



Convention on  
Biological Diversity

# **Guide to the Convention on Biological Diversity**

## **Module A-1**

Version 1 - July 2007

# **Contents**

- 1. What is Biological Diversity and why is it important?**
- 2. What is the Convention on Biological Diversity?**
- 3. How does the CBD Work?**
- 4. What is the Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety?**
- 5. What are the programmes of work and policy guidance that have been developed by the Convention?**
- 6. What is the 2010 Biodiversity Target and the Strategic plan of the Convention?**
- 7. How is the Convention implemented?**

## **List of Acronyms**

### **What you will learn in this module:**

This module provides an introduction to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for the focal points of the Convention as well as newcomers to the CBD process. It begins with a summary of the background of the Convention, the institutional and operational framework for the Convention, and the work being carried out by the Convention.

## **1. What is Biological Diversity and why is it important?**

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, is the variety of life on earth. It comprises the variability within species, among species, and of ecosystems. It also refers to the complex relationships among living things, and between living things and their environment.

Biodiversity is therefore the **sum total of all life on our planet**, and includes all the different species of plants, animals and micro-organisms (estimated at more than ten million species), all the genetic variability within these species (estimated at between 10-100,000 genes per species) and all the diversity of the ecosystems formed by the different combinations of species.

Biodiversity is important because it underpins ecosystem functioning and the provision of essential ecosystem services. Human well-being depends on this “web of life”.

## **2. What is the Convention on Biological Diversity?**

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a legally binding international treaty to promote the following objectives:

- the conservation of biological diversity;
- the sustainable use of its components; and
- the equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

It was the first global agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of all components of biodiversity including genetic sources, species and ecosystems.

The CBD was negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme in the period 1989-1992 and completed in May 2002. May 22 is celebrated each year as International Biodiversity day. The Treaty was opened for signature during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, and came into force on 29 December 1993.

## **3. How does the CBD Work?**

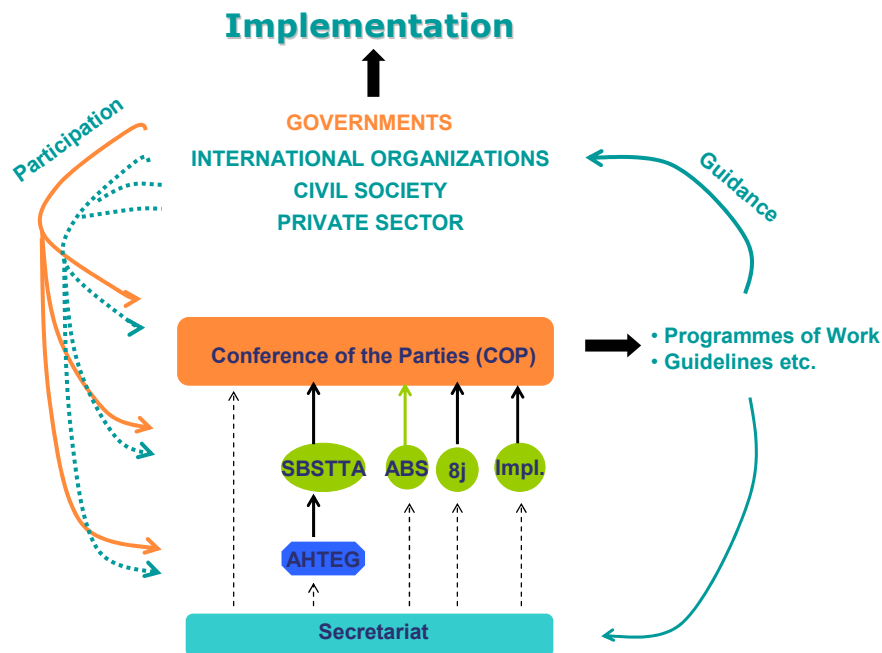
### **The Conference of the Parties**

The Convention on Biological Diversity provides a global legal framework for action on biodiversity. It brings together the 189 Parties (188 member countries and the European Community) in the Conference of the Parties (COP) which is the Convention’s governing body that meets every two years, or as needed, to review progress in the implementation of the Convention, to adopt programmes of work, to achieve its objectives, and provide policy guidance. It may also consider amendments and the adoption of Protocols to the Convention: The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was negotiated within the framework of the Convention (see Question X, below)

Although the CBD is an international treaty, responsibility for its implementation resides primarily with each Party at the national level. Thus the decisions of COP constitute guidance to

Parties on how to proceed with their implementation of the Convention. Its decisions during these meetings also serve as mandates for the work of the Secretariat to support implement the Convention. Consensus is required for all decisions on substantive issues (i.e. a decision cannot be adopted if one or more parties formally object).

