

The names we need to know: taxonomy for the 2010 target and beyond

BioNET

Chair: Stella Simiyu (CBD Secretariat, BGCI and BioNET-EAFRINET, Kenya)

BioNET and the CBD Secretariats invited a discussion on mobilising taxonomic responses to the 2010 target and future priorities. The event also provided the framework for launching the BioNET funding campaign¹ to over 40 SBSTTA delegates.

Achieving the 2010 target relies on practitioners being able to identify and manage biodiversity at species, genetic and ecosystem levels. Targeted taxonomic work is needed not only for species conservation but for implementation of the Convention generally including via the Ecosystem Approach and Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC). The benefits of mobilising taxonomy to address societal needs extend beyond immediate policy-driven targets. Benefits include the applications of taxonomy by biotechnology industries and the contributions these make to sustainable use of biodiversity and wealth creation.

Ahmed Djoghlaif (Executive Secretary, CBD Secretariat)

Taxonomy – the ability to correctly identify species – is essential to the ability to make informed decisions about conservation and sustainable use, and hence the implementation of the CBD. We can not conserve what we do not know, neither can we sustainably utilise that which is not familiar. As a member of the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI) coordinating mechanism and extensive world-wide network, BioNET has an important role in achieving the 2010 target by accelerating implementation of the GTI. I welcome today's launch of the BioNET Business Plan 2007-11, and urge all to help realise the plan by engaging with BioNET and in turn the CBD by providing the necessary financial resources and cooperation.

Peter Bridgewater (Secretary General, Ramsar Convention)

Our current taxonomic system is a long way from perfect, as we still don't know all the elements. Without an understanding of what the elements are, and how they depend on each other, we cannot truly adopt a proactive ecosystem approach, as required by the CBD. The taxonomic impediment cannot be resolved without developing human and institutional capacities especially in countries of the south – the core focus of BioNET. BioNET's challenge will be to get the species level of the biodiversity hierarchy right, in order to make it possible to properly deliver the ecosystem approach.

Julie Griffin (IUCN Species Programme)

Taxonomy is critical to the CBD as a whole, which is why the GTI is integral to the CBD. Taxonomy underpins the work of IUCN and its members in many ways, for instance the Red Lists, invasive species management, Important Plant Areas and indeed all protected areas. To conduct Red List assessments we need sound taxonomy and available expertise; capacity building is therefore urgently needed. IUCN applauds

¹ <http://linkger.com/6e4f67>

BioNET for their work to name the world's species – not least because that makes our job of saving them a little bit easier.

Alan Paton (RBG Kew)

Target 1 of the GSPC is to establish a widely accessible working list of all known plant species, as a step towards a complete world Flora. This mission is 53% complete; we need to share best practice and know-how to complete the task. Names are the key to the knowledge. Knowledge in networks (such as BioNET) leads to actions that provide the names we need to know to achieve our biodiversity conservation and sustainable use goals.

Olivier Biber (Government of Switzerland)

Switzerland has been supporting the activities of BioNET since 1996 and has been actively engaged as a Board member and in shaping BioNET's future. Why? We recognize the crucial role of taxonomy in sustainable use of natural resources and agricultural development, above all in the South where the overwhelming majority of the earth's biodiversity is found. We see in BioNET a very important partner which is able to deliver unique product-oriented services important, in particular, for Millennium Development Goals 1 and 7. Its programme is embedded in a policy framework concerned with poverty reduction, biodiversity management and trade. It has a relevant, needs based approach, makes important contributions to institutional strengthening and capacity building, and is both highly flexible and efficient. There is wide appreciation for BioNET's work and many use its services. The need now is for others to join us in a coordinated approach to funding BioNET.

Ana Tiraa (SPREP, BioNET-PACINET)

BioNET-PACINET is the Pacific LOOP (“Locally Owned and Operated Partnership”) of BioNET, formed by formal agreement among 21 Pacific island countries and territories. It operates under the direction of a Coordinating Committee (LCC) currently comprised of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), University of the South Pacific (USP), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Pacific Biodiversity Information Forum (PBIF). While PACINET works at the regional and local level, BioNET's Secretariat has provided vital practical support including helping to create productive collaborative partnerships with international technology partners such as GBIF and CBIT.

