



Report of the Meeting of the African Steering Committee 2021

Virtual Meeting on 29 - 30 March 2021

29 March Day 1

Welcome and Introduction

Dr Wolfram Morgenroth-Klein, the Head of Division for Biodiversity at BMZ and Kauna Schröder, Principal Project Coordinator and Advisor to the Environmental Commissioners Office in the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism of Namibia, welcomed everyone as the chairs of the meeting. After a brief round of introduction, the meeting agenda was adopted.

Status of developments under the Nagoya Protocol and CBD of relevance to ABS capacity development

Dr Taukondjo Sem Shikongo (SCBD) presented on the status of developments under the Nagoya Protocol (NP), provided key results from the NP implementation assessment and shared the roadmap to COP-15 / COP-MOP 4 with participants. He stated that the implementation of the NP is still at an early stage, but Parties and non-Parties are advancing in implementation. There is increased awareness of the value of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increased involvement of communities in conservation and sustainable use, and recognition of R&D as a key to a country's valorization of genetic resources. Mr Shikongo pointed to increased requests for information and applications for access and user compliance but also emphasized the need for close national coordination amongst ministries and institutions working on ABS-related issues. He addressed key policy issues, such as the need for a multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism as well the issue of "digital sequence information" (DSI), highlighting that the term emerged in CBD discussions at COP-13 on synthetic biology and has to do with the basic building blocks of life. In closing, he underlined the need for partnerships, frank communication, trust building and bottom-up approaches before expressing gratitude to the donors of the ABS Initiative and the Secretariat of the Initiative for their continuous support.

In the ensuing discussion, it was highlighted that much work remains to be done in relation to ABS awareness-raising and communication. The importance of strengthening capacities of administration in various sectors, local communities and NGOs, was also raised. Some mentioned the need for stocktaking on NP implementation, highlighting that additional efforts may be needed to make NP implementation more efficient. With respect to DSI, it was stated that a paper on DSI policy options for OEWG 3 is currently being developed by the SCBD to prepare the further process.

Updates on relevant international processes:

– Analysis of implementation of the Nagoya Protocol in Africa

Suhel al-Janabi provided participants with an analysis of NP implementation in Africa. He provided a snapshot review of the 2021 information found on the ABS Clearing-House (ABSCH) with a focus on African countries. 45 African countries out of 130 countries globally have ratified the NP. 67 legal, administrative and policy measures are posted on the ABSCH by African countries. Out of 53 African countries, 7 have posted procedures on the ABSCH which equals 13 % of the entire African region. 4 African countries have posted IRCCs on the ABSCH. 21 countries in Africa (39%) have submitted relevant ABS information on the ABSCH which is lower than the average regional percentage. For further details, see presentation “*ABSCH 2021 focus Africa*”.

– Status of ABS in the post-2020 discussion

Pierre du Plessis provided participants with a presentation on the status of ABS in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). He highlighted that failure to implement the third objective of the CBD threatens life on Earth, but that correcting that failure might save it. He pointed out that benefit sharing was supposed to mobilize resources and provide economic incentives for sustainable use and conservation. However, due to insignificant monetary benefits there is a funding gap of around US\$ 700 billion USD a year. Mr du Plessis stated that limited incentives to conserve as well as inadequate support to IPLCs contribute to unsustainable use and habitat conversion. The Post-2020 GBF and its explicit link to the SDGs might be the last opportunity to correct this. In his view, transformative change, a new deal for people and nature, as well as mainstreaming requires a different, balanced approach to the three objectives of the CBD.

Mr al-Janabi informed participants about the zero draft of Post-2020 GBF. He made reference to Vision 2050, the four long-term goals and 20 action-oriented targets. Target 12¹ relates specifically to ABS, namely the utilization of GR / aTK and benefit-sharing. Mr al-Janabi highlighted that Target 12 is focusing on impact, but a lot of pertinent questions are yet to be addressed. For example, how can benefit-sharing be measured? MAT clauses and benefit-sharing payments are typically of confidential nature. Mr al-Janabi further presented the draft indicators in the monitoring framework as suggested by the SCBD to measure progress towards goals and indicators.