While decisions in the COP are made by governments, a large number of other bodies can participate in the meetings and contribute information and points of view. These include representatives of indigenous and local communities, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private sector associations.



### Subsidiary intergovernmental bodies

The COP is assisted by the **Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)**, which is made up of government representatives with expertise in relevant fields, as well as observers from non-Party governments, the scientific community, and other relevant organizations. SBSTTA is responsible for providing recommendations to the COP on the technical aspects of the implementation of the Convention.

Other subsidiary bodies have been established by the COP to deal with specific issues as they arise. These are called “ad hoc open-ended Working Groups” because they are established for a limited mandate and period of time, and because they are open to all Parties as well as the participation of observers. Current Working Groups are:

- the Working Group on Access and Benefit-Sharing is currently the forum for negotiating an international regime on access and benefit sharing;
- the Working Group on Article 8 (j) and Related Provisions addresses issues related to protection of traditional knowledge;

- the Working group on Protected Areas is guiding and monitoring implementation of the programme of work on protected areas, and
- the Working Group on the Review of Implementation of the Convention examines the implementation of the Convention, including national biodiversity strategies and action plans (see question 4).

Working Groups make recommendations to the COP, and, as is the case for the Working Group on Access and Benefit-Sharing, may also provide a forum for negotiations of a particular instrument under the Convention.

### **Expert Groups and workshops**

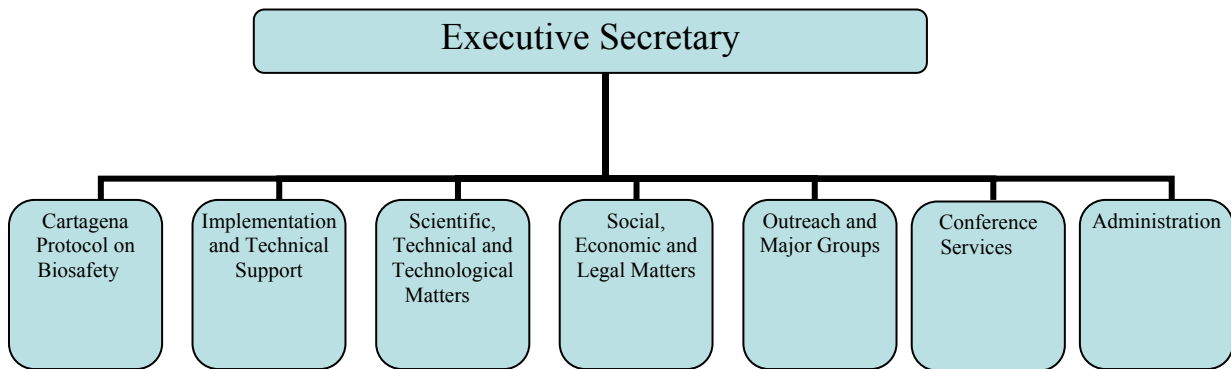
The COP and SBSTTA may also establish expert groups or call for the organization by the Secretariat of liaison groups, workshops, and other meetings. Participants in these meetings are usually experts nominated by governments, as well as representatives of international organizations, local and indigenous communities and other bodies. Unlike SBSTTA and the open-ended Working Groups these are usually not considered as intergovernmental meetings. The purpose of these meetings vary: Expert groups may provide scientific assessments, for example, while workshops may be used for training or capacity building. Liaison groups advise the secretariat or act as for cooperation with other conventions and organizations.

