

Special Meeting of the Regional Steering Committee for Africa

Virtual meeting on 22 April 2021

Welcome/ Adoption of the Agenda

After Marcello Maschke (BMZ) welcomed the participants to the Special Meeting of the African Steering, the agenda was adopted. Donor representatives from the European Commission as well as Mahlet Kebede from the African Union Commission excused themselves for not being able to attend the meeting.

Summary of the Evaluation Report

Dr Andreas Drews, the Manager of the ABS Initiative, provided participants with a summary of the draft external evaluation report, informing participants about the scope, methodology and time frame of the evaluation. The aim of the evaluation is to contribute inputs to the formulation of the next phase of the ABS Initiative and a follow-up phase of ABioSA. Mr Drews presented conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report (for details, see *presentation*). The final evaluation report is expected to be made available by the evaluators at the end of April, 2021.

Feedback by RSCA members

Following the presentation, the Secretariat collected feedback from the SC members with a view to feeding their comments back to the evaluators. On behalf of the colleagues from the European Commission, Mr Drews shared comments regarding the evaluation and its recommendations (see *Annex II* for further details).

Below is a summary of the comments made by the SC members on the *evaluation report*:

1. Most evaluation questions have been answered with a certain level of detail, but it is difficult to grasp the “big picture” of the conclusions of the evaluation.
2. The evaluation does not cover the dimensions of the project related to CBD negotiations, supporting African partners to build positions, participate, understand stakes, new developments (DSI etc.), and so on. These activities have occupied an important part of the projects time and budget, and led to useful results.
3. Caribbean and Pacific should be the subject of a specific section; lessons could be learnt from comparative evaluation of certain aspects between Africa and the Pacific, where more ownership, capacity and progress seem to have been achieved.
4. More in-depth analysis of efficiency of the project would be useful, considering notably the budget invested versus results reached.
5. Conclusions on “state of the art” project management (box p. 60) are very theoretical. Evaluation should be clearer on effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of project management.
6. The evaluation does not sufficiently cover the issue of DSI / DSI-related activities. More information in the report would be appreciated.
7. ABS is a highly complex topic. The report is valuable in bringing together different perspectives and activities which need to be integrated into conclusions / recommendations by the Secretariat.
8. While business concerns regarding ABS were adequately described in the evaluation report, the opportunities of the business sector for ABS were not accurately reflected. Business likes to see

ABS as a tool for sustainable development and is willing to explore how best to do that. This should be considered in the evaluation report.

9. The report does not sufficiently capture the link between benefit-sharing, conservation and sustainable use. When people are able to benefit from sustainable use, it encourages them to make changes in their communities, ultimately leading to good conservation outcomes. This needs to be more clearly reflected in the evaluation report.
10. Despite some internal contradictions in the evaluation report, the report is a fair assessment that acknowledges the great work undertaken by the ABS Initiative.

In response to the presentation of *recommendations*, the SC members highlighted the following:

- Regarding Recommendation 1 on “widening the ABS concept”, it was brought forward that the ABS concept has already been widened extensively. If the adoption of an ABS programme, not strictly aligned with the NP, e.g., by including nature based tourism as suggested by the example of the Endorois, and its domestication at national level, is considered, it should occur outside of the realm of the ABS Initiative.
- The recommendation which links ABS to financing of conservation is appreciated as is the original objective of the entire ABS goal. However, official information on revenues resulting from ABS is needed. The finance report for the Post-2020 GBF does not mention ABS, thereby undermining its pertinent role.
- The ABS Initiative has a unique position as a knowledge sharing / capacity development platform for ABS implementation. If the Initiative ceases to exist, this competence will be lost. It is key to ensure sustainable competence building in order to avoid dependency on support mechanisms.
- The ABioSA and the ABS Initiative programmes have been highly complementary. For instance, the ABS Initiative was able to capitalize on lessons from the ABioSA programme and feed them back into other countries.
- In the future, it would be good to develop an overarching narrative that helps to embed both ABioSA and the ABS Initiative in a better way (from “fixed marriage” to “love marriage”).
- It is important to pursue a “no regret” approach with regard to ABS implementation. Companies will benefit from activities undertaken by ABioSA / ABS Initiative irrespective of development prospects of the Nagoya Protocol.
- Following its “negotiations” (until 2010) and “national implementation” (2011-2014) phases, the Initiative’s programme since 2015 was designed to deliver “proof of principle”. While this may not be the most efficient use of resources (it obliges the Initiative to take responsibility for actions in the value chain that are not under the control of any donor-funded external project), the Initiative fulfills its task in supporting actors at various levels in line with the Initiative’s implementation logic.
- It is positive that the evaluation proposes several methodologies to contribute to more agile and fit for purpose monitoring of the programme. The Initiative should assess these in detail and consider whether some of these may be useful when planning the next programme phase.
- When working on capacity development of different actors in different contexts it is not always given from the start what the most effective and relevant deliverables will be. This can change from country to country. Flexibility regarding what these deliverables will be and that these may not be set from the start, is highly welcome.
- Annual re-designs of the entire results framework do not seem appropriate. There should be agreement from the start on the programme outcomes / objectives and what type of information/methods will be used to measure the more long-term results achievement. With respect to outputs however, one could use the Action Research method¹ to determine what

¹ Described in the evaluation

deliverables are most useful in each individual context. Information on the chosen outputs and how these will be monitored can be included in the annual work plans. This way the results framework can include predetermined objectives providing a sense of direction, as well as allow for the necessary flexibility in adjusting the roadmap on how to contribute to the main goals.