In the subsequent discussion, it was stated that the lack of proper reflection of ABS targets and indicators in the Post-2020 GBF is concerning. The ABS Initiative aims to address this issue by convening an expert group with relevant stakeholders, incl. industry and donor representatives, to explore more impact-oriented indicators. It was also suggested that the discussion on indicators in the Post-2020 GBF should put more focus on the SDGs.

Status of the DSI discussion and resulting capacity development needs

Dr. Hartmut Meyer and Pierre du Plessis presented on the status of the DSI discussion and resulting capacity development needs. To set the scene, the Initiative’s explanatory video on DSI was screened. Mr du Plessis stated that DSI is an indispensable part of modern biological sciences. There is wide-

¹ **Target 12.** By 2030, increase by [X] benefits shared for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through ensuring **access to** and the **fair and equitable sharing of benefits** arising from **utilization of genetic resources** and associated **traditional knowledge**.

spread agreement in discussions that DSI is a valuable technology and plays a major role in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. However, a key challenge concerns the fact that DSI is used to bypass national laws and treaty restrictions, resulting in a negative impact on the potential of ABS to mobilize resources. This in turn will have potential negative impacts on food, health, sustainable development and conservation. Parallel negotiations and discussions on the topic are ongoing in CBD & NP, FAO ITPGRFA, FAO CGRFA, WHO PIP Framework and UNCLOS BBNJ. The presenters highlighted the urgency for the CBD to find a solution for DSI since other international fora are waiting for a decision to be taken at CBD level.

Biology, DSI and UN Negotiations

According to Mr Meyer, the main focus in the context of DSI is on various applications in taxonomy, ecology, physiology, genetics, industrial biotechnology, cosmetics and drug development. The discussion also covers TK of IPLCs. Mr Meyer gave a concise overview of the DSI negotiations in the CBD from 2016 to 2020. COP-14 decided to establish a “science and policy-based process” on DSI elaborating recommendations to COP-15 on how to address DSI in the Post-2020 GBF. Mr Meyer emphasized that Africa will not agree to a post-2020 framework that does not include a solution for sharing benefits from the use of DSI. He also stated that the agenda for OEWG 3 is expected to be full, with a risk of running out of time and not finding a consensus on DSI. This could lead to COP-15 not adopting the Post-2020 GBF. Mr Meyer further informed participants that the governments of Norway and South Africa are leading informal DSI exchanges to improve shared understanding on the issue and explore potential solutions. The ABS Initiative is contracted to support these activities.

After a brief overview of DSI in different international fora, Mr Meyer gave a snapshot of DSI capacity development activities in 2020/2021 which were aimed at providing a better understanding of DSI and benefit-sharing options (see presentation “*DSI for ABS CDI*” for further details). Finally, Mr Meyer showed an indicative roadmap for the DSI process and relevant (ABS) meetings up to COP-15.

In the ensuing discussion, it was reiterated that DSI is acting as a roadblock in many international discussions and the CBD must address the issue in order to move forward with the process in other international fora.

Progress Report 2020

– Process, activities and achievements (Africa)

Supported by other members of the ABS Initiative, Dr Andreas Drews presented an overview of the Initiative’s process, activities and achievements in Africa in 2020. He also shed light on activities in the Caribbean and Pacific (see presentation “*Progress Report 2020*” – for more details, see Progress Report 2020). Following this, Mr Drews presented challenges that the Initiative encounters and measures to address these. One of the key challenges in 2020 was to transfer capacity development and regional exchange through virtual formats. The experiences gathered during the pandemic show that there is no need to *fully* return to physical formats in the future. From now on, the Initiative plans to make more use of semi-virtual formats and self-learning modules, however only in addition to physical events.