### **The Secretariat**

The **Secretariat** of the Convention is the administrative body of the CBD. The principal functions of the Secretariat are to prepare for and service meetings of the COP and other subsidiary bodies of the Convention, and to coordinate with other international bodies. It also assists member governments in the implementation of the multi-year programme of work of the COP, collects and disseminates information, and coordinates with other international organizations. The Secretariat is hosted by UNEP and is led by an Executive Secretary. It is provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is located in Montreal, Canada

The Secretariat organizes the meetings of the COP, SBSTTA, the Working Groups and a large number of expert groups and workshops. For each one of them, the secretariat prepares agenda, background documentation, and prepares reports of the meetings, as well as handling logistics.

The secretariat is organized into a number of divisions.



Each party to the CBD designates a National Focal Point responsible for coordinating CBD related activities at the country level (see module B). National Focal Points work closely with the Secretariat, as well as government agencies and relevant organizations in their countries to implement the decisions of the COP.

The secretariat also provides the global hub of the **Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM)**, an internet-based network that promotes technical and scientific cooperation and the exchange of information. It relies on CHM Focal Points, which are national and international centres and institutions with relevant expertise, to gather and organize information to be shared. The Secretariat analyses national reports of parties.

To facilitate its work, the Secretariat has developed partnerships with a wide variety of UN agencies, environmental conventions and non-governmental organizations to provide technical input and assistance. The secretariat also works closely with the financial Mechanism of the Convention (see question 7)

#### 4. What is the Convention is the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety?

The only existing protocol to the Convention is the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. It was adopted by the conference of the Parties in 2000 and entered into force in September 2002. The Protocol seeks to protect biodiversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from biotechnology. A key point here is that the Conference of the Parties to the Convention also serves as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, and the Secretariat and the Financial Mechanism set up under the Convention perform the same functions under the Biosafety Protocol. The Protocol is supported by a Biosafety Clearing-House. As well, there are National Biosafety Focal points to assist in implementation at the national level. Therefore, the Biosafety Protocol is administered by a semi-autonomous unit within the Secretariat. The Executive Secretary of the CBD is also the head of the Biosafety unit within the Secretariat.

## 5. What are the programmes of work and policy guidance that have been developed by the Convention?

### The Programmes of Work

Since the Convention entered into force, Parties have developed seven **thematic work programmes**, each of which establishes a vision for, and basic principles to guide future work, sets out key issues for consideration, identifies potential outputs, and suggests a timetable and means for achieving these outputs (see Table 1). Parties, the Secretariat, and relevant organizations contribute to the implementation of the thematic work programmes, which are periodically reviewed by the COP and SBSTTA.

**Table 1.**

Thematic Programmes of Work of the Convention on Biodiversity
Agricultural biological diversity
Inland water biological diversity
Marine and coastal biological diversity
Forest biological diversity
Biological diversity of dry and sub-humid lands
Mountain biological diversity
Island biological diversity (under development)

The COP also initiates work on key **cross-cutting issues** of relevance to multiple thematic areas. Essentially these correspond to the issues addressed in the Convention's substantive provisions in (Articles 6-20, see Annex I). The seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-7), for example, adopted a programme of work on protected areas to support the establishment and maintenance, by 2010 for terrestrial, and by 2012 for marine areas, of comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas that reflect the objectives of the Convention.

### **Principles, guidelines and tools available through the Convention**

The **Ecosystem Approach** was adopted by the Conference of the Parties as the primary framework for action under the Convention. It is a strategy for integrated natural resource management that takes a holistic approach to managing biodiversity and its components. It involves managing resources at a scale and scope that not only conserve the components of biodiversity, but also protect the essential processes and functions of the ecosystem of which they are part (i.e. nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, supply of freshwater and food). The Ecosystem Approach recognizes humans, with their cultural diversity, as integral parts of ecosystems. Thus, it involves managing ecosystems and natural resources in a way that reflects their intrinsic value, as well as the benefits they provide to humans, in a fair and equitable way. All implementation of the Convention is carried out and evaluated according to the ecosystem approach.

