

THE ABS PROJECT IN ACTION: PREPARING FOR THE GLOBAL ABS REGIME

Earlier this month the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) began the “next level” of negotiations regarding implementation of the concept of access to genetic resources and equitable sharing of the benefits from their utilisation (also known as ABS.) This current stage responds to the mandate of the last Conference of the Parties to the CBD and the CBD’s Strategic Plan and Multi-year Programme of Work, as well as to the WSSD Programme of Implementation, all of which declared a clear need for the development and implementation of a “global regime” on ABS, utilising key documents such as the so-called “Bonn Guidelines on ABS.” The issue is becoming increasingly complex, as many developing countries call for clearer and stricter measures and mechanisms to enable the creation of a truly functional regime at all levels from sub-national to international. Against this background, the ABS Project (a project of the ELP, in conjunction with many partners, with funding by the German Ministry for Development (BMZ)), undertook a number of key activities, including (1) co-sponsorship with the University of Davis (USA) of a workshop addressing the ABS legislation and legislative needs of the Pacific Rim, (2) co-sponsorship with SPDA, INE and INRENA of a Latin American workshop on the concept of “certificates of origin” (or legal provenance) of genetic resources, and possible interfaces with CITES; and (3) formal participation in the CBD’s Ad-hoc Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing. All three events will ultimately produce major publications on various aspects of ABS. In particular, the ABS Project’s documentary inputs to the Ad-hoc Working Group will be revised for publication in the coming CBD COP in Kuala Lumpur, and later used in two books – one on ABS issues at the international level, and another providing a “tool kit” for ABS Implementation at the national level.