

MoU between BIOTA West Africa and WAFRINET, the West Africa LOOP of BioNET-INTERNATIONAL, The Global Network for Taxonomy

Recent discussions between the Coordinator of BIOTA West Africa and the Coordinator of WAFRINET and the Development Officer of BioNET's TecSec (the Technical Secretariat of BioNET-INTERNATIONAL, the Global Network for Taxonomy) indicate that BIOTA and the LOOPS (Technical Cooperation Networks also known as Locally Organised and Operated Partnerships) stand to enjoy mutual benefits through collaboration.

The LOOPS are subregional networks formed by intergovernmental agreement and are designed to be cost effective mechanisms for building required taxonomic capacity in developing countries by facilitating the use and development of subregional expertise in the delivery of taxonomic products and services. LOOPS are organised subregionally based on the UN system and are institutional networks linked by government designated National and Network Coordinators. Each LOOP is linked to the Global Network through the Network Coordinators and the Technical Secretariat. In Africa, there are currently three LOOPS, each corresponding with a region where there is an active BIOTA project: EAFRINET, SAFRINET and WAFRINET.

The BIOTA West Africa project (funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research within the frame of the BIOLOG programme) links a set of thematically and geographically strictly coordinated analyses of habitat conversion in the West African forest and savanna regions. The efforts are centred on the comparison of primary and secondary grassland and rain forests with small isolated fragments. The principal goal is the establishment of biodiversity observatories for long term monitoring, the main focus being the effects of man-made changes on biodiversity. To achieve this aim, significant interfaces of the trophic network of the tropical rain forest and savanna plus their replacement communities will be critically selected: plant-pollinator systems, forest fragmentation and seed dispersal, exchange of atmospheric compounds, regeneration of tree species, the decline in anurans, and the diversity of insects and other major arthropods. Experiments will be carried out using standardized plots and sampling methods. The potential for sustainable use of forest and savanna ecosystems will be investigated. As a result, we expect a better understanding of the complex consequences of degradation and fragmentation, especially at the level of critical trophic and reproductive interfaces. In addition, we expect to be able to provide useful tools and methods for *rapid assessment* procedures for selected systems.

To implement the ten year biodiversity monitoring programme, BIOTA West Africa seeks to develop the necessary capacity, data management and support infrastructure. Monitoring is likely to require taxonomic input to create new and user-friendly field identification tools for use by both specialists and parataxonomists. Both the purpose and complementary regional

structure of the LOOPs provide an excellent basis for partnership with BIOTA West Africa in the development of taxonomic capacity and tools.

In particular, BIOTA West Africa and WAFRINET agree that the following areas indicate a basis for a partnership that would efficiently and cost effectively assist the local BIOTA West Africa programme achieve its objectives whilst also strengthening the LOOP through partnership with this important biodiversity monitoring programme:

A. BIOTA West Africa's use of existing LOOP structures and resources

1. BIOTA West Africa seeks to build regional capacity in species identification; WAFRINET is endorsed by governments as the capacity building mechanism and structure for taxonomy in West Africa.
2. WAFRINET, through its members and structure, can help provide communications, access and guidance on regional experts and relevant issues to BIOTA West Africa projects.
3. WAFRINET has organisational and networking capacity that may be of use to BIOTA West Africa.
4. WAFRINET is a government-endorsed and supported permanent structure and could therefore provide BIOTA West Africa with a key component of its exit strategy by helping to ensure long-term use and sustainability of the capacity built and the databases created via the BIOTA West Africa projects.
5. WAFRINET could help publicise BIOTA West Africa regionally through LOOP structures and communications, and globally through BioNET NEWS, the BioNET-INTERNATIONAL website (www.bionet-intl.org) and the monthly electronic Bulletin.
6. WAFRINET can contribute training manuals in various laboratory techniques.
7. BIOTA West Africa is interested in linking with the International Pollinators Initiative (IPI); WAFRINET's Coordinator, Dr Connal Eardley is the Co-ordinator of the subsidiary African Pollinators Initiative (API), which is being driven through the African LOOPs, and this thus provides a direct linkage for BIOTA West Africa to the API and the IPI.

B. Commissioning (by BIOTA West Africa and / or donor(s)) of LOOPs to provide project-specific tools, services and expertise as required

1. WAFRINET could produce field identification keys (CD and/or paper based) of indicator species for both expert and parataxonomist use, in the latter case to enable a large number of non-experts to participate in ongoing monitoring activities.
2. WAFRINET has experts who could usefully contribute to BIOTA West Africa, either in the field or in training and/or advisory capacities.
3. WAFRINET could provide access to cost-effective South-South and/or North-South training.
4. WAFRINET could develop training materials as required.

5. WAFRINET could, through BioNET-INTERNATIONAL's strategic alliance, provide training in using EcoPort (www.ecoport.org), a highly innovative and flexible database that may be appropriate for use by all BIOTA West Africa projects and provide a valuable long-term use of the project outputs.

This MOU can be amended with appendices in future.

Sign. -----

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