Table 2 lists other guidance developed under the Convention

**Table 2.**

**Principles, Guidelines, and other Tools Developed under the Convention**

<p>Description, Principles, and Operational Guidelines for the Ecosystem Approach (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/cross-cutting/ecosystem/default.asp">http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/cross-cutting/ecosystem/default.asp</a>)</p> <p>Bonn Guidelines on Access to Genetic Resources and Fair and Equitable Sharing of the Benefits Arising out of their Utilization (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/benefit/bonn.asp">http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/benefit/bonn.asp</a>)</p> <p>Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/use/addis-principles.asp">http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/use/addis-principles.asp</a>)</p> <p>Guiding Principles on Invasive Alien Species (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/?dec=VI/23">http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/?dec=VI/23</a>)</p> <p>Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental, and Social Impact Assessment regarding Developments Proposed to Take Place on, or which are Likely to Impact on, Sacred Sites and on Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local Communities (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/doc/ref/tk-akwe-en.pdf">http://www.biodiv.org/doc/ref/tk-akwe-en.pdf</a>)</p> <p>Guidelines for Incorporating Biodiversity-related Issues into Environmental Impact Assessment Legislation and/or Processes and in Strategic Environmental Assessment (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.aspx?dec=VI/7">http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.aspx?dec=VI/7</a>)</p> <p>Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/tourism/guidelines.asp">http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/tourism/guidelines.asp</a>)</p> <p>Proposals for the Design and Implementation of Incentive Measures (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/incentives/proposals.asp">http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/incentives/proposals.asp</a>)</p> <p>Proposals for the Application of Ways and Means to Remove or Mitigate Perverse Incentives (<a href="http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.aspx?dec=VII/18">http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.aspx?dec=VII/18</a>)</p>
---

## 6. What is the 2010 Biodiversity Target and the Strategic plan of the Convention?

In 2002, the Conference of the Parties adopted a **Strategic Plan**, which commits Governments to more effective and coherent implementation of the three objectives of the Convention in order to achieve, by 2010, a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional, and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth. This target – which has come to be known as **the 2010 Biodiversity Target** -- was subsequently endorsed by Heads of Government at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly. The Summit also highlighted the essential role that biodiversity and the 2010 target play in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

The Conference of the Parties adopted a framework to evaluate progress towards the 2010 target. This included the identification of a set of goals and sub-targets under seven focal areas for action (see Table 3). Indicators for these sub-targets are currently being developed (see Annex II for provisional indicators). The combination of goals, sub-targets, and indicators builds upon the approach taken in the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. It provides a flexible, yet meaningful framework within which regional and national targets can be set for further advancement towards the 2010 target.



**Table 3. Provisional Framework for Goals and Targets**

<b>Protect the components of biodiversity</b>
<p><b>Goal 1. <i>Promote the conservation of the biological diversity of ecosystems, habitats and biomes</i></b></p> <p>Target 1.1: At least 10% of each of the world's ecological regions effectively conserved.</p> <p>Target 1.2: Areas of particular importance to biodiversity protected.</p> <p><b>Goal 2. <i>Promote the conservation of species diversity</i></b></p> <p>Target 2.1: Restore, maintain, or reduce the decline of populations of species of selected taxonomic groups.</p> <p>Target 2.2: Status of threatened species improved.</p> <p><b>Goal 3. <i>Promote the conservation of genetic diversity</i></b></p> <p>Target 3.1: Genetic diversity of crops, livestock, and of harvested species of trees, fish and wildlife and other valuable species conserved, and associated indigenous and local knowledge maintained.</p>
<b>Promote sustainable use</b>
<p><b>Goal 4. <i>Promote sustainable use and consumption.</i></b></p> <p>Target 4.1: Biodiversity-based products derived from sources that are sustainably managed, and Production areas managed consistent with the conservation of biodiversity.</p> <p>Target 4.2: Unsustainable consumption, of biological resources, that impacts upon biodiversity, reduced.</p> <p>Target 4.3: No species of wild flora or fauna endangered by international trade.</p>
<b>Address threats to biodiversity</b>
<p><b>Goal 5. <i>Pressures from habitat loss, land use change and degradation, and unsustainable water use, reduced.</i></b></p> <p>Target 5.1: Rate of loss and degradation of natural habitats decreased</p> <p><b>Goal 6. <i>Control threats from invasive alien species</i></b></p> <p>Target 6.1: Pathways for major potential alien invasive species controlled.</p> <p>Target 6.2: Management plans in place for major alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.</p> <p><b>Goal 7. <i>Address challenges to biodiversity from climate change, and pollution</i></b></p> <p>Target 7.1: Maintain and enhance resilience of the components of biodiversity to adapt to climate change.</p> <p>Target 7.2: Reduce pollution and its impacts on biodiversity.</p>
<b>Maintain goods and services from biodiversity to support human well-being</b>
<p><b>Goal 8. <i>Maintain capacity of ecosystems to deliver goods and services and support livelihoods</i></b></p> <p>Target 8.1: Capacity of ecosystems to deliver goods and services maintained.</p> <p>Target 8.2: Biological resources that support sustainable livelihoods, local food security and health care, especially of poor people maintained.</p>
<b>Protect traditional knowledge, innovations and practices</b>
<p><b>Goal 9 <i>Maintain socio-cultural diversity of indigenous and local communities</i></b></p> <p>Target 9.1 Protect traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices.</p> <p>Target 9.2: Protect the rights of indigenous and local communities over their traditional knowledge, innovations and practices, including their rights to benefit-sharing.</p>
<b>Ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources</b>
<p><b>Goal 10. <i>Ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources</i></b></p> <p>Target 10.1: All transfers of genetic resources are in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and other applicable agreements.</p> <p>Target 10.2: Benefits arising from the commercial and other utilization of genetic resources shared with the countries providing such resources.</p>

