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Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit-sharing: Canadian Perspectives



High-level Experts Meeting in Tokyo
Addressing the Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) Challenges in the
Context of the Convention on Biological Diversity
8 -9 February 2007
Tokyo, Japan

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Why is Canada Developing an ABS Policy Framework?

- To ensure facilitated access to genetic resources
- To encourage additional benefits from use of genetic resources





Domestic approach to ABS in Canada needs to take into account:

- Canada's jurisdictional reality and existing practices
- Wide-ranging public policy goals
- Canada's international obligations
- Respect, maintenance and preservation of traditional knowledge
- Engagement of key stakeholders





Canadian interest:

- Canadians are both providers and users of genetic resources
- Interest of the Canadians about ABS related to:
 - Potential impact on research, innovation, commercialization and
 - Potential to improve conservation



Significant movement towards the development of Canadian policy on ABS

- Federal/Provincial/Territorial government's (FPT) Working Group on ABS created in September 2004 by Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for Forests, Wildlife, Endangered Species and Fisheries and Aquaculture.
- Scoping Paper and Guiding Principles developed.



Guiding Principles for ABS Policy Development in Canada

- Broad in Scope
- Environment-focused
- Practical and Economically Supportive
- Improve Health and Well-being of Canadians
- Involvement of Aboriginal Peoples in policy development and implementation
- Simple, Efficient, Adaptable and Flexible
- Balanced, Equitable and Transparent
- Enabling



ABS in the Canadian Domestic System

- **Impossible to know extent of bioprospecting activity, but it is occurring in all regions**
 - Valuable species spread out all across the country in different ecosystem
 - Canada's extreme environments (Arctic, hydro vents, toxic sites)
 - Unique resources, unique environmental and social conditions
- **Limited ability currently for Canada to control access to or share in benefits from our genetic resources**
 - Policy and legal gaps exist
 - Canadians should benefit from use of Canada's genetic resources



Key domestic engagement activities

- Workshop on the S&T Agenda: December 2004 (Ottawa)
- Northern Workshop on ABS and associated TK (15-17 March 2005, Whitehorse)
- FPT DM/ADM-level meeting on ABS (Gatineau, June 21-22, 2005)
- Workshop on ABS and Agriculture (8-9 November 2005, Saskatoon)
- Workshop on ABS and Forest Genetic Resources (Fredericton, February 21-22, 2006)
- Canadian National Meeting on ABS and the Issue of Certificates of Origin/Source/Legal provenance (Gatineau, November 16, 2006)
- Potential forthcoming workshops
 - Workshop on ABS and Marine Genetic Resources
 - Workshop on ABS and IP



Issues Raised:

- **Plant Genetic Resources**
 - Need to strengthen global approaches
 - Both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation strategies are important
- **Animal Genetic Resources**
 - Long-established tradition of exchange by contract in the Agricultural sector, often for payment
 - Progress has been made on ABS policy for genebanks, but this is new area
 - Currently not as well preserved as plant resources
- **Microbes**
 - Little known in Canada but prolific and potentially economically significant
- **Gaps**
 - Native medicinal plants and associated traditional knowledge



A well designed ABS policy aimed at regulating access and ensuring benefit-sharing should create opportunities

- **Environmentally**
 - Improved conservation of biodiversity
 - Protection of domestic and global species for social good
 - Benefit sharing in support of conservation
 - Development of sustainable resource management practices
 - Enhanced value and taxonomic knowledge
- **Economically**
 - Foster R&D in genetic resources
 - Develop legal certainty for researchers and biotechnology companies
- **Socially**
 - Incentive for sustainable and ethical use of genetic resources and associated knowledge
 - Encourage sharing of scientific knowledge for the common good
 - Rural employment and regional development
 - Sustainable development of Aboriginal communities



General Conclusions:

- Experts in various fields clearly stated that genetic resources are critical
- Further discussion will be needed to better document and understand the extent to which Canadian researchers, companies, farmers and others are dependent on the exchange of genetic resources and what implication ABS policies may have for particular sectors
- A holistic approach is needed for ABS but there are differences which need to be recognized across plants, animal and microbes





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