMG agreed that, on the basis of the background paper and any further input from EMG members, UNEP should work with the IMG to prepare a draft plan of action, and present this to the EMG at its next meeting for review and endorsement.

II. Aims of the [draft] Action Plan

5. The overall aim of this [draft] Action Plan is to support the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), in particular biodiversity-related treaties. To achieve this, a range of activities and projects is proposed that will improve the harmonization and streamlining of national reporting and information management at the national and international level.

III. Scope and focus of the [draft] Action Plan

6. The scope and focus of the activities and projects proposed in this [draft] Action Plan has intentionally been initially limited to the five global biodiversity-related conventions (CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and WHC).
7. For many of the proposed activities it would be entirely possible to expand their scope and geographical/thematic coverage to include, in the medium to long term, other global or regional MEAs, and MEAs covering issues other than biodiversity. It is recommended that decision on whether and when to extend the scope and coverage of the proposed projects should be taken on a case-by-case basis once experiences and results from the initial projects emerge. This will ensure that the means and methodologies for improving interlinkages between the five global biodiversity-related conventions are tested, reviewed, revised and adapted (as appropriate) prior to being gradually transferred to and implemented by other MEAs such as regional conventions, Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCCD, CSD) and the chemicals and waste related conventions.

IV. Approach in developing and implementing the [draft] Action Plan

8. In line with the EMG decision, the [draft] Action Plan transfers the recommended actions and associated progress reports and concept notes presented in the EMG background paper into a logical sequence of steps and activities to be taken at both national and international levels in order to achieve further progress.
9. The projects proposed address some of the topics and issues in information management and national reporting for which previous studies demonstrated an urgent need for harmonization and streamlining. They represent a logical progression from the theoretical *evaluation* of difficulties experienced by national governments and MEA Secretariats to the more practical *testing/refining* and ultimately *implementation* of more harmonized and streamlined concepts and procedures.
10. The general concerns about the need for synergies on the international level are well known, as are the approaches being taken and considered by international organizations and convention secretariats. However, in order to ensure that the problems in reporting and information management experienced on the national level are identified and that there is adequate input of national stakeholders in the development of harmonization and streamlining concepts, UNEP has been supporting pilot projects in four countries (Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and Seychelles) to test

information management and harmonization concepts in the context of the national reporting to the five global biodiversity-related conventions, and is surveying coordination mechanisms in a number of other countries.

11. The pilot projects, which were established during a workshop in October 2000 attended by eight countries and eight convention secretariats, are addressing four key approaches in addition to the review and analysis of reporting requirements under the relevant conventions. These approaches are linking national reporting to the State of the Environment reporting (Ghana), identifying information modules and using modular approach in national reporting (Indonesia), exploring regional support mechanisms for national information management and reporting (Panama) and testing of a consolidated approach to national reporting (Seychelles).
12. At the time of preparing this [draft] Action Plan, final reports are available from the Seychelles project and preliminary messages are emerging from the other pilot projects. The results and indications available so far show that pilot projects will deliver, in addition to recommendations with respect to their general and specific tasks, a variety of conclusions related to a number of other harmonization activities addressed in this [draft] Action Plan. Any such conclusions should be taken into account in the further development and implementation of projects proposed here, in particular as regards:
 - harmonization and integration of information management (cf. cluster ?);
 - improving institutional interlinkages (cf. cluster ?).

V. Structure of the [draft] Action Plan

13. In setting out a portfolio of concrete proposals for further action to improve the harmonization and streamlining of information management and national reporting in the context of the MEA implementation, this [draft] Action Plan distinguishes between:
 - a) *Enabling Activities* such as meetings, workshops or the establishment of dedicated expert groups, which are necessary to advise, support, further develop and/or initiate one or more of the project proposals; and
 - b) *Project Proposals* which outline the practical actions needed to test and subsequently implement harmonization and integration approaches.
14. Enabling activities: These activities are described in terms of the following seven categories:
 - Aim*: Identification of the project proposals which would be supported by the proposed activity
 - Timing*: Indication of whether the activity should be initiated in the short term (< 1 year), medium term (1-3 years) or long-term (> 3 years)
 - Partners*: A non-exclusive list of national and/or international organizations which would be expected to participate in the activity
 - Modus*: Indication as to whether the proposed activity is a one-off activity/meeting or a continuous activity requiring e.g. regular meetings and/or communication
 - Organization*: Existing activities, programmes or structures which could be considered when developing, initiating and implementing the activity
 - Background*: References taken from the EMG paper and up-dated as necessary
 - Output*: Anticipated results (and as appropriate their further use) of the activity
15. Project proposals: These are grouped within four clusters: (i) testing of concepts and methods to harmonize national reporting to global biodiversity-related conventions; (ii) harmonization and

integration of information management; (iii) improving institutional interlinkages and (iv) supporting actions. Each project proposal is described in terms of:

