



News

The highest decision-making body of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Conference of the Parties (COP), which consists of more than 2,300 delegates from governments, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, indigenous communities, industry bodies and academics, came together for the seventh meeting to find ways to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010.

The Seventh COP (COP-7) meeting hosted by Malaysia was concluded after 2 weeks of meetings and discussion. The COP-7 produced a host of outcome-oriented work programs with a quantitative approach to protect biodiversity by adopting measurable indicators and specific goals for the overall 2010 targets.

The first step to be taken was towards an international regime on access and benefit-sharing of genetic resources, which will determine future rules on access and benefit-sharing. CBD recognizes that companies and scientists should no longer have free access to genetic resources but must share the benefits derived from these materials with source countries. At the end the delegates agreed not to have new work programs for the next six years. Instead, work will focus on implementation and reviewing progress towards the 2010 target. This shift in approach will bring the CBD back on track as an over-burdened agenda can only strain resources. As one observer points out: They should get back to basics.

(More information on:
<http://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2004/2/24/features/7378760&sec=features>)

Meetings, contacts & Seminars

Meetings

IBSAR visit to Costa Rica. Drs. Marwan El-Sabban, Fadia Homaidan, and Salma Talhouk, representing AUB's

"Initiative for Biodiversity Studies in Arid Regions (IBSAR) were invited by Dr. Jose Zaglul (President of EARTH University) to meet with administrators, faculty members and officials at the Institute for Biodiversity (INBio), EARTH University and the Ministry of Energy and Environment (MINAE) in Costa Rica.

The objectives of the meetings were to:

- Identify fundraising mechanisms adopted by INBio and EARTH
- Investigate prospects for collaboration with INBio and EARTH.
- Expand IBSAR's outreach by reviewing successful partnerships such as the one established between MINAE and INBio.
- Invite Dr. Jose Zaglul to serve on IBSAR's advisory board.
- Introduce IBSAR at an international level.

The trip included:

Two-Day Visit to INBio (National Institute for Biodiversity Studies)

(www.inbio.ac.cr)

INBio is a private non-governmental, non-profit research organization and biodiversity management center that was established in 1989.

Dr. Gamez, who was the driving force behind the creation of INBio gave a briefing on the history of the institution and its relation to biodiversity in Costa Rica.

Today INBio is focusing mostly on building a database on Costa Rica biodiversity. They have mobilized a team of field trainees (parataxonomists) to conduct regular collection expeditions and have done away with the "Darwinian approach" which relied on taxonomy experts to conduct field expeditions and collections. Through this approach, members of local communities are trained and involved in the collection and



presorting of the different specimens while research (taxonomy) is performed on these acquisitions through partnerships with local and international institutions and/or individual scientists. With respect to the generation of nature-based products, INBio's activities focus on extraction and prescreening of extracts with some fractionation. Positive findings are used to solicit interested investors. INBio has relied primarily on British Technology Group (BTG), which produces, owns and manages the patent and provides licenses for market outreach. The profits are shared between INBio and BTG.

In an attempt to ensure its sustainability, INBio focused on 'bioliteracy' and information dissemination by partnering with the media and by establishing the INBio press that currently produces field guides for tourists, games, children books etc... An INBio Park which recreates different ecosystems of the Costa Rica was also established.

Emphasizing the investment in their long-term objectives, INBio's director said that " for the last fifteen years, INBio has been selling the dream and not the product".

Four days visit to EARTH University

Highlights of the visit to EARTH included a meeting with: Dr. Bert Kohlman, Coordinator of Natural Sciences at the University and also our escort and guide. Dr. Kohlman described the research collaboration with USA institutions and NASA, and other Latin American partners to study ways to control "Chagas Disease". EARTH contribution to the partnership involves project coordination (Dr. Kohlman being the coordinator) and testing of extracts from native

organisms against the biological activity of the disease carrier, the kissing bug. Dr. Kohlman discussed his other research activities in biodiversity research which resulted in the production of a UNESCO-sponsored book on Costa Rica in collaboration with NASA. He also presented the approach he is using to identify important biodiversity areas in Costa Rica and the effectiveness of protected areas distribution in capturing this biodiversity.

Meeting with Dr. B.K. Singh, was an opportunity to understand his approach to provide an environment and framework for innovation and generation of marketable products through classroom teaching.