Highlights of the work in 2020 include:

- Benin: Analysis of access requests and uploading of 12 ABS permits on ABSCH

- Côte d'Ivoire: Final validation of draft ABS decree, now up for signature
- Kenya: 10-year celebrations of the Nagoya Protocol by Kenya Wildlife Service and the Bogoria County Government
- South Africa: Support grants for 7 SMME in the biotrade sector; additional to the 10 SMMEs in 2019; 6 sector development plans being developed: *Aloe ferox*, honeybush, buchu, marula, baobab and the essential oil cluster; Declaration of Ethical Conduct for Engagement with IPLC related to BCP support (with DEFF and Natural Justice) in ZAF, BWA, NAM, ZWE
- Follow up webinars of Global Dialogue on DSI with support of NOR and ZAF and in cooperation with SCBD
- Transferring capacity development and regional exchange in (semi-)virtual formats

In addition, Mr Drews informed the SC about global and regional events in Africa that were held in 2020 (for details, see presentation "*Progress Report 2020*"). He pointed out that the ABS contract training for lawyers and paralegals supporting IPLCs in partnership with the NGO Natural Justice has been postponed to the fourth quarter of 2021. After this, Tobias Dierks showed a preview of the new joint online platform, a topic-related website that presents the three projects (ABS Initiative, ABioSA, BIA) with their unique selling points. He also emphasized the urgent need for modernizing communication approaches within the biodiversity community.

After presentation of various knowledge products produced by the Initiative, Mr Drews gave an overview of the Initiative's financial situation. He presented the expenditure including co-funding for ACP countries against intervention processes as well as the yearly funding commitments of donors since 2005. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions, the expenditure in 2020 amounts to 3,124,112 Euros as compared to 3,117,647 Euros in 2019. Core contributions are provided by BMZ, SECO and the EU. In 2020, the Francophonie was not able to provide funding to the ABS Initiative. The funding by the Government of Norway is spent exclusively on DSI-related activities, such as the Global DSI Dialogue.

The BMZ donor contribution is available until end of March 2022 with the possibility of a three-month extension until June 2022. BMZ and SECO are strongly committed to continuing their support to the ABS Initiative: BMZ intends to make available to the Initiative ideally 3 mio Euros until 2025. This continuation is subject to budgetary approval processes of the German government which will only be concluded at a later stage in light of the upcoming elections. SECO aims to support the second phase of the ABioSA programme with a similar contribution and duration as in the first phase. The Initiative will submit the project proposal, which is currently under preparation, to SECO in June 2021.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were made:

- More attention may need to be brought to the issue of donor visibility on the new online platform. The platform provides a good opportunity to emphasize the role of donors as *real partners*, with a view to building trust between donors and provider countries. The Initiative will take up the discussion regarding donor visibility on a bilateral basis to determine needs and requests.
- More emphasis should be placed on the link between ABS and natural resource conservation. Further thinking is required on how to reflect this link in the future phase of the ABS Initiative.

After some clarifying questions, the following was agreed:

1. *The Initiative is to follow up on the request of a SC member to correct the slide on South Africa in the presentation “Progress Report 2020” by inserting the following: “Reviewed NEMBA is at cabinet level for approval”.*
2. *The Initiative is to divide the expenditure figure for Natural Justice according to topics (IPLC CEPA materials, Kenya, Madagascar) as reflected in the grant agreement.*
3. *The Progress Report is to be adopted following the insertion of graphs showing the evolution of the outcome indicators to better track progress of the Initiative’s work. The amended report is to be sent to the SC at the end of April for final approval after a silence procedure.*

30 March Day 2

Welcome / Adoption of the Agenda

Following the adoption of the agenda, Dr Wolfram Morgenroth-Klein announced that the ABS Initiative currently acts under high uncertainty due to the ongoing pandemic and meetings may continue to take place in a virtual format.

Work plan and indicative budget 04/2021 to 03/2022

An overview of the work plan including indicative budget allocations for the timeframe 04/2021-03/2022 was presented by Mr Drews (see *Work Plan 04/2021-03/2022 for Africa* for further details). Mr Drews gave an overview of national processes in the Initiative’s partner countries as well as an overview of the international agenda, planned ABS activities and tools soon to be available in 2021 / 2022.

