



ReFOP

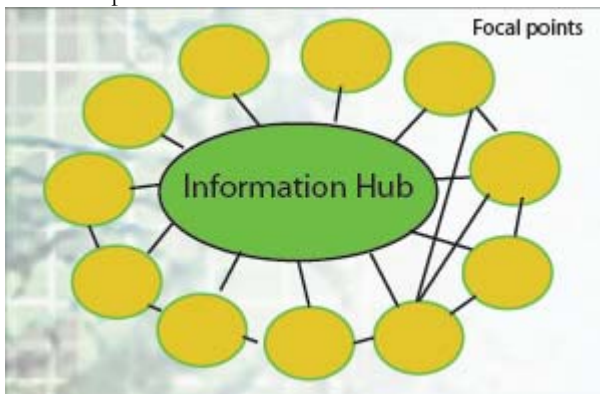
Clearing-House Mechanism

What is a Clearing-House Mechanism?

The term "clearing-house" originally referred to a financial establishment, where checks and bills are exchanged among member banks so that only the net balances need to be settled in cash. Today it is also used in the implementation of international agreements to allow information sharing as basis for joint decision making. The concept supports the advertising, discovery, access, dissemination and use of information and data held by numerous organizations using the decentralized capabilities of the Internet. In its simplest definition, a clearing-house can be viewed as a 'network of networks'.

Assets of Clearing-House Mechanism

A clearing-house (abbreviated CHM) consists of a hub, which serves as platform for network member or focal points. In the clearing-house model, the focal point is responsible for producing and maintaining the data while retaining full responsibility and ownership of its information. This custodianship is important because it places the responsibility of quality, timeliness, maintenance, access and other issues squarely where it belongs to – on the initial producer or provider. This is a sensitive issue for many governments and organizations, because they want to retain full control and ownership over their products.



The information hub maintains the platform which guarantees higher transparency, faster access to information and data and reduces duplication. A clearing-house should allow all users to access work related data and information and enable them to make direct contact with the sources of information.



Prerequisites for CHM

In order to ensure compatibility of information provided common formats and standards are essential. Common formats provide an efficient and easy-to-use method to structure and organize information. For example, a given document can be divided, organized or structured according to sections or categories (title, author, jurisdiction, country, etc.).

Example Standards: The Dublin Core

The Dublin Core is an example for a standard called meta data. Similar to a catalogue describing the subject of a monograph collection in a library, the Dublin Core describes generally the contents found on a web page and not each individual content element. It consists of:

- Title
- Creator
- Subject
- Description
- Publisher
- Contributor
- Date
- Type
- Format
- Identifier
- Source
- Language
- Relation
- Coverage
- Rights

More information on the Dublin Core can be found on the Dublin Core web site: <http://dublincore.org>

Common formats allow the analysis and comparison of information. Common formats also facilitate the coordination of joint regional positions for international fora by regional organizations such as ASEAN. Formats also enable the creation of search mechanisms. Without them the integration of information located on remote websites could not be effectively integrated into the system.

Key characteristics of CHM:

- Fully decentralized
- Each member has full ownership of data
- Provides access to information and data
- Supports networking and decision making
- Provides sophisticated search, query and retrieval methods
- Promotes needs driven development

Example of a CHM-The Convention on Biodiversity

Contracting parties to the convention on biodiversity (CBD) are required to establish a Clearing-House Mechanism to facilitate and promote technical and scientific co-operation.

In order to be able to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity, contracting states, nongovernmental organizations, and all the other bodies supporting the convention need a great deal of knowledge and information. Much of this knowledge and information is already available somewhere in the world, in the form of biodiversity surveys, research findings, data on sustainable use, regulations on access to genetic resource, expert databanks, meetings, and training courses etc.



The task of the CHM is to provide necessary information and to indicate where such information is available and of what quality it is. The CHM helps avoiding duplication of work, promotes the transfer of technology, identification of funding sources and enables formulated objectives to be achieved more quickly.

The Biodiversity Convention Clearing-House Mechanism was set up to facilitate access to data, to create transparency, and to point out factors relevant to implementation. It is a decentralized needs-oriented

system that assists decision-making and improves co-ordination on such things as projects.

Sources and Further Reading

CHM of the Convention on Biological Diversity:
<http://www.biodiv.org/chm>

UNEP-Global Programme for Action -CHM
<http://www.gpa.unep.org/clarhouse/default.htm>



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