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Bio-NET-INTERNATIONAL: A Global Cost-Effective Response to a Taxonomic Crisis in the Developing World

By Wandera Ojanji

Sustainable management and wise use of biodiversity presupposes a sound knowledge of the identity and interrelationships of its constituent organisms which requires good and adequate taxonomic capabilities. These are however lacking in most, if not all, developing countries where the need for sustainable management and use of biodiversity is most urgent.

Before you can access anything, leave alone the biological resources, you need to know or rightly identify it. Having the correct identification name gives the access to relevant and correct information. A wrong identification leads to a false and irrelevant information, that may not only deny you the benefits

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Only Fifteen Experts to Carry Forest Biodiversity Through to COP-6? Not Possible!

a statement by:
Birdlife International*Defenders of Wildlife* Diverse Women for Diversity*Ecoropa*Ecoterra*German NGO Forum on Environment and Development-WG on Biodiversity*Greenpeace International*Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Network*Institute of Biodiversity*ITDG*Environment Liaison Centre International

The CBD is the only globally legally binding instrument on forest biodiversity, and only the CBD provides accountability of national action related to forest biodiversity.

Forest biodiversity will be one of the main thematic areas on the agenda at COP-6. COP-5 has to ensure a thorough preparation between now and 2002. We are very concerned about the limited discussions at COP-5 in this regard. Although a small Ad-hoc Technical Expert Group of fifteen participants reporting to the SBSTTA would be a step forward, it is not sufficient. It can neither take into account the expertise and views of

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The CBD - on its road to implementation?

by Peter Herkenrath, BirdLife International

The Convention on Biological Diversity has been in force for 6 1/2 years. It has established its bodies as well as a number of work programmes. With 177 parties, it is widely accepted, and many countries have initiated National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. So, everything's alright? Obviously not.

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1. Revision of the programme of work towards strong action-orientation.
2. Compliance mechanisms for the implementation of the work programme.
3. Analysis of gaps in forest biodiversity law and law enforcement on the national and international levels.
4. Evaluation of forest biodiversity.
5. Review and synchronisation of COP decisions on thematic and cross-cutting issues, such as agricultural biodiversity, access and benefit-sharing, incentive measures, and Article 8(j) which are relevant for forest biodiversity.
6. Socio-economic aspects of forest biodiversity, including forest biodiversity products and market access and international trade of those products.
7. Development of elements which allow to prioritise forests with regard to their quality and biodiversity value.
8. New and additional funding options for forest biodiversity.

Finally, we consider the ecosystem approach as an indispensable tool for conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity and urge you to use the ecosystem approach as the overall principle for work on forest biodiversity.

The CBD has not been able to stop the loss of biological diversity through, for instance, the rapid destruction of globally significant ecosystems like primary forests or drylands. People are losing the natural resources they depend on, species continue to get to the brink of extinction, and the genetic diversity of crops and their wild relatives is seriously reducing.

What can be done? No doubt, the implementation of the convention must be the strong focus for the next years. Last year's Intersessional Meeting on the Operations of the Convention (ISOC) focused on the question of how to improve the bodies and mechanisms of the CBD in order to allow for better implementation. The result is a number of proposals for COP 5, ranging from a strategic plan for the convention, clearer guidance to the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Groups and a Scientific Assessment Mechanism to the establishment of a Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI). The latter especially has proved to be contentious. Listening to the discussions at ISOC and last week at COP 5, there were not many arguments brought forward for why an SBI would turn the tide of loss of biodiversity. Not many parties were talking about the underlying causes of the global biodiversity crisis, an analysis of which might lead to more inspiring ideas than the establishment of just another time and resources-

consuming body under the CBD. What about issues such as economic, financial and trade conditions, unsustainable consumption, unequal distribution of wealth, unresolved land tenure problems, inadequate cross-sectoral integration of biodiversity issues within decision-making bodies or the lack of respect for the knowledge of indigenous and traditional communities?

It is certainly necessary to strengthen the existing bodies of the convention to make their work much more effective. A strategic plan would be helpful if seriously implemented. In addition, the convention should build partnerships with other institutions, agencies and organisations. This is essential to keep biodiversity on the global and regional agenda. We don't want to see the CBD living its life as an island of peace and happiness while other more powerful institutions are continuing to undermine the objectives of the convention. We are convinced that the existing memoranda of understanding or cooperation are already strengthening the case of our convention and we hope that new ones will come into life, as well as other effective forms of cooperation.

A crucial point is the involvement of civil society. Indigenous bodies, local communities, non-governmental organisations, business, scientific institutions and the wider public all need to be part of the process globally, regionally, nationally and locally to establish the momentum that is needed for effective implementation. This is where the investment of the scarce resources is really needed.

Taxonomy Is More Exciting Than You Thought...

(Editor's note: in striving to cover most of the topics covered by COP, we have been stumped by the Global Taxonomy Initiative...no NGOs are tracking this one closely, *yawn, snore!* But taxonomist friends (not generally from the NGO sector) have preferred some information, highlighting how taxonomy can advance many other agendas, so long as we know what we are talking about)

The ability to identify - whether a friend from a foe, an edible from an inedible mushroom, or a Number 1 bus from a Number 96 bus - is fundamental to survival. In the fields of food production and medicine, farmers, doctors and scientists need to be able to identify the causal organisms which constantly afflict people, animals and crops. Yet the science which is dedicated to identifying the organisms with which we share this planet - taxonomy - has a very low profile. To the layman, taxonomy tends to be regarded as a dry, academic discipline of little relevance except as a source of names for organisms being studied. However, to anyone engaged in any of the biological sciences - particularly agriculture, horticulture, conservation or medicine - accurate identification is essential.