Possible adaptations in the international agenda may be necessary depending on developments in the corona crisis. Physical meetings at international / regional level are unlikely to take place before the third quarter of 2021. To the extent possible, national meetings may be held. Mr Drews stated that the 13th Pan African ABS Workshop will take place in a virtual format, split into two meetings before and after OEWG 3. The date of the 14th Pan African ABS Workshop may need to be shifted because budget will not be available to hold this event still within the current phase of the ABS Initiative.

The presentation of the budget revealed that 2,7 mio. Euros are secured as ABS Initiative core budget and approximately 880,000 Euros from the SECO budget are available to finalise the current ongoing phase of ABioSA. Mr Drews highlighted that the SECO budget only covers the period from April to October 2021. A proposal for the continuation of a second phase for the ABioSA programme from November 2021 onwards for 3 to 3,5 years is under preparation.

Following the presentation of the work plan and budget, the discussion evolved around these key issues:

- The EU contribution to the ABS Initiative ends in June 2022. The current work plan of the Initiative covers the period until end of March 2022 which is closely linked to the commissioning cycle of BMZ, the basic commissioning party to the ABS Initiative. The Secretariat has submitted a request for extension of the phase until end of June 2022 to BMZ which would be fully aligned with the EU co-funding period. After BMZ approval, the work plan will be revised and submitted to the SC. Further discussion will be needed on how to take things forward (partner countries, exit strategies, etc.).

- The format of physical meetings will continue to play a key role after the pandemic in order to allow cooperation countries to benefit from lessons learned in partner countries. The value of face-to-face community exchanges was recognized.
- The wording “subject to available funding” used in the budget reflects that the Initiative aims to respond to opportunities and ABS requests in a flexible manner by providing on-demand support.
- The close collaboration between the Initiative and the AU Commission was essential for supporting the African Group of Negotiators. The AU hopes to see budget allocated to further strengthen the AU online coordination mechanism and to support the ongoing AU reform. The latter involves the move of the ABS mainstreaming policy from the AU Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (DHRST) to the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA). A Letter of Intent with the Commission has been signed and the Initiative will continue its cooperation with the AU in the usual manner.
- Cooperation with the AU Commission could be further enhanced by looking, for example, at complementarities of donors in the field of green economy. Additional opportunities for synergies are expected once the move to DREA has been carried out.
- ABS support for Cameroon is no longer provided through the ABS Initiative, but through the BIA project. ABS-related activities for Cameroon are occurring in the context of the BIA project.

After some questions for clarification, the work plan including budget were approved by the SC subject to the following amendments:

1. *In order to better follow-up on the impacts of individual projects, the work plan is to be amended to provide more specific information on country activities (e.g. in Madagascar, Namibia, Benin and Côte d’Ivoire).*

Initial findings of the external evaluation of the ABS Initiative

In 2020, the Secretariat of the Initiative commissioned an external evaluation of the Initiative’s current programme phase with a view to guiding the design of a possible next phase of the ABS Initiative starting in April 2022. Since the evaluation team has been busy with conducting interviews, it has not yet been able to compile the draft evaluation report which requires proper triangulation of the information received in the interviews. However, Mr Drews presented the available results of an opinion survey, which focused on the following: global policy framework; project management cycle; implementation strategies; and ABS processes.

The survey is a stratified sample of a target audience ranging from community leaders to members of the SC. Mr Drews presented the opinions which were raised by interviewees on the question “Imagine you are charged with leading the next phase of the ABS Initiative / ABioSA; what would be your top three priorities?” or “What would be your recommendations for a follow up phase?”. Various opinions were compiled in a confidential manner and some of the answers address needs for improvement for ABS / NP implementation as such, e.g.

- More prominent role of CBD in capacity development
- Benefit-sharing needs to contribute to conservation and sustainable use
- Maximise potential of multilateral approaches for benefit-sharing (Art. 10 NP)
- Need for simplified compliance procedures and minimal reporting requirements.