- Objectives:* What the project aims to achieve
- Reference:* Cross-reference to the relevant paragraph and Annex of the EMG background paper
- Background:* Outline of any existing and/or ongoing activities related to the project
- Relevance:* Links to other harmonization/streamlining work and projects
- Requirements:* Enabling activities, actions and work to be carried out prior to the project
- Approach:* Outline of work and activities to initiate and implement the project
- Output:* Anticipated results, and, as appropriate, their further use

VI. Implementation of the [draft] Action Plan

Co-ordination

16. The overall co-ordination of the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan and of the individual proposed enabling activities and projects will be carried out by UNEP working in close collaboration with various key players. The establishment of an advisory group, probably based on the membership of the IMG, should be considered.
17. Co-ordination will take into account any concurrent activities at the national, regional and global level, which are directly or indirectly relevant for the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan. Many of these are identified in the background paper previously prepared for the EMG.

Key players in implementation

18. The implementation of the activities and projects proposed in this [draft] Action Plan require actions to be carried out by policy makers, administrators, national focal points and IT experts, both at the national and international level.
19. The key partners in the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan are the secretariats of the relevant MEAs, in particular the secretariats of the five global biodiversity-related conventions. The secretariats have a multiple role, comprising *inter alia*:
- a) Actions to implement some of the projects (or parts thereof) to improve institutional interlinkages at the international level, in particular as regards issues related to information access and information management facilities/infrastructure.
 - b) Participation in the regular review of the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan as a whole and of the progress achieved under the various enabling activities and projects.
 - c) Acting as communication centres for the dissemination of information to the national level. In this role, the secretariats should work to ensure that harmonization and streamlining activities are a standard agenda item of the relevant meetings (including COP meetings).
 - d) Active promotion of the results of the various harmonization and streamlining projects, either by implementing them in their own administrative procedures or by encouraging their contracting parties to make best use of the results in their national implementation and reporting procedures. As regards the latter, the secretariats should help ensure that, where appropriate, reference to the project results and their application is made in the relevant COP agreements and decisions.

20. Other partners in the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan are regional organizations and programmes as well as individual countries. As set out within the proposals for enabling activities and projects, these partners will have an active role in providing the suitable framework for testing of harmonization and streamlining concepts, including their adaptation to specific regional and/or national requirements.

Interlinkages between proposed enabling activities and projects

21. Harmonization and streamlining of implementation, information management and national reporting to MEAs is a very complex matter. The enabling activities and project proposals recommended in this [draft] Action Plan are highly interrelated and mutually supportive. The flow diagram in Annex ? demonstrates some of these interlinkages.

Stepwise implementation over time

22. Taking into account the range and complexity of the matters to be addressed, the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan (or parts thereof) will have to be carried out in small, regular steps over time. Each of these steps involves activities to be carried out by a variety of national and/or international organizations, ranging from specific governmental agencies to the secretariats of global conventions. There is no single all-embracing solution, and each solution needs to be agreed to by wide range of independent stakeholders.

Resource implications

23. It is acknowledged that most, if not all, of these organizations have only limited resources available to manage their considerable workload. The practical implementation of the proposed activities and projects in this [draft] Action Plan will initially require the mobilization and allocation of financial and personnel resources (and in some cases capacity building) to set up new procedures or change and revise existing ones, as appropriate. While better integrated approaches should lead to savings in the long term, resources will be needed in the short term to achieve this future integration.
24. Once a certain degree of harmonization, streamlining and synergies has been achieved, the advantages and benefits for all stakeholders in the medium and long term will outweigh many times the initial resource investments. This will be in areas of:
- efficient and effective compilation, management and use of information;
 - reducing duplication of effort at national and international levels; and
 - increasing synergy in the use of information.
25. The obligations of the more than 500 MEAs currently in force place a considerable burden on the national and international governing bodies. This burden is likely to increase over time, *inter alia* due to additional implementation and reporting requirements under existing or newly negotiated agreements. The implementation of harmonization and streamlining activities will help not only to counteract this trend but to achieve a constantly lower level of burden.

