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Article 6 of the Convention

Issues relating to the information network clearing house (CC:iNet): evaluation, synthesis of views from Parties and next steps

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The prototype information network clearing house (CC:iNet) was launched in December 2005 to support the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention by facilitating the exchange of information and experiences on climate change education and outreach activities. The effectiveness of the prototype will be assessed in December 2007. This document presents information on the extent of implementation of CC:iNet and considers the lessons learned by Parties and registered users. The document also provides recommendations on how to improve the clearing house and move towards its full-scale implementation.

* This document is submitted after the due date in order to include the results of an online survey, conducted in September, based on questions submitted by Parties in August 2007.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 11/CP.8, adopted the New Delhi work programme on Article 6 of the Convention. To facilitate the implementation of the work programme and improve information exchange between Parties and relevant stakeholders, the same decision requested the secretariat to work on the development of an information clearing house.

2. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), at its twenty-third session, welcomed the launch of the prototype information network clearing house (CC:iNet) for Article 6 of the Convention.[1] It requested Parties to submit their views on advancing work on the clearing house and on making it fully functional, multilingual and user-friendly,[2] and requested the secretariat to compile these views into a miscellaneous document.[3]

3. The SBI, at its twenty-sixth session, further invited Parties to submit their views on issues relating to the work on the clearing house,[4] and requested the secretariat to compile these views into a miscellaneous document.[5] It also requested the secretariat to prepare an evaluation report of CC:iNet drawing on these views, the results of an online survey, and usage and content rating statistics to present recommendations on how to improve the clearing house and move towards its full-scale implementation.[6]

B. Scope of the note

4. This document presents an evaluation of the prototype clearing house, drawing on views from Parties contained in documents FCCC/SBI/2007/MISC.12 and FCCC/SBI/2006/MISC.15, an analysis of statistics on the status of implementation of the clearing house, and results of an online survey conducted in September 2007. The document concludes with possible ways forward for the full-scale implementation of the clearing house.

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

5. The SBI may wish to take note of the elements outlined in this document in making recommendations on further action for advancing work on the clearing house.

II. Extent of implementation of the prototype clearing house

A. Background

6. Article 6 of the Convention, which addresses education, training, public awareness, public participation and access to information in relation to climate change and its effects, and international cooperation in these matters, is key in engaging all stakeholders and major groups in the development and implementation of policies relating to climate change. The New Delhi work programme, which comes to an end in December 2007, will be reviewed by the COP at its thirteenth session, and it is expected that an extended framework will be adopted to sustain and promote national and regional efforts.[7]

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[1] FCCC/SBI/2005/23, paragraph 75.
[2] FCCC/SBI/2005/23, paragraph 77.
[3] FCCC/SBI/2006/MISC.15.
[4] FCCC/SBI/2007/15, paragraph 63.
[5] FCCC/SBI/2007/MISC.12.
[6] FCCC/SBI/2007/15, paragraph 64.
[7] FCCC/SBI/2007/15, paragraph 61.

7. CC:iNet is being developed to facilitate the implementation of Article 6 and provide increased access to, and improve the availability of, relevant and reliable information on the six key areas of Article 6, as described in paragraph 6 above. In their submissions on a possible future framework for implementation of Article 6 to replace or enhance the existing New Delhi work programme,[8] Parties have indicated the crucial role that the clearing house can play in supporting the implementation of Article 6, including through dissemination and communication of information in all six areas.[9]

8. A small-scale model of the clearing house was presented to Parties at the twentieth session of the SBI and served as a basis for further consultations and guidance from Parties. Drawing on this guidance, the secretariat prepared a note for consideration by the SBI at its twenty-first session, which presented a feasibility study outlining the features, databases and milestones for the development of the clearing house based on a two-phase implementation process.[10]

9. The SBI, at its twenty-first session,[11] encouraged the prompt start of the first development phase of the clearing house and requested the secretariat to advance its work as the host organization for the clearing house, in line with the time frame and features presented in the feasibility study.

10. Phase I of the development of the clearing house started in December 2005 with the launch of the prototype clearing house. As suggested in the feasibility study, an evaluation of CC:iNet is to be undertaken after two years to determine future steps in the development of a full-scale clearing house.[12] The feasibility study sets targets for the development of the prototype, and these are compared with the current level of implementation of CC:iNet as shown in annex I. Other indicators for this evaluation were agreed by the SBI at its twenty-sixth session[13] and encompass the 16 views submitted in August 2006 and August 2007 by 11 Parties[14] representing the views of 43 Parties,[15] the results of an online survey of registered and other users of CC:iNet in September 2007, and usage and content rating statistics up to August 2007.

