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Title:

The Clearing House Mechanism and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility; is there a common future?

Two important biodiversity information initiatives have been established recently. *The Clearing House Mechanism* (CHM) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is organised through National Focal Points (NFPs) to promote scientific and technical cooperation in implementation of the convention. The CHM has been operating since 1995 and national clearing houses maintained by the parties of the convention have gained a variety of forms and contents. *The Global Biodiversity Information Facility* (GBIF), originally an OECD Megascience Forum initiative, is an effort to make biodiversity data globally available through modern information techniques. One of the main focuses of the GBIF is to accelerate taxonomic research and to make the scattered information on species-level biodiversity widely available for scientists, educational purposes and decision making. The GBIF is currently taking first steps towards its operational phase, as the secretary hosted by Denmark is being established.

In this paper, the perspectives of these two initiatives are reviewed. We survey the success of the national CHMs in serving the goals of the CBD. As an operating Internet-based system, the properties of the global CHM are surveyed in the light of its original objectives. At the level of national CHM web sites, special attention is paid to the items of 1) cooperation and networking, and 2) biodiversity information exchange, as agreed in the convention. These items are studied on the basis of data collected from all functioning national CHM web sites hosted by the parties of the CBD. The capability of the international CHM to provide information for users, such as (1) scientific community and conservation planners, (2) administrators and decision makers, and (3) economic and development sector, is discussed. The perspectives of the GBIF are examined in the light of the properties and capabilities of the international CHM. The administrational rationales of the two systems are analysed and facilities for coordination and division of labour are discussed with reference to our results. Furthermore, we discuss the discrepancies and potential synergies between the two.

At the time of data collection in July-August 2001, only 40 out of the 181 parties of the convention had operating Internet CHM web sites. Nearly 70% of all CBD parties had published at least one country report, but only slightly more than 30% had published a national thematic biodiversity report. Since the deadlines for two country reports and three national thematic reports had passed by the time of the data collection, the degree of implementation of the CBD remains poor in this respect. The overall results on cooperation, networking, and biodiversity information exchange show that the CHM still operates at a relatively general and preliminary level. Among

the countries with functioning CHM web sites, the basic idea of the national CHM seems to have been realised fairly well, however.

To analyse the results further, the countries were divided in three groups as follows: the biodiversity-rich or megadiversity countries, the OECD countries, and other countries comprising those not belonging to either of the previous groups. Generally speaking, the two first groups have been more active in the CHM. In some countries, active development of the national CHM has been accompanied by acting as a voting participant of the GBIF. According to our overall results, a distinct group of countries has clearly taken an active role in the field of international biodiversity information issues.