Dissemination and exchange of information

26. Taking into account the cross-sectoral relevance of most of the projects proposed in this [draft] Action Plan, the active dissemination of information about the work, approaches and results to relevant national, regional and global bodies and meetings will be very important. It is proposed that UNEP will take responsibility for ensuring this occurs.
27. There is also a need to facilitate information exchange between the experts involved in each of the projects. This will be supported by establishing internet-based discussion fora, similar to the one

created by UNEP-WCMC for the current pilot projects, and maintaining a "harmonization" website (see <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization>).

Review of the [draft] Action Plan

28. The [draft] Action Plan as a whole should be reviewed on a regular basis by the main partners involved in its implementation. Mechanisms for doing this need to be defined, but could include *inter alia*:
- review by EMG on an agreed cycle;
 - review by the proposed advisory body;
 - review by the MEA Co-ordination Meetings regularly convened by UNEP.
29. This review, which would be supported by background documentation, should cover:
- a) progress in implementation of the [draft] Action Plan;
 - b) assessment of the effectiveness of existing synergies and harmonization/streamlining measures, taking into account also the potential of other concurrent work and activities to support the overall aim of this [draft] Action Plan; and
 - b) evaluation of emerging needs for harmonization, streamlining and synergies with a view to initiating further activities and projects, and introducing new measures, as appropriate.

VII. Enabling Activities

30. The enabling activities proposed in this section and described further in Annexes 1-## comprise a number of meetings, workshops and the establishment of dedicated expert groups, which have been identified as necessary to advise, support, further develop and/or initiate one or more of the projects proposed in the following section. Not all the enabling activities proposed would need the establishment of new or additional infrastructure, but instead could be carried out by using or adapting existing arrangements under UNEP and the MEAs to the extent possible. The interlinkages between the enabling activities and the proposed projects is illustrated in Annex ?.
31. Consultation meetings with convention secretariats: One of the most important enabling activities is to convene a consultation meeting between senior representatives of UNEP and the secretariats of the five global biodiversity-related conventions (CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and WHC) to discuss the work to be carried out to implement the various proposed activities and projects, in particular as regards the testing and demonstration of harmonized national reporting concepts, the harmonization of terminology and classification, and the improving access to the national information submitted to them.
- [SEE PROPOSED ENABLING ACTIVITY IN ANNEX ?]
32. Liaison meetings between information managers from convention secretariats: Over the last four years there have been two *ad hoc* meetings of those convention secretariat staff most concerned with information management, together with UNEP-WCMC staff involved with information harmonization issues. Each meeting has resulted in harmonization efforts in management and delivery of information over convention websites, and has the potential to increase practical arrangements for information sharing and harmonization. It is proposed that these meetings recommence.
- [SEE PROPOSED ENABLING ACTIVITY IN ANNEX ?]
33. Follow-up workshop on harmonization of reporting: Following the completion of the current UNEP pilot projects and the analysis of their outputs, there will be a need for a further workshop on harmonization of national reporting to the global biodiversity-related Conventions. This workshop will, *inter alia*, review any general recommendations and/or guidelines prepared on the

basis of the experiences gained by the current national pilot projects with a view to identifying and agreeing on the follow up action to be taken.

[SEE PROPOSED ENABLING ACTIVITY IN ANNEX ?]

34. Expert workshop on streamlining reporting through electronic means: Significant benefits could be gained by streamlining national reporting through the increased use of electronic means, as has already been demonstrated by CSD and the Ramsar Convention, and to some extent by CBD. This might ultimately lead to a 'virtual' reporting. A workshop would provide the opportunity to bring together experts with different backgrounds and experience to discuss, initiate and support the proposed work on using electronic means and/or virtual reporting mechanisms to streamline and ease the reporting to MEAs, in particular to the five global biodiversity-related conventions.

[SEE PROPOSED ENABLING ACTIVITY IN ANNEX ?]