B. Features and databases

11. The prototype clearing house includes various indexed textual and relational databases, search features and links to partners, including Parties, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in the implementation of Article 6. The main features of the prototype include the following:

(a) The current information pool contains 880 items, falling under public awareness (32 per cent) and education (26 per cent), but not limited to these elements;[16]

(b) English language content dominates the majority of content in the prototype (90 per cent). However, multilingual (including French, Spanish, Russian, German, Dutch and Turkish) content is also available;

[8] FCCC/SBI/2007/MISC.10.
[9] FCCC/SBI/2007/29, paragraph 30.
[10] FCCC/SBI/2004/14.
[11] FCCC/SBI/2004/19, paragraph 68.
[12] FCCC/SBI/2004/14, paragraph 31 (c).
[13] FCCC/SBI/2007/15, paragraphs 63 and 64.
[14] Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, China, Egypt, the European Community and its member States, Gambia, Japan, Malawi, United States of America, and Uzbekistan.
[15] FCCC/SBI/2006/MISC.15 and FCCC/SBI/2007/MISC.12.
[16] Information content may not necessarily fall into one single category.

(c) The majority of content (74 per cent) has been entered into the prototype by the secretariat. The remaining information (26 per cent) has been supplied by a total of 85 registered users – often on behalf of their respective organizations;

(d) The clearing house search includes indexed (i.e. by language, country, scope, etc.) and full-text search functionality. All queries take into account meta-information that is associated with all clearing house content;

(e) The expert database contains the current list of focal points for Article 6 (40 national and two organizational);[17]

(f) The calendar database maintains a link to the UNFCCC calendar for relevant events;

(g) The statistics-gathering capability encompasses basic usage information being compiled, and allows registered users to rank the relevance of individual content items.

12. To further promote and facilitate the use of the clearing house, the secretariat has developed a users' guide[18] outlining the steps to be taken for submission of content information. The secretariat has also enhanced the start page of CC:iNet, which now offers a 'What's New' section featuring recent and innovative products or initiatives, and a 'CC:iNet Spotlight' section highlighting the latest content information submitted, sorted by scope.

13. The secretariat has undertaken some promotional activities, such as a side event at COP 12, organized training sessions during regional workshops on Article 6 and provided information on CC:iNet in the 'InFocus' section of the UNFCCC newsletter. During the twenty-fourth sessions of the subsidiary bodies in Bonn, a workstation was set up to provide hands-on assistance to participants wishing to learn how to enter information.

C. Statistics and ratings

14. Since the launch of CC:iNet, the secretariat has maintained statistics on users and usage of the clearing house. The secretariat made a presentation of these statistics at COP 12.[19] Annex II shows the increase in usage of CC:iNet, with the statistics presented at COP 12 used as a baseline. The number of registered users has increased by 245 per cent since November 2006, which includes an increase of 410 per cent for registered users from Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties), which are now the majority. There is a better regional balance of registered users, although Africa remains the least represented region. The hits in 2007 (January to August) total over 2,000,000, which represents an average of 6,500 hits per day, compared with an average of 2,000 hits per day in 2006.

III. Lessons learned from implementing the prototype

A. Synthesis of views from Parties

15. Generally, Parties acknowledge that CC:iNet is a useful tool, and that it has the potential to facilitate access to information and promote the implementation of Article 6 (Australia, Bolivia, China, Egypt, European Community (EC), Japan, Malawi, United States of America, and Uzbekistan). Some Parties note that the importance of CC:iNet as a resource for assisting education and outreach activities will increase proportionally to the amount of useful information available (Australia and Japan).

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[17] <http://unfccc.int/cc_inet/information_pool/items/3888.php>.

[18] *Contributing to CC:iNet - A quick-start guide*. Available online at <http://unfccc.int/cc_inet/information_pool/simple_search/items/3522.php?displayPool=874>.

[19] <http://unfccc.int/cc_inet/information_pool/simple_search/items/3522.php?displayPool=978>.