- The organizational readiness to implement new methods and systems for planning and results monitoring must be considered. Human resources should be in place who have the necessary knowledge; financial implications and time may be an issue as well. A more agile set-up for monitoring results, which includes new methodology, demands time and capacity, must be considered before a final decision is made.

Considerations for a next phase / programme document of the ABS Initiative

In the SC meeting on 30 March 2021, a brainstorming session was held to discuss considerations for a next phase of the ABS Initiative. The discussion touched upon core areas of work of the Initiative, highlighting opportunities, challenges and building blocks. Building on this, the Secretariat presented recommendations to the SC at the present meeting, which include, but are not limited to:

- Governance: clarify functions
- Quicker gains by focus on specific sectors
- Target private sector and show change
- X-border cooperation for more fairness
- Country ownership readiness
- Networks enhancing communication
- ABS for conservation and sustainable use (CSU)
- Strengthening stakeholder networks
- Capacity development at institutions / IT / blended partners
- Longer intervention cycles
- Implementation partnerships (incl. GEF)

In the ensuing discussion, it was emphasized that the Post-2020 GBF will be ambitious to bring about transformative change and implement the SDGs. The Initiative was advised to find a way to multiply its expertise to a larger number of intervention points. This could be done through better knowledge management tools, enhanced partnerships / networks and by distributing (EU) funded projects in many more places. It was also highlighted that the value chain approach - as used in the BioInnovation Africa project - needs to be further integrated into the ABS Initiative programme. The importance of South-South partnerships was also mentioned. Further, Mr Drews indicated that the Secretariat will develop a concept outlining elements for a new phase of the Initiative programme, in due consideration of a better integration of the ABS Initiative programme and the ABioSA sub-project.

Way forward

The SC feedback on the evaluation will be shared with the evaluators by Monday, 26 April. The Secretariat will share the final evaluation report with the SC members as soon as it made available by the evaluators. A focus of the conceptual work will now be put on the development of a proposal for a follow-up phase of the ABioSA programme. In parallel, the Secretariat will work on conceptualising key objectives and outcomes for a next phase of the ABS Initiative, to be shared with the SC in September. If COP-15 is being held as scheduled (October 2021), its results will be integrated into a full-fledged ABS Initiative Programme Document 2022-2030.

Finally, Mr Drews thanked all SC members for their valuable contributions. He informed the SC about his retirement at the end of 2021. The GIZ is in the process of identifying a successor for Mr Drews, so as to allow for sufficient time for hand-over of the programme.

Closing

Marcello Maschke thanked all SC members for their participation and the ABS Initiative for the organization of this meeting.

Annexes

- I. List of Participants***
- II. Comments by European Commission on external evaluation report***

Annex I – List of participants

SC Members

Marcello Maschke	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany
Philipp Ischer	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), Switzerland
Bente Herstadt	Norad, Norway
Natalie Feltmann	Department for Environment, Forests and Fisheries (DEFF), South Africa
Véronique Koffi	Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement durable (MINEDD), Côte d'Ivoire
Aurélié Dingom	Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la Nature et du Développement durable (MINEPDD), Cameroon
Lucy Mullenkei	Indigenous Information Network
Pierre du Plessis	pers. capacity, advisor to the AUC

SC Observers

Olivier Rukundo	Secretariat of the ITPGRFA
Maria Julia Oliva	Union for Ethical BioTrade
Morten Walløe Tvedt	Molde University, Norway

ABS Initiative Secretariat

GIZ	Andreas Drews, Hartmut Meyer, Johanna Doll
Geo Media	Suhel al-Janabi, Eva Fenster

Annex II – ABS Initiative. External evaluation report – draft April 2021: Comments by European Commission (INTPA), 22/04/2021

Recommendations

- I. The ToR request “recommendations for the conceptualisation of a potential follow-up phase of the ABS Initiative and its ABioSA subproject”. Though the report provides a significant number of elements and ideas (notably in the clustered “raw answers from meetings”), the general shapes of different options for a follow-up phase are not clear. The four scenarios (continuity, network and communication, MEA, agile) are not defined. The list of recommendations mixes different levels of details and is not structured.
- II. “In any case a new strategic landscape is emerging greatly determined by the post 2020 GBF and DSI. In order to evaluate these themes and explore possible scenarios, the evaluators advise to conduct a feasibility study.” Was this not the objective of this part of the evaluators’ mission?: according to different scenarios for the new GBF, recommend different options for a new phase of ABS support?
- III. “Recommendations should really depend on where key stakeholders want the Secretariat to go”. The future of the secretariat should not be the core objective of the recommendations.