35. Establishment of a joint scientific advisory committee: There is a clear need for scientific advice in order to focus the work and facilitate the implementation of several of the proposed projects contained in this [draft] Action Plan. It is proposed that consideration should be given to the establishment of a joint scientific committee to perform this advisory function.

[SEE PROPOSED ENABLING ACTIVITY IN ANNEX ?]

36. Establishment of a joint working group on information management: Several of the project proposals aim to improve the management of environmental information (in particular on biodiversity) at national and international levels. A joint working group on information management would be advisable to ensure that this work builds on existing initiatives of UNEP, Convention Secretariats, regional organizations and individual countries.

[SEE PROPOSED ENABLING ACTIVITY IN ANNEX ?]

VIII. Project Proposals

37. The focus of the following projects is on the practical testing and implementation of harmonization and streamlining procedures to improve national reporting and information management, in particular with respect to biodiversity and the implementation of biodiversity-related treaties. The proposals have been grouped in four clusters. Each paragraph briefly introduces the proposed projects, with further information provided in Annexes 7-##. The interlinkages between the enabling activities and the proposed projects is illustrated in Annex ?.

CLUSTER 1: National reporting to global biodiversity-related conventions

38. During 2001/2, pilot projects on harmonization of national reporting have been ongoing in four countries (Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and Seychelles), following on from the workshop convened by UNEP in October 2000. At the time of preparing this [draft] Action Plan ([August] 2002), the Seychelles have completed the project work. It is expected that the projects in Ghana, Indonesia and Panama will be finalized towards the end of 2002.

39. Following the completion of work, UNEP will review and evaluate the experiences gained under the pilot projects and the recommendations and conclusions made in the final pilot project reports with a view to establishing a set of general recommendations and/or guidelines for harmonizing and streamlining national reporting to the global biodiversity-related Conventions. These general recommendations and/or guidelines should be available by December 2002.

40. Further pilot testing of harmonization concepts: It is already proposed that the evaluation of the general recommendations and/or guidelines developed as a result of the current pilot projects is carried out at a further workshop on harmonization of national reporting and information management (Paragraph ##). Taking into account, *inter alia*, the work under related enabling activities and projects proposed in this [draft] Action Plan, this workshop should discuss and conclude on the need, objectives, scope and arrangements for a further, extended practical testing

of concepts to harmonize and streamline national reporting to the global biodiversity-related conventions.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

41. Demonstrating streamlined approaches to reporting using electronic means: Closely related to (or even part of) the project for an extended testing of concepts to harmonize national reporting (Paragraph ##) is the demonstration of the possibilities of streamlining the national reporting process through the use of electronic means, and the possibility of extending this to 'virtual' reporting for at least some categories of information. This is clearly closely linked to the proposed expert workshop (Paragraph ##), and is likely to both contribute to it and follow on from it.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

42. Nomination and reporting on sites: There is a considerable number of international agreements and programmes that designate or recognize individual protected areas, with a significant overlap in some parts of the world. For example, in Europe there is one site where seven different international initiatives apply. Each agreement and programme has a different nomination format and procedure, and a different reporting procedure. In most cases, reporting does not distinguish between information that may change with time (and where periodic reports are required) and cases where only exception reporting is required. A review of nomination and reporting formats and procedures is proposed, with a view to recommending steps to harmonize approaches and hence reduce the potential burden on national agencies. This may also lead to improvements in information management internationally.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

43. Recommendations on listing species: A significant number of international agreements have annexes or appendices listing individual species that the agreements cover. These lists of species inevitably overlap. Each agreement has assessment and review processes in place for recommending changes in the status of species (in other words change from one annex or appendix to another), yet these processes differ from one agreement to another, in particular as regards the formats for the recommendations and associated underlying information. A review of formats and procedures is proposed, with a view to recommending steps to harmonize approaches and hence reduce the potential burden on national agencies (and increase the sharing of information).

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

CLUSTER 2: Harmonization and integration of information management

44. The competent management and use of data and information, both at national and international levels, is key to the effective implementation of MEAs. It is also a fundamental component of the reporting process. At the national level, reports should be a direct output of information management processes that are required anyway to implement the convention effectively and to establish/refine governmental priorities and policies. At the international level, reports should be a direct input to information management arrangements, so as to inform and guide the convention governance processes. Integration and coordination between conventions at both national and international levels is a key factor in ensuring synergy and avoiding duplication.
45. In general, the harmonization and integration of information management aims to improve the effectiveness of existing procedures and practices. As most of these are largely independent of the type of data and information handled, it is possible to draw general conclusions from the proposed projects.
46. The following proposals distinguish between projects related to harmonization and integration of information management at the international and on the national level, taking into account the different needs, purposes, set-ups and capacities.