16. Some Parties observe that the clearing house will be most useful at the regional level, since there is a vast potential for cross-fertilization of ideas between countries in the same region (Malawi), and will encourage the creation of regional nodes or portals (Japan and Uzbekistan) and the categorization of links according to regions and synergies with other relevant efforts (Australia).

17. Some Parties suggest developing monitoring indicators (Bolivia), tracking website usage (United States), and seeking feedback from users through questionnaires (Japan), in order to increase the usefulness of the clearing house.

18. While the amount of material submitted has been increasing gradually and contains useful elements and topics, many Parties expect more content information (Bolivia, China, EC and Japan), more information that could be replicable (Bolivia) or that can be directly downloaded from the clearing house (Malawi), and identify site maintenance, including regular monitoring and updating of information, as a key component of the clearing house functionality (Bolivia, EC, Japan, United States, and Uzbekistan). Many specific suggestions for content are proposed in the submissions.

19. As suggested in the feasibility study,[20] the initial information pool has been established from existing data maintained by the secretariat and partner organizations or Parties willing to contribute, that is, the registered users. A few Parties report positive experiences in submitting material (EC and Japan), and some invite Parties to make use of CC:iNet by populating it with practical information and by promoting wider awareness of this information tool in their country (Australia, EC, Japan and Uzbekistan).

20. Some Parties recognize that the number of registered users is still insufficient and that some regions are very poorly covered, in particular those with non-Annex I Parties, and suggest that the secretariat could be more proactive in enhancing the network of registered users (EC and Japan). The submission from Japan emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the submissions continue to be made voluntarily.

21. In the opinion of one Party, the process of maintaining and enhancing the information pool might need to be clarified, and the issue of quality control of the clearing house should be addressed, drawing upon the lessons learned and experiences gained by other similar sites hosted by the secretariat (such as TT:CLEAR), Parties and other conventions (United States). Other Parties suggest that quality control be ensured by tagging an expiry date on information and by sending automatic reminders to those registered users who entered the data to update the information (Japan).

22. Parties find that the structure of the clearing house has in general met the objectives set during the prototype phase (Australia, Bolivia, Japan and Uzbekistan). Many enhancements are suggested as regards the structure, organization and retrieval of the information, to promote interaction with users and take into account different user groups and differences in bandwidth.

23. Most Parties recognize that access to multilingual information should be enhanced (Bolivia, China, Egypt, EC, Gambia and United States) by providing navigation in other languages (Egypt and United States), translating material (Bolivia and Gambia) and creating multilingual mirrors (China).

[20] FCCC/SBI/2004/14, paragraph 12.

24. Several Parties encourage wide promotion of CC:iNet (Australia, EC and Japan), and enhancement of technical and/or financial capacities in promoting the use of the clearing house (Bangladesh, China, Egypt and Malawi). Hosting the clearing house under the secretariat website is considered the most logical location for the clearing house (United States). To further improve accessibility and use of the clearing house, Parties suggest a few enhancements to the system as well as promotional activities, and in particular:

(a) Organizing regional training workshops for Parties to gain expertise in, and to encourage them to use, the clearing house (Egypt and Malawi);

(b) Making presentations on the clearing house at intergovernmental sessions and mandated workshops (Japan and Malawi);

(c) Developing relevant guidelines to increase user-friendliness (Japan);

(d) Preparing a CD-ROM version of the clearing house (Bangladesh);

(e) Marking items requiring significant download capacity (United States);

(f) Increasing interactivity with visitors (Bolivia);

(g) Linking the clearing house to national websites (EC and Uzbekistan);

(h) Allowing use of the CC:iNet logo to registered users (Japan);

(i) Finding a more attractive name for the clearing house: the EC sees a need for this, whereas Japan does not.

B. Results of an online survey

25. As requested by the SBI at its twenty-sixth session,[21] the secretariat developed and launched an online web-based survey in September 2007, which sought to further elaborate on issues raised by Parties in their submissions on issues relating to the work of the clearing house.[22]

26. The survey was launched on 31 August. In order to maximize participation, the secretariat advertised this survey on the home page of the UNFCCC website and the start page of CC:iNet, and sent e-mail notifications to the 71 registered users of the clearing house as well as to the 42 focal points for Article 6 of the Convention. The survey closed on 14 September, with only 11 complete responses (from four registered and seven non-registered users). The detailed report of the results of the survey is accessible online.[23] Owing to the low level of participation in the survey, the results are not statistically significant.

