

## **Access to genetic resources and benefit sharing – Challenges and opportunities for biodiversity science**

**Thursday, 15 Oct 2009, 12.45 – 13.45 h, Room 1.61-1.62**

### **Science-Policy Round Table Discussion, DIVERSITAS OSC2 conference**

**The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits resulting from the use of genetic resources constitutes one of the goals of the CBD. International negotiations are currently under way on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS). They will affect biodiversity research. This round table will present information on current political processes regarding ABS and research. It serves as a platform to discuss researcher's experiences, views, and academia's options to incorporate its specific needs into the CBD negotiations.**

#### **What is ABS?**

Conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity are two goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992). The third major objective is the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits resulting from the use of genetic resources. According to the CBD this term refers to biological material containing functional units of heredity. The CBD endorses the sovereign rights of states over their biological resources and the authority of national governments to determine access to genetic resources. The CBD states the system of Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS).

Accordingly, before using genetic material of another country for research or possible commercialization you ('users') have to inform about your planned project and apply for an access permit. It is issued by the responsible authorities of the country providing the material ('providers'). In a contract, users and providers must subsequently agree on the exact use of the genetic resources and the benefits resulting from the use, regardless of a commercial or non-commercial purpose. Many scientists lack awareness regarding this important change that concerns their work.

#### **Consequences for academic research**

At present, an operational ABS-system is lacking in many countries, and/or the access procedures do not differentiate between research with commercial or non-commercial intent. This generates an administrative burden and delays that hamper research. Concurrently, developing countries are losing important gains in new knowledge and other benefits generated by academic biodiversity research that could e.g. help to implement the conservation goals of the CBD.

#### **Current international negotiations**

Among scientists it is common practice to exchange biological material among each other. However, for providing countries it is difficult to control resources, once they have left the country. In addition, cases of biopiracy have led to mistrust and the urge for an increased control. Currently, negotiations for more mandatory ABS rules are under way. They are expected to be concluded by 2010. Facilitated access for non-commercial research is being discussed. Yet, academic research has to acknowledge that the differentiation between commercial and non-commercial intent is often blurry.

#### **The discussion panel**

This round table will discuss the impact of ABS on non-commercial research and the significance of the ongoing CBD negotiations for academia. Specialists will present ABS information and news on the current political

processes. Representatives and researchers from developing and industrialized countries will state viewpoints and report on their experience with the ABS system.

### **Key items to discuss**

Panelists and the audience will discuss the significance of ABS for non-commercial academic research, its impact, and academia's options to put forward its specific needs into the CBD negotiations. When pleading for facilitated access, non-commercial academic research will have to build trust by keeping genetic resources within the non-commercial domain and by proposing adapted means for tracking the flow of genetic resources.

### **Panel members**

- *Dr. David Cooper, CBD Secretariat, Montreal, Canada*

ABS background and current negotiations

- *Mr. Pierre du Plessis, International Regime ABS negotiator for Namibia*

Views and expectations regarding non-commercial academic research from a providing country perspective

- *Dr. Maureen Wolfson, South Africa National Biodiversity Institute SANBI*

South African ABS experiences regarding non-commercial research.

- *Prof. Norbert Jürgens, University of Hamburg, Germany. Non-commercial research projects with successful ABS procedures*

Prerequisites for a successful ABS research collaboration (time, finances, agreements)

- *Prof. Gabriel Nemogá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Researcher from a providing country*

Repercussions of ABS legislation for researchers working on national territory with national access requirements.

- *Dr. Susette Biber-Klemm, Swiss Academy of Sciences. Science & policy in user country*

Activities geared towards academic research in an industrialized country, what has been done and achieved so far.

### **Moderator**

*Prof. Brian Huntley, former CEO of the South African National Biodiversity Institute*

### **Organizers**

*Prof. Peter Linder, Institute of Systematic Botany, University of Zürich, Switzerland*

*Sylvia Martinez M.Sc., Swiss Biodiversity Forum, Swiss Academy of Sciences, Bern, Switzerland*



Biber S, Martinez S (2009) Access and Benefit Sharing – Good practice for academic research on genetic resources. Swiss Academy of Sciences SCNAT, Bern, Switzerland. 58pp. ISBN: 978-3-033-01907-2

Also available in French & Spanish. It can be downloaded.

<http://abs.scnat.ch>