

Address by  
**Prof. Alfred A. Oteng-Yeboah, Ghana team leader**  
at the  
**Opening of the First Workshop on  
Assessing Taxonomic Needs in Ghana**  
1-4 August 2006, Accra and Aburi

Today can be considered as one of the important days to remember in the history of taxonomy as a discipline in Ghana.

Today we are gathered to formally start a project on "Taxonomic Needs Assessment in Ghana".

Ghana is making history as one of the first countries in Africa and perhaps in the tropical world to get into this business of assessing the taxonomic needs of the country.

What this means to us is that we have embarked on a journey to address the issue of taxonomic impediment that characterises the inability of several Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to fully implement the Convention to achieve its three point objectives of

- a) conservation of biological diversity
- b) sustainable use of biological diversity and
- c) fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources

This activity is the first of a series of actions required for achieving the five operational objectives designed by Parties to the Convention. Parties to the Convention have jointly agreed, in decisions III/10 (of 1996 COP 3 in Buenos Aires, Argentina) IV/ID (of 1998 COP4 in Bratislava Slovak Republic) and V/9 (of 2000 COP5 in Nairobi Kenya), to establish a Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI) to be supervised by a Co-ordination Mechanism with special terms of reference which through the Executive Secretary to the Convention will report to the Conference of the Parties (COP).

The programme of work for the GTI has these five operational objectives, the first of which is taxonomic needs assessments at the national, regional and global levels. The other four operational objectives have targeted actions, all of which depend on the outcome of the first operational objective.

Ghana is therefore on the right path, seeking ways to enter into the GTI imperatives in order to be in a position to successfully follow the other targeted actions in the remaining four operational objectives.

We believe that in going through this activity we will be on our way to the full implementation of Article 7 of the Convention which is on identification and monitoring whose achievement, would enhance

- a) human resource and capacity development in taxonomy
- b) infra-structural development in taxonomy
- c) increase in fundamental data on biological diversity in areas of priority for the country
- d) generation of needed taxonomic data

We should remember that as we scale all of these achievements we are actually poised towards the overall implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Ghana.

In order to remove doubts in our minds, let me explain the operative word "taxonomy" that I have used all along. Taxonomy is the science of classification, and it involves the application of names to objects so that these objects can be referred to.

The process of name application takes note of the characteristics of the object, so that when a name is given it is done so on the basis of those characters.

The process of name application is a basic human endeavour which is meant for identification, association and recognition. It has been with us from time immemorial, in human history through the Biblical times of creation and Adam to the present.

In all Ghanaian traditions and customs, we offer names to objects and even events in order to refer to them. In our encounter with our immediate environment, we give names to plants, animals, rivers, rocks and almost everything that we come into contact with purely for the purpose of referring to them in identification, association and recognition.

The mode of name-giving does not follow any order in the traditional systems and the name becomes known to only people with the same cultural background or experience.

A lot of our local people are very familiar with the things around them and they can refer to them and talk about them to the people of the same language or experience. Consequently we give different names to the same object as we travel through the country. This difficulty in transferring local names to objects limits local taxonomy. The scientific name application is always more preferred because it has wide application.

A scientific approach to name giving has a standard format which is applicable world wide. Thus when an object has been given a scientific name, that name remains with the object throughout the world.

It is the lack of widespread expertise in this system which creates the impediment in communication about biological diversity to many Parties, such as Ghana.

Human and infra-structural capacities to undertake the task of making these scientific applications have been limited, not only in Ghana, but in several countries especially in the developing world.

Thus our abilities to identify, monitor and communicate about what we have as our biological wealth has been impaired. This project is thus to enable us to take stock of the needs, in order to identify gaps and find solutions.

As we do this, we are actually contributing to wealth creation and reduction of poverty because we are empowering all stakeholders who use the biological resources with information. The information they will receive will serve as basis for decision making in conservation and sustainable use of biological and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. This empowerment is the source of wealth, which underpins the tenets of sustainable development.