27. The qualitative feedback from the survey was consistent with the views expressed by Parties and synthesized above. There were calls for keeping information more up-to-date, broadening information in all areas under Article 6, providing a regional focus in clustering of information, promoting visibility through multiple means and addressing issues of language. There were also suggestions to increase submission of information by a variety of users, but with an emphasis on the need for the secretariat to review content prior to the information being made publicly accessible. Three alternative names for the

[21] FCCC/SBI/2007/15, paragraph 64.
[22] FCCC/SBI/2007/MISC.12.
[23] <http://unfccc.int/cc_inet/information_pool/simple_search/items/3522.php?displayPool=980>.

clearing house were proposed: ClimateOnLine, Clean Climate Public Information Network and Climate Change Portal.

C. Overall assessment

28. The first development phase of the prototype clearing house has been implemented successfully. The role of CC:iNet has been identified as critical in the context of the implementation of the future work programme on Article 6, which is expected to succeed the New Delhi work programme, and many suggestions were made towards a fully functional, multilingual and user-friendly clearing house. These are integrated into concrete next steps, as discussed in the next chapter.

IV. Next steps in implementing the clearing house and issues for further consideration

1. Enhancing functionality

29. Parties agree that full-scale implementation of the clearing house should broaden content and functionality to support the six elements of Article 6, with careful matching of content and delivery to the intended targets under each element. Suggested targets for these enhancements are presented in annex III.

2. Inputting and managing content

30. A flexible approach is suggested to expand the size and relevance of the information pool, including active promotion by the secretariat to increase the number of registered users able to submit information.

31. To facilitate quality control, inputs could be screened by the secretariat, tagged with expiry dates or with automated messaging to contributors and site managers to update information after a specified time. A history of additions could also be maintained to facilitate regular assessment of new content.

3. Enhancing user-friendliness and flexibility

32. Many enhancements are possible to encourage repeated and frequent visits by users to the clearing house and to facilitate interaction and access for different needs under each of the elements of Article 6. Customized menu structures under each element, including a mix of browsing and searching as the main access to information, would improve flexibility.

33. To facilitate access to information for those limited by hardware and internet speeds, information can be bundled by theme onto CD-ROMs and/or DVDs and distributed at regular intervals, or upon request by those in developing countries – especially in least developed countries where Internet access is limited.

34. Other enhancements could be implemented to offer a broad overview and scanning of highly ranked content in the clearing house, including through slide shows.

4. Language issues

35. Building on lessons learned from other sites that manage content in multiple languages, the secretariat could be mandated to seek and input content in multiple languages, and to implement navigation in several United Nations languages, as well as offer browsing based on the language of the materials. Such efforts would need to be scaled subject to the availability of resources.

5. Considerations in scaling up to full-scale implementation

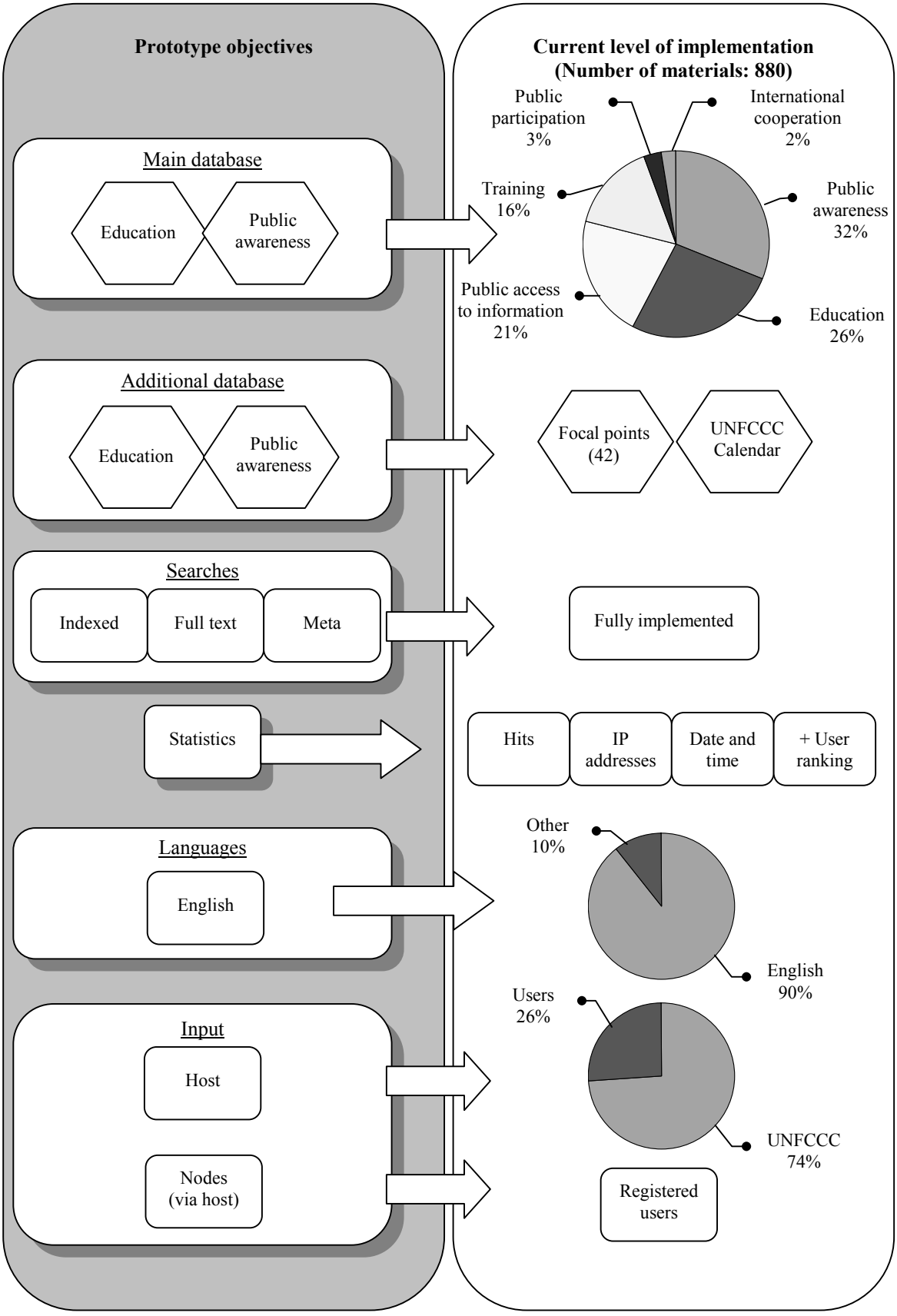
36. The time frame for full-scale implementation of the clearing house depends on the financial resources available. The estimated budget presented in the feasibility study,[24] which is comprised of development and maintenance costs amounting to USD 140,000 and USD 135,000 respectively, over a two-year period, would apply to support the level of implementation proposed in annex III. The multilingual functionalities would further increase these costs.

37. Increasing the amount of content to address the objectives of the clearing house fully will require the active participation of Parties, especially the national focal points for Article 6. Partnerships with IGOs and NGOs, especially at the regional level, would greatly enhance these efforts.

[24] FCCC/SBI/2004/14, paragraph 29.

Annex I

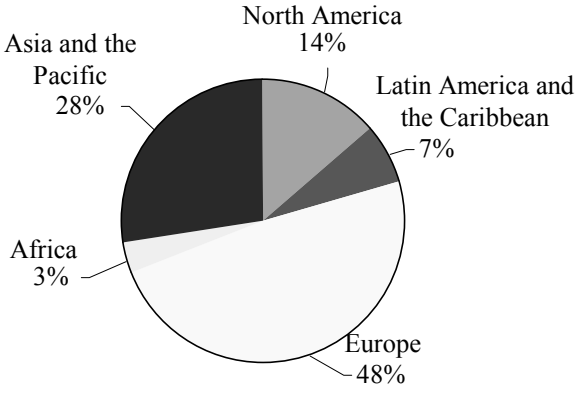
Comparison of objectives and current achievements



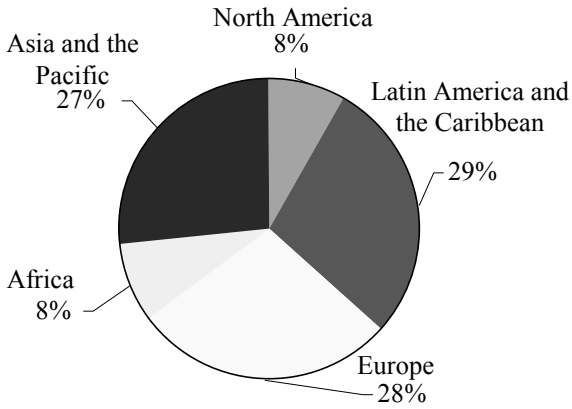
Annex II

Users and usability statistics

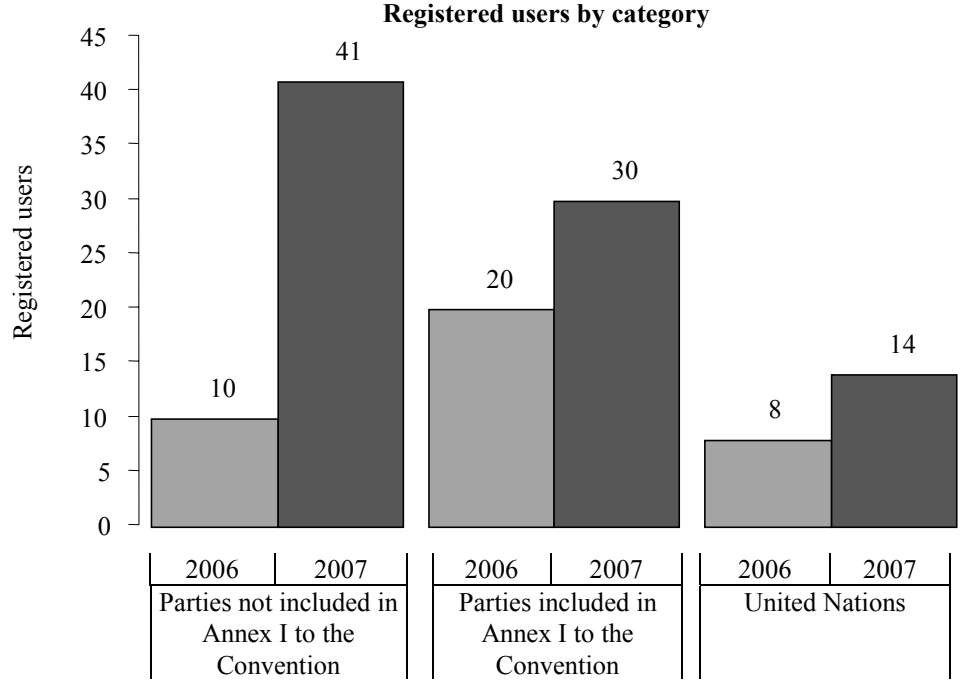
Registered users by region as of November 2006 (38)



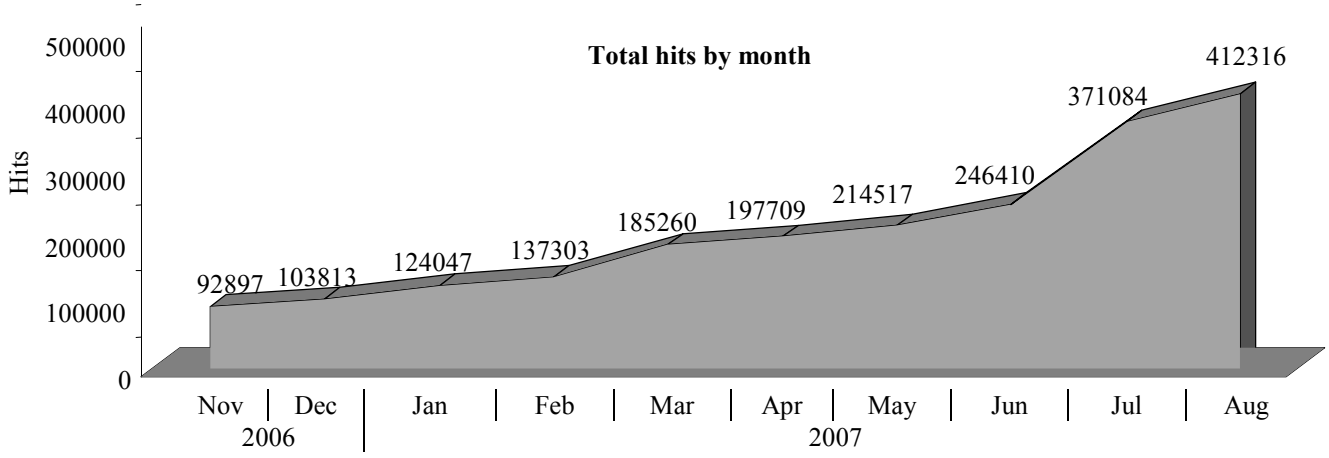
Registered users by region as of August 2007 (85)



Registered users by category

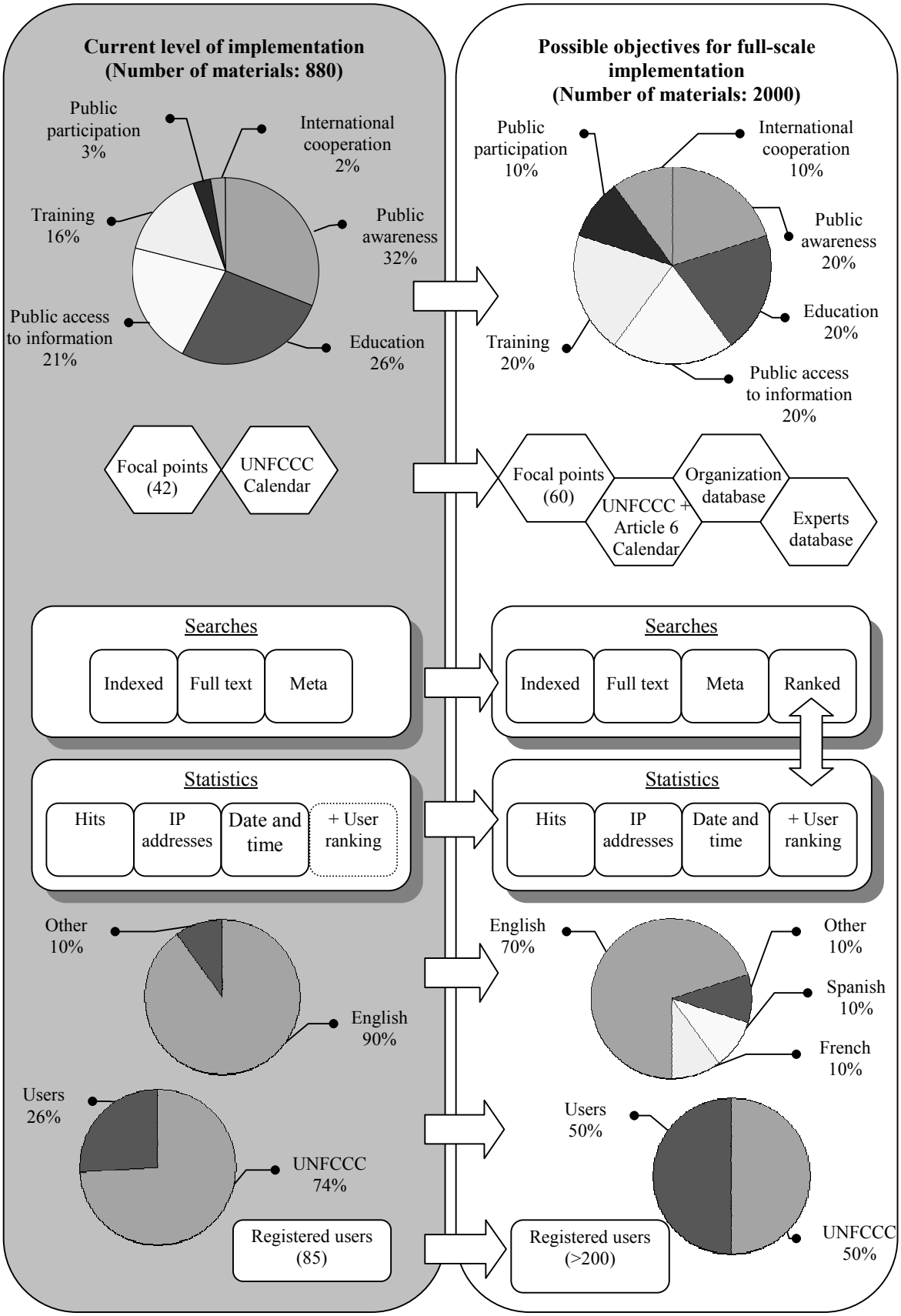


Total hits by month



Annex III

Current level of implementation and possible objectives for full-scale development



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