The evaluation team is to submit the draft report to the Secretariat of the ABS Initiative by 14 April and the Initiative is to forward the report to the SC as soon as it receives it. The Initiative is to call for a

special SC meeting on 22 April from 13.00 to 16.00 CEST to discuss the findings of the external evaluation with the SC.

What can we learn from ABioSA and BioInnovation Africa?

Suhel al-Janabi and Hartmut Meyer gave an overview of the components, outcomes and lessons learnt from the ABioSA and BioInnovation Africa projects. Lessons learnt from both projects feed into implementation of the Initiative's activities, e.g. the valorisation trainings. Observations from the ABS-compliant value chain work from both projects were presented (for details, see presentation "*What can we learn from ABioSA and BIA?*"). These observations may also guide the ABS Initiative in its deliberations on what may be important for the next programme phase.

The resulting discussion focused on the following issues:

- Better ways need to be found to integrate communities as resource and TK providers. Evidence suggests that governance and management of natural resources by communities is the best approach for conservation.
- Morocco has in the past expressed interest in joining the BIA project as a partner country. The Initiative and BMZ took duly note of Morocco's interest.
- ABioSA is a daughter project under the roof of the ABS Initiative. Ear-marked funding is provided by SECO for support of a regional approach in South Africa and the Southern African region. BIA, a sister project to the ABS Initiative, aims to help more advanced countries in accessing markets and refining their regulatory systems.
- Replicating the results achieved in the Southern African group of countries to other multi-country groups in Africa may be worthwhile. A key question to be addressed: "What are the enabling conditions for such replication to be successful?"
- COP-15 is tentatively scheduled to take place from 11 to 24 October 2021 in Kunming, China. The SCBD will announce in April whether the dates for OEWG 3 and COP-15 have been confirmed.

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

A brainstorming session was held with the tool *Idea flip* to discuss considerations for a next phase of the ABS Initiative. The discussion was based on summarized information compiled by the evaluation team about the recommendations given by the interviewees for a next ABS Initiative phase, lessons learned from the ABioSA and BIA projects and challenges identified in the Progress Report. Issues such as the selection of partner countries, core processes, ABS compliant value chains & Green Recovery, DSI / Benefit Sharing / One Health were discussed. The Secretariat preidentified and presented opportunities, challenges and building blocks of the ABS Initiative. The SC participants contributed fruitfully to the subsequent discussion.

Some of the **opportunities** that were mentioned include a steady market growth of the natural product sector. The level of interest on biodiversity is currently very high in the business community. Major cosmetic brands have developed sustainability strategies specifically focused on biodiversity. There is growing business commitment around the issue of responsible sourcing and due diligence.

Opportunities in the field of green finance were also mentioned. Nature-based solutions and ABS can play an important role in combatting climate change. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the

financial mechanism of the CBD, is also key in supporting countries' implementation of the new Post-2020 GBF. More ABS value chain related projects could be supported by the GEF.

The discussion also revealed a number of **challenges**, some of which are summarized below:

- Complexity is a key challenge. It is not only difficult to “sell” ABS politically but also to set up adequate systems for different rights holders. Time is required to implement ABS effectively and equitably.
- The lack of national budgets poses a problem for ABS implementation. ABS focal points are often in charge of several international conventions. Fluctuation of staff makes the institutionalisation of capacity difficult.
- The business understanding of value chains is often limited at the level of providing countries. Lengthy processes involve high transaction costs for users.
- ABS fatigue is a continuous challenge. Donors expect to see “proof of principle” that the ABS mechanism works.
- The complexities of TK keep users from collaborating with communities or from working with resources. Working at the level of communities and connecting communities to the market is crucial. Also, more incentives for communities are needed.
- Decentralisation is key. ABS support should be wide-spread and not only focus on “flagships”.
- Everything starts with a good and honest discussion. History has not made communities comfortable and immediately trusting. Users and providers need to engage.

