

Latest developments of the German Clearing-House Mechanism of the CBD facilitation of research collaboration between Germany, Colombia and Cameroon

Horst Freiberg and Frank Begemann

German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture (ZADI), Information
Centre for Genetic Resources (IGR), Villichgasse 17, D-53177 Bonn, Germany
freiberg@zadi.de , begemann@zadi.de

Abstract

The implementation of the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was decided at the 2nd Conference of the Parties (COP2) in Jakarta, Indonesia in November 1995. Art. 18(3) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides the basis for the development of the CHM aimed to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation among the Contracting Parties of the Convention and active partners. Furthermore, through the CHM global access to and exchange of information on biodiversity and its sustainable use will be facilitated. The guiding principles for the establishment of the CHM emphasize that the CHM should be neutral, cost-effective, efficient and accessible with a decentralised, transparent and independent structure. It should be based on existing information sources and use various available media. The Information Centre for Genetic Resources (IGR) of the German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture (ZADI) has been contracted in November 1995 by the Federal Ministry of the Environment (BMU) through the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) to give support to the development of the German CHM under the Convention on Biological Diversity (<http://www.biodiv-chm.de>).

Under the guidance of the government(s), the national as well as the international CHM will gradually be developed based on the experiences gained by the users and active partners. This implies that features presented may be modified according to the demand-driven nature of the CHM. Information structuring is important but cannot be the final stage of the CHM. Building the content and explore how interaction between partners, their active participation in the development of the CHM, the use of the CHM for reporting requirements connected to the creation of synergies between the various „biological“ international conventions and how technology transfer and capacity building requirements can be developed within the CHM are of utmost importance to the future use and acceptance of the CHM itself.

The German CHM has contributed actively to the development of the international CHM. The shape and identification of the specific information niche of its national CHM has lead to a concept of three pillars of the CHM: the (i) Information-, (ii) Convention- and (iii) Cooperation Pillar. Through these pillars (i) access to domestic information is made available and (ii) a monitoring service provided for the implementation of the CBD and related COP-decisions. Besides, emphasis is put on innovative interactive tools (iii) which should stimulate and facilitate scientific and technical cooperation via the CHM.

How „scientific and technical cooperation“ can be facilitated via the CHM and how this has been implemented by the German CHM are based on two concrete cooperation projects with Colombia and Cameroon supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (gtz). First results and ways of concrete and active participation by the

scientific community in the identification of potential cooperation partners <http://www.dainet.de/bmu-cbd/new/colomb.htm> will be presented at this meeting.

The German Clearing-House Mechanism - setting priorities in the development of the CHM -

What does „Clearing-House Mechanism“ mean

Art 18(3) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the basis for the development of the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) aimed to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation among the Contracting Parties of the Convention and active partners. Through the CHM global access to and exchange of information on biodiversity and its sustainable use will be facilitated. The CHM, as the information and communication system of the CBD, will be developed in a step-by-step process, extending over a two year pilot phase (1996-97). The guiding principles for the establishment of the CHM emphasize that the CHM should be neutral, cost-effective, efficient and accessible with a decentralised, transparent and independent structure. It should be based on existing information sources and use printed and electronic media.

Step by step the international CHM will gradually be developed based on the experiences gained by the users and active partners. This implies that features presented may be modified according to the demand-driven nature of the CHM. Information structuring is important but can not be the final stage of the CHM. A good and intuitive information structure which facilitates understanding of where to get the information needed, is the necessary precondition. A second step in the development of the CHM has to explore how interaction between partners, technology transfer, capacity building via e.g long-distance learning elements can be implemented in the CHM. Developing countries represented at the Information Society & Development Conference (ISAD) in May 1996 in South Africa considered these features vital for fulfilling the expectations of one global information society with one speed.

The Information Centre of Genetic Resources (ZADI, IGR) has been contracted in November 1995 by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) under the research plan of the Federal Ministry of the Environment (BMU) to give support to the development of the German CHM under the Convention on Biological Diversity (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1 The German Clearing-House Mechanism Homepage <http://www.biodiv-chm.de>

„Use it - or loose it“



This describes in a dramatic and drastic way the international efforts to preserve earth viable. The analogy to the Clearing-House Mechanism CHM may appear somelike artificial but the CHM is expected – in a way - to contribute fundamentally to help to overcome loss of biodiversity. These five words „Use it - or loose it“ globally and nationally stand for the overall development and acceptance of the Clearing-House Mechanism.