Some of the products of taxonomy include:

Names - an internationally agreed system for naming organisms is used which allows all who use or work with natural diversity to indicate precisely which organisms they are concerned with when contributing and/or seeking knowledge. **Identifications** - by using the unique characteristics of individual species or organisms to distinguish one species from another. **Identification keys and systems** - devices which provide means knowledge about them. relationship between groups of "family traits", specific evolutionary origins, which pest status, etc., of newly **Distributions** - to show where world in different ecosystems ecological niches.

What's the problem?

A tremendous number of the described, or entered into the But information about what is access outside of a major Global Taxonomy Initiative the CBD as a means of building the world, so that everyone can

Taxonomy (also called systematics) is the science dedicated to discovering, identifying, naming and placing organisms in their correct position in the evolutionary spectrum of biodiversity. It is the science that gives unique names to individual species of organisms, allowing communication across geographic and cultural gaps. The name of an organism is the key to all that is known about it, and gives access to knowledge on how to conserve it if it is beneficial, or to control it if it is a pest. Taxonomy underpins all other biological sciences.

to identify organisms and link to **Relationships** - uncovering the organisms and recognising behaviour characteristics and enable predications of habits, discovered species. different species occur in the and in smaller habitats and

world's species have not yet been international taxonomic system. already known can be difficult to museum or herbarium. The (GTI) has been proposed under taxonomic capacity throughout benefit from the foundation that

taxonomy provides for understanding biodiversity. The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and BioNet International share many goals with the GTI, but have different origins. One of the tasks facing the CBD is to sort out how to get the best synergy from these and other initiatives to resolve the "taxonomic impediment."

Over the last ten years, privatisation has caused many institutions that formerly provided free identifications to start charging for their services. Meanwhile, many taxonomic posts have not been replaced as staff has retired. Thus, getting accurate identifications, especially on organisms from tropical developing countries, has become increasingly expensive and difficult in recent years. This has caused problems for many agricultural, forestry, and conservation management issues that depend upon accurate identifications.

Examples of the importance of taxonomy

Taxonomy is vital to biological control, and played a key role in the control of cassava mealybug in Africa with a parasitic wasp, control of water hyacinth in many places with beetles, and, most recently, control of pink mealybug in the Caribbean. Taxonomy is vital to the use of organisms in environmental monitoring programmes, as indicators of ecosystem health, and to the quality of quarantine inspection and protection of crops. Taxonomy is vital to public health. For example, characterisation of species complexes amongst mosquitoes that need to be managed in different ways.

The international communication system provided by taxonomy can help protect against biopiracy. Taxonomy, and herbarium specimens, provided vital evidence in the recent rejection of the patent on ayahuasca (Banisteriopsis), by helping to document claims of the indigenous people. Taxonomy can also help prove geographic origin of organisms or samples.

BioNet, con't

of the resource, but prove dangerous. The acquisition of necessary taxonomic services from expert centres of the developed world has proved to be too costly and not practical on a sustainable basis. The only cost effective and practical solution is for the developing countries to become realistically self-reliant in taxonomy through sub-regional Locally Organised and Operated Partnerships (LOOPS). LOOPS enable South – South cooperation, that is, pooling and sharing of existing taxonomic skills, collections and records, and infrastructures followed by North-South partnerships for institutional strengthening and human resource development.

BioNET-INTERNATIONAL, a global network for taxonomy, is the global response to the taxonomic crisis in the developing world, occasioned by the coincidental withdrawal of free biosystematic services formerly available to developing countries at the expert centres of the developed world and the dramatic increase in the need for taxonomic services following the Earth Summit of Rio in 1992.

The main purpose of Bio-NET-INTERNATIONAL is to pull, share and the use of existing taxonomic resources in the various sub-regions of the developing world through Technical Co-operation Networks like LOOPS and SOUTH-SOUTH cooperations. The purpose of BioNET-INTERNATIONAL is not just for the identification of the biodiversity resources. The identification is means of contributing to environmental conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through inventorying, monitoring and wise management of ecosystems and habitats, prevention of pollution, bioprospecting and development of green products, and equitable sharing of benefits in accordance with the requirements of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Its contributions have also been felt in the provision of sustainable health and wealth of humankind, especially in rural communities, eradication of poverty and disease and promotion of equitable access to resources and opportunities.

This is expected to enable the transfer of taxonomic information, skills and expertise and new technologies from the expert centres of the developed world to the relevant institutions in the LOOPS through donor-funded programmes for institutional strengthening and human resource development.

Announcements

- Invitation to a lunchtime at COP 5 ON Important Bird Areas of Africa – priority sites for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Speakers from Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania, Nature Kenya, Nigerian Conservation Foundation and the BirdLife International Secretariat. Today, May 23, 2000. 13.00 – 15.00 hrs: room 7. Lunch will be provided.
- Taxonomic Exhibition at the the National Museums of Kenya Herbarium, starting today May 23, 2000 to Friday May 24, 2000. Time 10.00 am to 1.00pm in the morning and 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm in the afternoon. **ENTRANCE IS FREE FOR COP 5 DELEGATES** . REGISTER YOUR INTEREST AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM DESK IN THE CONFERENCE EXHIBITION AREA. The National Museums of Kenya houses the National Centre for Bio-diversity with a wide range of both national and regional specimens.
- Tourism Workshop. Critical Information: Indigenous Peoples and Biodiversity. Today, May 23, 1.00 –2.00pm
- Morning bird-watching tour on UNEP grounds, 23 May and 25 May, 8:30 to 9:30 am, organised by Nature Kenya. Meet at the main entrance to the UNEP building at 8:30 am, or ask for directions from the Nature Kenya/BirdLife International stand.



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