Conclusions of the evaluation

- Most evaluation questions have been answered with a certain level of detail, but it is difficult to grasp the “big picture” of the conclusions of the evaluation.
- The evaluation does not cover the dimensions of the project related to CBD negotiations, supporting African partners to build positions, participate, understand stakes, new developments (DSI etc), etc. These activities have occupied an important part of the projects time and budget, and led to useful results.
- Caribbean and Pacific should be the subject of a specific section; lessons could be learnt from comparative evaluation of certain aspects between Africa and the Pacific, where more ownership, capacity and progress seem to have been achieved.
- More in depth analysis of efficiency of the project would be useful (considering notably the budget invested vs results reached).
- Conclusions on “state of the art” project management (box p. 60 etc) are very theoretical. Evaluation should be clearer on effectiveness, efficiency, transparency etc of project management.

Some of the key conclusions that would be useful to highlight and use in the recommendations:

- A. There is an effectiveness issue regarding legal frameworks, and work at national level. Only 4 countries have been supported, and results are still “interim” since 2015 (and earlier), and will “need review”. No budget is dedicated to ABS by national governments, hence these interim results are unlikely to be sustainable. Nevertheless the evaluation notes that general awareness raising activities have started to create more demand from countries, to receive support to implement ABS frameworks; it would be important to ensure that activities at national level are more demand driven, and involve a wider range of stakeholders.
 - *(based on conclusions:*
 - *“39. The implementation of national ABS frameworks is still very much in an interim phase and in all four partner countries ABS frameworks are set to be remodelled to ensure that they are more aligned with national objectives and to take into account lessons learned since the adoption of the NP.*

- 44. *The absence of national financial resources dedicated to ABS, will make it very challenging for countries with an interim regulatory framework to move from pilot implementation (interim framework) towards a full-scale implementation (full-fledged law) without additional external financial support.*
- 27. *Governments lose interest because of the complexity of the process and lack of status information on what has been implemented.*
- EQ3. *Outcome targets have mainly been met through demand driven capacity building of national actors, the closure of ABS agreements and to a lesser extent through the implementation of regulatory frameworks“.)*

B. Different conclusions point to better impact in the case of regional approaches and tools, with value added of simplification and harmonisation; and to the need to enhance coordination within this regional approach (beyond just joint activities). Exchange platforms, coordination of stakeholders and networking is valued.

(based on conclusions:

- *“41. Regional activities implemented by the Secretariat were essentially regional capacity development delivery mechanisms for national ABS implementation with limited scope for coordinated approaches of ABS implementation.*
- *63. Consultation and exchange platforms or stakeholder forums are repeatedly mentioned as essential processes to engage with value chain stakeholders to ensure the development of an ABS compliant biotrade sector”)*

C. Value chain approach and ABS sector wide agreements have stronger potential for impacts in terms of inclusiveness, as well as more rapid economic benefits. Important in a context of a certain fatigue regarding ABS / the NP.

(based on conclusions:

- *“50. ABS value chain compliance that can be formalized through ABS-sector wide agreements is a more inclusive implementation of ABS that takes account of existing actors along value chains that are important economic levers that contribute to the sustainable use of IBR*
- *36. ABS compliant value chain models can lead to the implementation of more rapid commercial benefit sharing agreements*
- *EQ4. ABS-IP has shown early signs of impact.*
- *EQ6. The gains facilitated by ABS-IP may or may not last. There is weakness in national authorities depending on external funding and in lack of ownership at different levels. Gains achieved towards an ABS compliant IBR BioTrade will be resilient as they surf on trends that are unlikely to be reversed: i) increased global demand for IBR and ii) increased market demand for ABS compliant value chains.”)*

D. Grass root level support should be further emphasised, to ensure benefits reach communities and contribute to empowerment and livelihoods. Develop appropriate implementation modalities to reach that level.

(based on conclusions:

- *“35. Organisations such as Natural Justice provide a unique service”)*

E. E. The absence of linkages between the ABS initiative and biodiversity conservation poses fundamental questions on the relevance of the programme. This dimension should be integrated in any future approach to ABS development. The evaluation suggests that sector level plans have more potential to include biodiversity conservation measures.

(based on conclusions:

- *“23. In the design of the programme there is no causality leading to conservation of biodiversity.*
- *EQ4. So far agreements do not lead to biodiversity support.*

- *56. Benefit sharing at sector level through sector organizations and through sectoral plans can result in conservation measures improving landscapes or society.”).*

F. Evaluation’s conclusions on non monetary benefits are not clear.

- *(based on conclusions 47 and 53.)*