Ma Keping (Chinese Academy of Science)

The Chinese Virtual Herbarium is an example of national investment in taxonomy that deploys technology to respond to the increase in demand for taxonomic information from both specialists and the public. Combining images, bibliographic references, taxon information, names and herbarium specimen records, the Virtual Herbarium is a tool for integrating vast quantities of complex data and presenting it in a form suitable for a range of users including decision makers, conservation agencies, research organisations, education, the public and the information providers. This collaborative project may be considered a model for regional and global cooperation.

Richard Smith (Director, BioNET Secretariat)

BioNET is the only international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting taxonomy, achieving this by building capacity and partnerships to support less

industrialised countries. BioNET comprises a UK-based Secretariat linking institutions from 115 countries in ten regional, government-endorsed partnerships (LOOPs) to provide a unique taxonomic product delivery mechanism. Recognised as the “most comprehensive network” for taxonomy by Parties to the CBD, BioNET has several unique roles within the landscape of organisations involved in generating and applying species information, e.g. identifying user product and information needs, mobilising taxonomists to address challenges in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, and mobilising resources and advocating taxonomy to create an enabling policy environment. BioNET has ongoing commitments from its developing country Coordinating Institutions. To respond to their needs, BioNET urgently needs new operational and human resources to deliver its ambitious yet realistic 2007-11 Programme and fulfil its expected roles in accelerating taxonomic product delivery to address the targets of 2010 and beyond.

Chris Lyal (UK GTI Focal Point, Natural History Museum, London & Chair of BioNET’s Board)

I speak to you today as Chair of the BioNET Board; UK national Focal Point for the GTI, one-time GTI Acting Programme Officer for the SCBD and, importantly, a taxonomist. I name, describe and help others identify beetles. In the last month, I have received requests for help from quarantine officers, forest managers, farmers and scientists from over a dozen countries around the world. My specialist knowledge enables me to distinguish pollinators, pests and biocontrol agents from rare and common species. To make my expertise available world-wide I have prepared taxonomic data for the web - we need content for the informatics systems to be of value to users! My point: taxonomists can contribute to implementing this Convention in many ways. Indeed, the presentations today showcase some examples of best practice in delivery taxonomy to support CBD implementation. But the rate of delivery urgently needs to be accelerated and delivery needs to be sustained. BioNET has been and is developing capacity and helping taxonomists to become engaged in implementing the CBD and other conventions and priorities. I recommend the BioNET Business plan to you and ask how you can contribute to maintaining and developing this vital resource.

Discussion

- * David Penman, Chair of the GBIF Governing Board: BioNET has a critical role as an authoritative names gatherer via its network of taxonomists, but needs technology partners such as GBIF.
- * James Seyani, National Herbarium & Botanic Gardens, Malawi: BioNET is to be congratulated for successfully supporting the GTI process. The African experience, however, shows that despite capacity building efforts job security and retention are still very weak; training is being done but then trainees lost to other professions.
- * Michael Brown, IUCN-SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group: The invasive alien species issue may increase interest in taxonomy and offer an opportunity to leverage more support. Examples a) listing of all known IAS; we have formed a partnership with

BioNET and b) include taxonomic capacity building in IAS management proposals, e.g. marine invasives surveillance in the Pacific.

* Sobhia Saifan, Head PGR Unit, Jordan: Taxonomy has important connections to CBD and GSPC targets (conservation, agricultural development) and distribution data and national floras are lacking. Ethnobotanical knowledge needs connecting with Latin taxonomy so as to better understand and protect those species are important for people.

* Simon Tillier, European Distributed Institute of Taxonomy – EDIT: Capacity building is clearly needed in the less developed countries, but European capacity issues are also very real as it is increasingly difficult to meet taxonomic needs. EDIT supports BioNET and hopes within few years to be able to offer services to developing countries.

* Stas Burgiel, Board member, Global Invasive Species Programme: Recognising the critical need to strengthen taxonomy for the management of IAS, the secretariat's of BioNET and the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2006. BioNET is a very valuable partner for GISP because sociology and human management are critical factors both in IAS management and capacity building.