Introduction into the history of the development and experiences of the German CHM

Based on the International CHM-Workshop on the Isle of Vilm in May 1995 in Germany, organised by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation the ground was prepared to start first of November 1995, a 3-year pilot-project ending in December 1998 on the development of the German CHM. With this pilot-project Germany seeked from the beginning to actively contribute to the development of its national and international CHM, as part of a "global biodiversity information and communication network". Since January 1999 the second phase of the national CHM started. The CHM-pilot-project additionally offered an experimental area to identify and test new ways of participation and active contribution by the users of the system which was aimed to convert the CHM into "a living" instrument. Design, structure and content of the CHM was further discussed in two other International Expert meetings on "Building the CHM" : the first in Bonn, June 1997 and the second in Florence, Italy in July 1998. One important element to realise these five steps is the implementation of the national CHM working group. This working group is composed by members of NGO's, Universities, Governmental Organisations and the private sector.

The CHM as „door-opener“

In the course of the development of the CHM it was converted more and more towards a „door-opener“ which is used to broaden the interest and contribution by other relevant institutions and organisations working in the area of biodiversity. This, together with the supportive work of the members of the CHM-Working Group, helps to create a national biodiversity information and communication network. Of course, this implies a clear prioritization of the information provided.

Still practical examples or „best practices“ are needed in the areas of:

- * capacity building, technology transfer, implementation of the Convention's objectives, articles and themes,
- * how CHM users can actively participate and interact within the CHM converting themselves from a user into an active supplier of information and „owner“ of the system, and
- * how information accessed via the CHM can be individually aggregated, saved or sampled that the final product can be used for ie. National and/or individual reporting purposes.

It is still obvious that the work on the CHM development has not yet completed – still this is the beginning of identification of the priorities and specific niches of this information and communication system of the CBD. What will be expected from it is that it develops towards a system to used for daily and practical work in the area of biodiversity. Therefore the following questions need to be treated and answered by practical actions. It is extremely easy to Talk in theory about the practical implementation than do it in reality. Therefore „**use it – or loose it“** means „**do it – or loose it“** !

The future course of CHM development

The sequence of four words are needed to „build up the new CHM culture“: *Information - Participation - Communication – Interaction*. **Information** is the basis for --> **Participation** which stimulates --> **Communication** which will then lead to ----> **Interaction** . The CHM should facilitate and promote this sequence - which describes this „new culture“ of the use of the CHM. The CHM represents therefore the information- and communication platform of the CBD and their individual Parties and Partners. This implies that one should look at the CHM as a catalytic instrument for stimulating interaction To reach this a change of behaviour in the use of the CHM is needed – similar to other information systems and the use of the Internet and WWW in general.

The „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ Colombia-Germany, Article 18.3 CBD

- *a practical example on how to facilitate research cooperation via the CHM –*

The design and implementation of the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) is one of the priorities of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ a contribution to Article 18.3 of the Convention on Biological Diversity "... to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation" is developed within the bi-lateral cooperation on „Building the Clearing-House“ between Colombia and Germany supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GTZ. The internet-based „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ is a test-bed on how to add a new and complementary way to facilitate research cooperations through the Clearing-House Mechanism. The expected prototype is aimed at increasing the scientific and technical co-operation between Colombia and Germany and which can be also used and adapted by other countries and regions to promote cooperation – including also towards **Development Assistance**.