Building blocks to successful ABS implementation were also brought forward. It was emphasized that close partnership is needed among governments, private sector and academia. Some advocated for blending processes with financial institutions, such as the German state-owned development bank KfW. Some considered it important to roll out the practical tools developed by the ABS Initiative and its partners, e.g. the *Contractual Tool 3.0*. Others drew attention to the supply chain angle of ABS, highlighting that it is important to keep the supply chain link in mind but also recognize the need for approaches other than PIC and MAT.

Way forward

The final session of the meeting focused on how to deal with current implementation uncertainties and to discuss potential ways forward. The majority of SC members agreed that the ABS Initiative should continue to strengthen its partner country approach while providing regional support with a view to “leaving no one behind”. Strong foundations have been built in partner countries and there is value in upscaling them to other countries. However, national staff or strong local partners, such as in Benin, are needed for successful ABS implementation in partner countries. Mr Drews indicated that the upcoming evaluation report may guide the Initiative's further thinking.

It was further agreed that the ABS Initiative should capitalize on its knowledge assets and expertise by continuing to roll out its experience to many more countries. A roadmap for successful ABS implementation was considered useful in this context. A representative of the AU Commission reinforced the importance of regional cooperation for ABS implementation. The AU hopes to see concrete regional-level activities integrated in upcoming work plans of the ABS Initiative. In the future, a mix of physical and virtual events may make more budget available for ground implementation activities. Overall, keeping a level of flexibility was considered the best approach with respect to ABS implementation.

As a way forward, a donor of the SC suggested to concentrate on “no regret” implementation measures, such as value chain development and community work. When focusing merely on policy measures, it needs to be kept in mind that progress can be slow and there are limited absorption capacities of administrations. Finally, the importance of the private sector and the role of IPLCs for conservation was reiterated. There is a need to set up systems in order for benefits to arrive at the community level, for example by building resources with TK components from the ground.

Following the discussion, Mr Drews summarized the immediate next steps:

- 1. The Work Plan and the Progress Report are to be approved subject to the discussed amendments following a silence procedure. Both documents are to be shared with the SC members before the end of April for final approval.*
- 2. The ABS Initiative is to provide the SC with updates of the international meeting calendar and is to adapt the Work Plan where needed.*
- 3. The evaluation report is expected to be made available to the Secretariat on 14th April 2021 and is to be shared immediately with the SC members. The Initiative is to call for a special SC meeting on 22 April from 13.00 to 16.00 CEST to discuss the findings of the external evaluation of the SC.*
- 4. The Secretariat is to work on the Initiative’s new Programme Document (2022-2030) once the evaluation report is available. A proposal by the Secretariat of the Initiative can be expected in autumn 2021.*

Before coming to a close, Mr Wolfram Morgenroth-Klein thanked everyone for their fruitful contributions and the Initiative for the organization of this meeting.

Closing

Meeting of the African Steering Committee 2021

List of participants

SC Members

Wolfram Morgenroth-Klein Marcello Maschke	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany
Philippe Mayaux Florence Van Houtte	European Commission, DG INTPA
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
Kauna Schroder	Ministry for Environment and Tourism (MET), Namibia
Christine Akello	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Uganda
Mahlet Teshome	African Union Commission (AUC)
Ahmed Birouk	Institut agronomique et vétérinaire Hassan II, Morocco
Shamiso Mungwashu	Fair Trade Support Network Zimbabwe (FSNZ)
Lucy Mulenkei	Indigenous Information Network
Jazzy Rasolojaona	Natural Justice
Pierre du Plessis	pers. capacity, advisor to the AUC

SC Observers

Taukondjo Sem Shikongo	Secretariat of the CBD
Kent Nnadozi Olivier Rukundo	Secretariat of the ITPGRFA
Maria Julia Oliva	Union for Ethical BioTrade
Morten Walløe Tvedt	Molde University, Norway
Alicja Koslowska Mery Ciacci	EU, DG ENV
Gaute Voigt-Hanssen	Ministry of Climate and Environment, Norway

ABS Initiative Secretariat

GIZ	Andreas Drews, Hartmut Meyer, Lena Fey, Tobias Dierks
Geo Media	Suhel al-Janabi, Eva Fenster