Dr. Zaglul was invited to serve on IBSAR's advisory board to which he agreed and promised his full support. Several issues were raised in this respect. Briefly these are:

- a. IBSAR with its current status, of not being featured on AUB's priority list, and its existence as an informal entity will not succeed in recruiting support because it does not provide the stability sought by donors and/or philanthropists. Therefore, integration of IBSAR as a formal University entity will be required.
- b. It was suggested that the advisory board should consist of diverse group of individuals who are committed to help either financially or through improved networking and international exposure. Funding provisions are essential to secure an annual meeting for the members of the advisory board to keep them engaged in all activities conducted by IBSAR.
- c. EARTH is ready to start a formal partnership with IBSAR and to lead an umbrella agreement between INBio/MINAE/EARTH on the Costa Rican side.



- d. No solicitation or invitations for any new members of the advisory board will be made until IBSAR's status within AUB is clarified, and by-laws established. These will ensure that the existence of IBSAR is carried beyond the present faculty members involved.

One-day visit to MINAE

Highlights of the visit to MINEA included a one-hour meeting with his Excellency the Minister of MINAE Mr. Carlos Manuel Rodriguez Echandi. The Prospects for collaboration between Lebanon and Costa Rica were discussed. Such collaboration could be achieved by relying on institutions such as EARTH, IBSAR/AUB and INBio as the driving force behind the collaborations. The minister was highly enthusiastic and interested, and he offered IBSAR direct contact with him for investigating prospects and venues for collaboration.

Concluding remarks

It must be emphasized that mutual benefits for AUB and IBSAR will result from this more formal structure. These will include educational delivery, fund raising, prestige, and national and regional leadership in the field of biodiversity. AUB's readiness to handle such issues as patent generation, patent protection, and market identification must be addressed. This is relevant not only to IBSAR-developed products, but any innovative research finding at AUB. The University should develop strategies for marketing and generating revenues from patentable and marketable products generated at AUB, including the development of new policies, contracts, and agreements with the private sector.

IBSAR's outreach should be expanded by producing University publications targeting the general public.

(For more information: report on web site)

Workshop: "Prospects for the Identification and Conservation of Biodiversity Rich Areas in Lebanon" 26 February 2004

The workshop was organized by IBSAR and held on Thursday, February 26, 2004, at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel in Beirut. The objective for the workshop was to bring together representatives from the scientific community to discuss



Biodiversity Rich Areas in Lebanon (BIDRAL), constraints and potentials, the applicability of international criteria, the role of public/private sector and the criteria for identifying such areas in the region. The workshop was attended by participants from the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, National Center for Remote Sensing, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University in Germany, the Lebanese University and the American University of Beirut. The first three sessions were assigned to short presentations, while a fourth was dedicated to the consolidation of feedback from the participants and agreeing to a plan of action. The presentations, reflecting the diverse interest/background of the participants, include mapping tools that allowed for interdisciplinary input/sharing of data (vegetation maps, GIS, forestry maps), current mechanisms and criteria for ranking natural, semi-natural and managed plant cover in Lebanon, the global experience of ecotourism and nature conservation and the holistic approach to BIDRAL of landscape that



integrated conservation concerns and cultural ones.

So was the workshop successful?

I think it was because it initiated an interdisciplinary dialogue among those concerned with CBD in Lebanon using BIDRAL as a practical/tangible framework for addressing the latter rather than the abstract/elusive concept of CBD. Sharing tools and methodologies, exchanging notes and welcomed constructive criticism on the respective approaches to CBD is the first step towards consolidating knowledge and the foundation for a holistic, integrated approach. The workshop was equally significant because it challenged conventional approaches to CBD namely, conventional reliance on taxonomy and the role of scientists as 'key players', rather the necessity of alternative approaches were argued utilizing para-taxonomy and accepting that local communities, agricultural coops and NGOs can, and should, play an equally significant role in the identification and conservation of BIDRAL. A side benefit of the workshop was introducing IBSAR. Answering queries as to the who, what and how of 'IBSAR' the workshop organizer, S. Talhouk, explained how the initiative came to be, its mission and objectives, promising to keep them posted on future plans and activities. The participants left, challenged by the concept of BIDRAL but equally interested in this new initiative from AUB; IBSAR.

Jala Makhzoumi

Fund Raising

Funds received

IBSAR has been selected by UNDP to implement the following two projects for the Ministry of Environment:

LEB/97/G31 "Top up Biodiversity Enabling Activity" (39,950 USD)

LEB/03/010 "Development of the National Biosafety Framework" (60,000 USD)

The team, which began its activities in February, will manage these projects with an additional UNDP funding of 222,969 USD). Members and associate members involved in these two projects are A. Al Khatib, R. Baalbaki, D. Jamali, H. Mohtaseb, W. Nasser, E. Sattout, R. Talhouk, and S. N. Talhouk.

Proposal submitted!!!