At the national level

47. Harmonization and integration of information management at the national level was not addressed in the EMG paper. However, for the purpose of this [draft] Action Plan, it is necessary to outline some of the past, present and future (i.e. planned) activities in this respect, in particular those with close interlinkages to other ongoing or proposed harmonization activities.
48. Biodiversity Data and Information Management: Some of the difficulties experienced in the national reporting of biodiversity data and information to MEAs indicate that, despite capacity building projects such as the UNEP-GEF Biodiversity Data Management project (see Annex ##), the existing data and information management procedures and infrastructure in a large number of countries (and of some MEA Secretariats) are not adequate. Similar conclusions can be drawn from some of the preliminary conclusions resulting from the current UNEP pilot projects on harmonization of reporting (see Paragraph ##). The proposed project aims to analyze and review the current management of biodiversity data in several countries, with a special focus on those procedures related to the implementation of, and reporting to, global biodiversity-related conventions. The project will identify shortcomings, outline the reasons as to why existing guidance has not been followed or implemented and evaluate the need to revise the existing or establish new advice in the light of the experiences gained.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

49. National Clearing-House Mechanisms (CHM): Development of the CBD CHM “network” has the potential to lead to improved access to information and promotion of scientific and technical collaboration beyond just that needed for implementation of the CBD. However, despite a wealth of guidance and support provided to facilitate the establishment of national CHMs, the existing national CHMs have largely been set up independently, and approach and content varies widely. Recently, attempts have been initiated to harmonize some approaches within the CHM by looking at issues such as inter-operability and sharing experience on means to promote scientific and technical cooperation. Both have the potential to lead to improvements at national and international levels in what can be achieved by the CHM “network” and to make it more cost-efficient. The proposed project aims to:
- a) carry out a systematic review of national-level implementation of the CHM, with a view to developing recommendations that will lead to improvements in national implementation of the CHM through more targeted sharing of experience and actively seeking of synergies;
 - b) assess the extent to which national biodiversity information networks are integrated with national CHM development and implementation, also taking account of the former UNEP Biodiversity Data Management project (see Annex ##) and the benefits that could be achieved by providing an effective link between this approach and the CHM implementation.
 - c) review the extent to which existing national CHMs aim to support implementation of biodiversity-related conventions other than the CBD, including links to joint work-programmes, and make recommendations on how this can be extended.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

At the international level

50. Environmental legislation and legal instruments: ECOLEX is an information service on environmental law which was initially set up as a collaboration between IUCN and UNEP, and now also comprises FAO. It provides access to basic legal and adherence information on all of the environmentally-relevant international agreements (both global and regional). However this information is not linked to other information relevant to each of the agreements, and does not provide links to the websites of the convention secretariats. Also, at present, ECOLEX only

includes international agreements and provides no links to the national legislation which implements each agreement within each country. Consideration needs to be given to how the existing service provided by ECOLEX can be extended to serve the needs of convention secretariats and contracting parties.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

51. Species-related information: There are several components of biodiversity, and the actions taken to conserve it, that are relevant to a wide range of international agreements. For example, species are listed in the annexes to CITES and CMS, the Bern Convention and the EC Birds and Habitats Directives, the SPAW Protocol to the Cartagena Convention. Many other organizations also deliver species information over the Internet, including IUCN, UNEP (especially UNEP-WCMC) and numerous national agencies. Additional information is generated under international programmes and organizations addressing specific species-related topics or themes, such as the Global Register of Migratory Species, the Global Invasive Species Programme and the Association for Biodiversity Information. Collaborative programmes need to be developed to use the power of the Internet to link information in a manner that is useful. The ultimate aim is to develop integrated information systems that serve the needs of a wide range of international agreements and programmes.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