## Ensure provision of adequate resources

### **Goal 11. Parties have improved financial, human, scientific, technical and technological capacity to implement the Convention**

Target 11.1: New and additional financial resources are transferred to developing country Parties, to allow for the effective implementation of their commitments under the Convention, in accordance with Article 20.

Target 11.2: Technology is transferred to developing country Parties, to allow for the effective implementation of their commitments under the Convention, in accordance with its Article 20, paragraph 4.

## 7. How is the Convention implemented?

As noted above responsibility for its implementation resides primarily with each Party at the national level. Decisions of the COP and the programmes of work, principles and other guidance provide a framework for Parties on how to proceed with their implementation of the Convention.

Parties have an obligation to develop and implement **National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions Plans** (NBSAPs) or other similar tasks, and should integrate biodiversity concerns into other national policies strategies and programmes (see modules A-2). Parties must report to the Conference of Parties on national implementation of the Convention through **National Reports** (see module A-3).

The Convention's **financial mechanism** provides financial resources to developing countries for the implementation of the CBD. It is supported primarily by funding from member governments and operated by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under the guidance of COP. UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank, as Implementing Agencies of the GEF, including the preparation and cost-effectiveness of GEF projects.

There are a number of **international organizations**, inter-governmental and non-governmental, that have expertise, mandates or resources that enable them to assist countries with NBSAPs and national reports. Such inter-governmental organizations include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations University (UNU), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and others, including regional organizations. Non-governmental organizations include the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the World Wide fund for Nature (WWF), Fauna and Flora International (FFI), the World Resources Institute (WRI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and others

The implementation of the Convention is also supported by workshops, meetings, and activities outside the formal Convention process. These may be held in conjunction with the Secretariat and Parties to the Convention, or outside the auspices of the CBD. Examples include specialized conference, regional and sub-regional preparatory meetings for COP, side events and COP and SBSTTA meetings, and the GTI.

Through its work programme on **Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA)**, the Convention offers an outreach programme targeted at all stakeholder groups. From educational programmes to public awareness campaigns, the CEPA work programme attempts to engage stakeholders at all ages and levels in awareness due to the raising of the issues surrounding Biodiversity. An important international activity is the International Day for Biodiversity, celebrated nationally around the world on 22 May each year. In addition, the UN General Assembly has proclaimed 2010 as the International year of Biodiversity.

## **List of Acronyms**

BPSP	Biodiversity Planning and Support Programme
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHM	Clearing House Mechanism
CEPA	Communication Education and Public Awareness
COP	Conference of the Parties (to the CBD)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFI	Fauna and Flora International
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IUCN	World Conservation Union
LMO	Living Modified Organism
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNU	United Nations University
WGRI	Working Group on Review of Implementation (of the Convention)
WRI	World Resources Institute
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature