



## STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

### On Sharing Biodiversity Data from Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

A group of representatives of national environmental regulators, policy officials, environmental consultants and non-governmental organizations from the West Asia region including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, together with a number of global experts, met at a two day workshop in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, on 15-16 September 2015 to address issues on the theme of *Unlocking Biodiversity Data from Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)*.

The workshop was hosted by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA), Sultanate of Oman; led by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) under a project funded by the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI) for the Eye on Earth programme, and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA).

After discussing some of the tools, best practices, opportunities and challenges involved in such data sharing, the group agreed on the following general statement of principles, while emphasizing that they do not represent formal positions or commitments of the organizations represented at the workshop:

1. Free and open sharing of primary biodiversity data in EIAs, structured according to established biodiversity information standards, adds value to these data, and helps countries in the region to contribute towards national and global targets such as those agreed through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for the Strategic Plan on Biodiversity 2011-2020, and to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. In particular, mobilizing primary biodiversity data from EIAs contributes towards Target 2 of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets on the integration of biodiversity values into planning processes, and towards Target 19 on the wider sharing and transfer of biodiversity knowledge.
3. The process of sharing biodiversity data from EIAs using tools and practices developed through the GBIF/Eye on Earth project is technically and scientifically sound, contributing to the common good and to biodiversity conservation.
4. Sharing of biodiversity data from EIAs can bring numerous benefits and opportunities, including:
  - Improved spatial planning, for example, by contributing to national spatial planning to ensure appropriate zoning for different forms of land use and development and aiding strategic/regional environmental assessments
  - Improved access to existing baseline data to support future assessments
  - Increased efficiency of data gathering in EIAs, through avoiding the need for repeat data capture
  - Improved quality of EIAs, through greater transparency of data on which reports are based, and through encouragement of the use of standard data recording practices
  - Enhanced reputation for EIA practitioners, governments and companies
  - Improved scientific knowledge of biodiversity in the region, for example in relation to rare and threatened species, leading to better-informed decisions on biodiversity conservation

- Filling data gaps on seasonal occurrences of biodiversity in the region, for example for migratory and ephemeral species, given the short time available for many EIA surveys
  - Identification of large-scale, cumulative and transboundary impacts of development through biodiversity monitoring
  - Opportunities for education and awareness-raising of biodiversity, for example, in local communities
  - Opportunity to build a repository of high-quality data to build a fuller picture of biodiversity in the region
  - Opportunities to add value to business and countries by knowing present biodiversity values
5. Standardization and implementation of international best practices are essential to assist data quality, sharing and use, given the diverse range and scope of biodiversity data collected from EIAs;
  6. Regional human and technical capacity and infrastructure are critical for the long-term preservation and timely access to biodiversity data gathered through EIAs, and engaging with institutions such as GBIF will enhance such capacity;
  7. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and regionally-based research institutions contribute important data and information useful to the private sector in carrying out EIAs;
  8. Data from EIAs are just one of many important sources of biodiversity information to be mobilized for improved decision making in the region, and efforts are needed to support biodiversity data publishing more generally from West Asia through engagement with GBIF and other initiatives;
  9. Implementation of the principles expressed in this statement will depend on the particular national circumstances and regulatory arrangements of countries in the West Asia region;
  10. Issues expressed at the workshop will help to inform a new best practice guide on mobilizing biodiversity data from EIAs to be published in English and Arabic in coming months as part of the GBIF/ Eye on Earth project.

**—Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 16 September, 2015**

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