52. Information related to protected areas: A significant number of international agreements and programmes designate or recognize specific protected areas, and even more international agreements call on nations to establish a protected area networks. Work is now underway to prepare a new *United Nations List of Protected Areas* to be presented in September 2003 at the Fifth World Parks Congress. At the same time, UNEP-WCMC, the custodian of the World Database on Protected Areas, is working with a range of other international organizations to develop a more systematic and widely accepted approach to further develop and maintain the global database on protected areas. In the context of preparing the United Nations list and the associated synthesis and assessments of the information related to protected areas, the project seeks to promote the harmonization of information management and reporting to meet the needs of the various international agreements and programmes concerned with protected areas.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

53. Development assistance and aid flows to biodiversity: UNEP-WCMC has worked with both the GEF and the UK Department for International Development to demonstrate mechanisms for sharing of information between donors on projects and priorities. Meanwhile, the OECD Development Assistance Committee has begun collecting statistics relevant to allocation of resources to biodiversity-related projects, and the CBD COP has called for improving information sharing and co-ordination among donors. Proposals already exist for developing and implementing such information services, based on past experience.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

54. Review of international information sources: A large number of international information systems and networks has been set up to assemble, integrate and exchange data on biodiversity, nature conservation and environmental issues. A UK-funded project on 'Rationalization of the International Nature Conservation Information Systems' (RINCIS) has recently been completed, and the final report contains approximately 100 recommendations concerning the adequacy and relevance of available international information services to support the development and implementation of national nature conservation policy. This project aims to build upon the outcome of RINCIS and further analyze in particular the biodiversity-related information systems and networks, with a view to providing general guidance for national and international governing bodies on how to make best use of these sources for developing policies to respond effectively to evolving global and regional issues.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

55. Review opportunities for harmonization of indicators: At least one of the harmonization pilot projects has identified the need for incorporation of objectively verifiable indicators (relating to the implementation of biodiversity-related conventions) into the various activities and projects carried out on the national level. A review of the use of indicators in assessing implementation of international conventions, and whether the range of indicators currently used (or proposed) covers the full range of needs, will be undertaken with a view to providing advice on how this work might be developed further in the future. This would be linked to the ongoing GEF-funded project assessing national indicators linked to CBD work programmes in four countries.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

CLUSTER 3: Improving institutional interlinkages

At the national level

56. Preliminary messages resulting from the national pilot projects on harmonization of reporting facilitated by UNEP clearly indicate that there is a need to improve the national institutional interlinkages in two areas:

- a) The data and information exchange between the various national focal points and institutions involved in the reporting to the global biodiversity-related conventions. It appears that existing means, procedures and mechanisms could be improved by creating a national biodiversity information network, incorporating, as necessary, a central national data base to collate and disseminate biodiversity relevant information.
- b) The establishment of an operational framework for a transparent biodiversity stakeholder interaction. With biodiversity data being held and managed by various public and private institutions, agencies and individuals, governments find it increasingly difficult and time-consuming to establish a consultative process which involves all relevant stakeholders in the national reporting activities. Facilitation and streamlining of the flow of information between stakeholders would not only counteract the very often fragmented management of biodiversity information, it would also help the implementation of national and international policies and ensure that the national reports to the biodiversity-related conventions give a full and accurate picture.

57. It is anticipated that these needs will be addressed in the context of the projects proposed under Cluster 2 on harmonization and integration of information management on the national level. The further results and experiences emerging from the current national pilot projects and from the implementation of this [draft] Action Plan will have to be evaluated to determine the need and scope for more specific activities and projects to be carried out with a view to improving the harmonization and streamlining of institutional interlinkages on the national level. Meanwhile, one other project is an important input to this.

58. Reviewing approaches to coordinated implementation at the national level: The background paper on harmonization identified five different approaches to coordination at the national level: exchange of information; periodic co-ordination meetings; convention co-ordination office; common national focal points; and integrated programmes and strategies. A project is proposed to review and assess the experiences gained in a range of countries in coordinating the implementation of biodiversity-related conventions and related international commitments. The aim of this project is to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of different national approaches to coordinated implementation (both processes and tools), with a view to highlighting those which could usefully be applied elsewhere.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

At the international level

59. There are also two approaches that might increase inter-institutional linkages at the international level, the first addressing essentially bilateral relationships with a view to improving and extending these, and the second looking at the full range of options and how these interrelate.

