

ABS Governance Dialogues

Documenting resource and knowledge flows in an international certificate of origin scheme

Lima, 21st January, 2007

Hotel Plaza del Bosque

Almost 13 years since the idea was first proposed a group of international technical experts will meet in Lima, from the 22nd to 25th of January 2007, to examine the potential role of a system of certificates of origin/source/legal provenance as part of an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing (ABS). The original proposal for an international certificate system to provide evidence of the origin and legal provenance of resources was developed in Peru in response to concerns over biopiracy and the challenge of developing mechanism to make use of resources dependent upon evidence of a legal right. This makes Lima and very apt location for the first meeting of the Technical Expert Group (TEG).

One of the key challenges facing the TEG experts in their deliberations will be the need to identify practical means for the implementation of any certificate system. Research carried out by UNU-IAS on the practicality, feasibility and cost of an international system of certificates of origin http://www.ias.unu.edu/binaries2/abswg-03-inf-05-en_revised%202.pdf demonstrated the existence of a wide range of practices amongst ex-situ collections for the documentation of resources, and the potential benefits of more harmonised standards for the keeping of records by collections.

In November 2004, participants at the Paris Roundtable on Certificates of Origin (<http://www.iddri.org/iddri/telecharge/biodiv/workshop-abs.pdf>) noted that need for flexibility within any scheme in order to ensure that any certificate system would be designed with due regard for the changes in technology and the need to record resources and their origin/source/legal provenance in a manner which adapts to the changing nature of resources as they move through various stages of research, development and transformation. The roundtable was organised by the ABS Governance Program, a collaboration between the United Nations University, Institute

of Advanced Studies UNU-IAS, the Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales (IDDRI) and the Center for the Philosophy of Law (CPDR), at the University of Louvain, Work by the ABS Governance Program partners has also involved participation in the MOSAICS project. As part of this work the documentation practices of microbial collections were reviewed with a view towards proposal of a harmonised system for documenting resources and importantly creating the link between resources entering and leaving ex-situ collections. One of the key proposals emerging from the MOSAICS project argues for the establishment of a system of unique individual identifiers for microbial resources.

One common thread arising in all studies has been the importance for greater understanding of the ongoing practices of different sectors in documenting resources, whether adopted on a voluntary basis or in response to client demands or regulatory obligations. Also deemed of importance is the need to understand the capabilities of legal and technical mechanisms for enabling users to identify countries of origin and rights-holders from whom consent must be obtained for use of resources and/or traditional knowledge.

To further understanding of these issues, the ABS Governance Program will organise an international ABS Dialogue on *the Role of Documentation in ABS and TK Governance*. *The ABS Dialogue* the first of a new series of Dialogues organised by the ABS Governance Program. This meeting will be held in Lima, Peru, on the 21st of January 2007 back to back with the first TEG meeting. The purpose of the meeting will be to promote informed debate on the role of documentation in helping identify the origin/source/legal provenance of biological and genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. The meeting will bring together representatives of government, industry, ex-situ collections, indigenous peoples, local communities and the research sector, and will include many of the TEG experts. Experts in documentation practices from various sectors have been invited to provide insight into the practices of industry, research, ex-situ collections, indigenous peoples and local communities.

The Lima ABS Dialogue, the first of a series of planned international ABS Dialogues designed to support the ongoing negotiation of an international ABS Regime, follows on from an earlier series of annual Paris Roundtables on ABS Governance, organised by UNU-IAS, IDDRI and CPDR. These roundtables covered issues such as user measures, certificates of origin and compliance measures. The ABS Dialogues, organised as intersessional meetings between meetings of the Working Group on ABS, are designed to provide a space for negotiators, stakeholders and rights-holders to meet and discuss important technical issues key issues pertinent to the negotiation of an international ABS regime in an informed and productive fashion.

For more information on the Lima ABS Dialogue, future ABS Dialogues, and the ABS Governance Program contact **Brendan Tobin, at tobin@ias.unu.edu**