- The two-step approach - easy to use -

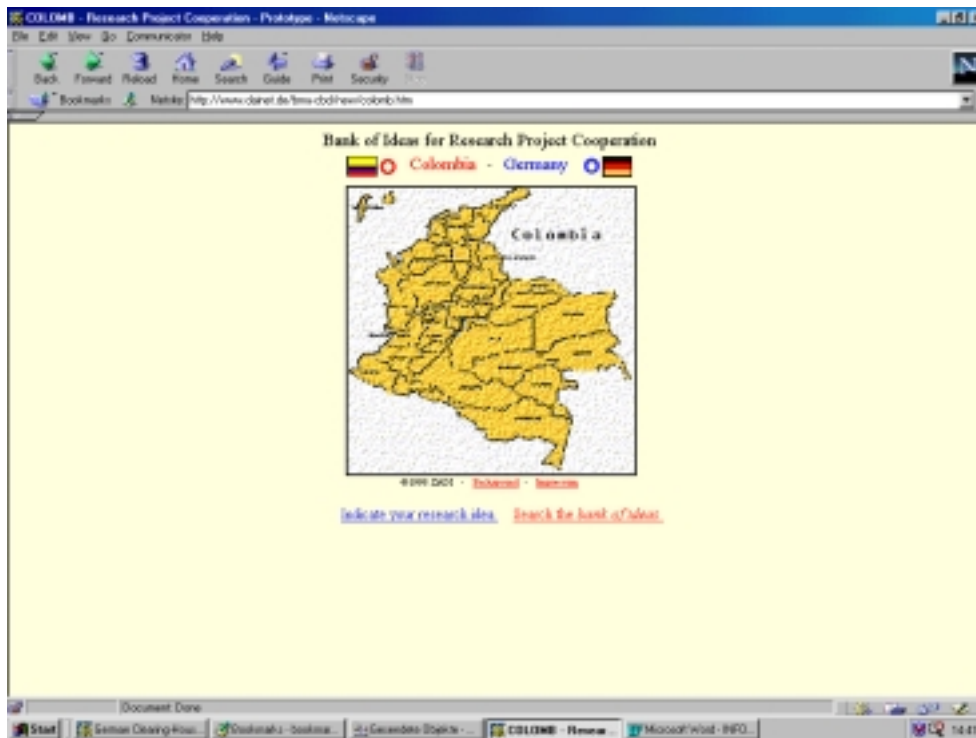
1st Step „visualize yourself“

To indicate a research idea one has to click on „Indicate your research idea“ on the start page <http://www.dainet.de/bmu-cbd/new/colomb.htm> and fill a few fields in the present form. Then one submits the form. After that you will be shown a map of Colombia. Here you surf with your „mouse“ over the map and you click (plot) a colored dot on that location where you expect your research project. If this is the correct location, then finally „submit“ this to the „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“. Now your „Idea“ is visible and linked interactively with your information submitted. This is the starting point for all potential visitors of the „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ to contact you in order to begin a „CHM facilitated“ research cooperation. This can be easily done by clicking on the start-page on „Search the bank of ideas“.

2nd Step „ the first contact“

An important feature which would complement – as 2nd step - the strategic function of the „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ as facilitator of „scientific and technological cooperation“ through the CHM would be a possibility to apply for „seed money“ to facilitate a „first contact“ between scientists. Based on this „first contact“ scientists could then elaborate the final project proposal.

Figure 1 „The Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“



The Vision: a „Global Scientific Cooperation Platform“

What is envisaged from this conceptual approach of the „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ for the development of the Clearing-House Mechanism to facilitate and promote scientific and technical cooperation as laid out in article 18.3 of the Convention on Biological Diversity ? What could be the role of SBSTTA and COP ?

In the course of the development of the CHM one of the requirements will be to step on new terrain - which means, to explore new ways and means on how to strategically use the CHM as a vehicle to also „facilitate scientific and technical cooperation“. It could be a prominent option and element of the Clearing-House Mechanism to develop a function that fulfills its role in the pro-active contribution to the realization of its article 18.3.

The international CHM could develop a similar platform like the „Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation“ on the global level. Researchers could access this platform either to „plot“ themselves and/or to identify a potential research cooperation partner in a participating country. In addition to this, the research priorities identified by SBSTTA and consequently proposed to COP for the next workprogramme could be used for national and global orientation.

To also facilitate scientific cooperation, a "financial mechanism" is to be conceptualized that would ONLY facilitate the „first meeting“ or „first contact“ between the interested scientists and the funding agency/donor institution. With this „seed money“ the respective researcher would be enabled to work out a concrete research project proposal. It would be up to the

Deutscher Tropentag 1999 in Berlin
Session: Biodiversity and Development of Plant Genetic Resources

researchers then, to look for the concrete funding source either on national, regional or international level – this would not be at the reach of the CHM.

This approach offers to the development and use of the CHM in its core competence a specific niche in facilitating the identification of research partners and the consequent realization of research projects. It would be the responsibility of the Parties to identify on national level some funds in order to facilitate these „first contacts“ between scientists. Priorities of research projects could be based on the very general decisions on these matters by COP.

This is regarded as an open concept and as a concrete contribution to stimulate discussions on the potential of this concept for the implementation of article 18.3 as core of the Clearing-House Mechanism and the creation of a Global Scientific Cooperation Platform.

The „**Bank of Ideas for Research Project Cooperation**“ shall stimulate scientific and technological cooperation and complements the „traditional“ and classic way of the creation of research partnerships. The page can be accessed via the German CHM Homepage under „Cooperation & Dialogue“.

We see this as a concrete contribution and test-bed for the practical use of the CHM as interactive communication platform.

So much to do, that many of us have trouble to maintain orientation on „what to do first - what has priority ?“. May be we can't see the wood for the trees. But this definitely requires practical examples on the usefulness of – not only the CHM – but all existing information systems. All of us need a feeling of success. Therefore the five words I opened my presentation, I extend for three additional:

Use it - or loose it – just do it !