60. Review of bilateral arrangements between conventions: There are already in existence joint work programmes between certain conventions, MOUs between secretariats, liaison group meetings, and so on. A review of these arrangements is proposed to assess the extent to which these address harmonization of reporting and information management and other issues covered in this [draft] Action Plan, and recommendations on how this might be improved upon both in terms of new agreements and modification of existing arrangements.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

61. Assessing the "big picture": The UNEP harmonization workshop (Cambridge, 2000) raised the question as to whether the current national reports to the biodiversity-related conventions and associated assessments together cover the "big picture" with respect to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems and whether national reporting provides information that is suitable for addressing the present and emerging biodiversity needs as highlighted in recent outlook studies (e.g. the third Global Environment Outlook report). A review coupled with a workshop is proposed to address this issue.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

CLUSTER 4: Supporting actions

62. A number of recommendations and concept notes discussed in the EMG background paper address aspects and potential supporting actions related to improving the diverse and complex interactions between international conventions and agreements. An obvious example for such potential supporting actions is the development and implementation of joint programmes of work between and among MEAs. By addressing common themes such as international cooperation in issues such as capacity building, policies and strategies, identification and monitoring and in-situ conservation, joint work programmes contribute to streamlining the reporting processes and more integrated information management. The following project proposals comprise activities to be carried out by UNEP or within the framework of the relevant MEAs that will support other projects identified above either directly or indirectly.

63. Technical and administrative terminology and classification: Important support to improve the access to information and to increase the usefulness of data would result from the development and/or sharing of common taxonomies, glossaries, lists of abbreviations, definitions and terminology, and the possible future adoption of cross-convention standards. The proposed project takes into account that some of these, for example standard taxonomies, would be far more difficult to implement than others.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

64. Access to national reports and documents submitted to MEAs: Currently, past and present national reports and documents (e.g. official meeting documents and recognized information papers) are made available to and by MEA Secretariats in differing ways, and in some cases are not at all easily accessible. In a first step to address these needs, the project proposed in this [draft] Action Plan aims to define and support the establishment of technological standards, means and facilities which would improve the availability and Internet access to the various data, information and reports submitted by Contracting Parties to the five global biodiversity-related conventions.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

65. Access to experience of others: In addition to the need for improving access to national reports and documents submitted to MEAs, the EMG background paper considered ways to promote and facilitate the sharing of experience from case studies, whether positive success stories or examples

of what to avoid. A number of MEAs currently have some case studies available through the Internet, but there is little consistency in this – even within one MEA, and no uniform way of searching for relevant case studies across conventions. The objective of this proposed project is to develop means and procedures to support the integration of case studies called for under a range of international agreements and programmes into an effective and easily accessible “Lessons Learned Library”.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

66. Reporting time schedules, "handbook" and inventory of reporting obligations: The benefits of harmonizing and synchronizing the existing MEA reporting timetables and schedules has been highlighted several times. The preliminary results from the current national pilot project facilitated by UNEP confirm that the differences in the reporting cycles appear to be a significant barrier to streamlining procedures for reporting at the national level. The project proposed in this [draft] Action Plan outlines the activities needed to synchronize the timetables, schedules and base years for national reporting to the five global biodiversity-related conventions. In the context of these activities, a reporting 'handbook' (possibly a website or CD ROM product) could be compiled, which in a further step could be used as the basis for preparing an annotated list of specific "questions" or information elements demanded (directly or implicitly) by each of the five global biodiversity-related conventions. Both project outcomes would contribute to identifying opportunities for harmonization and streamlining of the reporting frameworks and approaches under CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar and WHC. This could also benefit from, and contribute to, EEA-led work on a reporting obligations database.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

67. Harmonization website and web forum: In order to provide access from one point to the range of ongoing activities relevant to harmonization of reporting and information management, it is proposed to maintain the existing website and webforum, and to also develop closer working links to the joint website on the biodiversity-related conventions.

[SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL IN ANNEX ?]

ANNEXES

NOTE

Draft versions of the Annexes describing the details for each of the proposed enabling activities and projects have been prepared.

These Annexes will be up-dated in the light of the comments received on the text of the [draft] Action Plan.

ANNEX ?

Flow Diagramme to Illustrate of the Interlinkages between Enabling Activities and Project Proposals

NOTE

A draft EXCEL graphic has been prepared.

This draft graphic will be up-dated in the light of the comments received on the text of the [draft] Action Plan.