ARBIMS

Albertine Rift Biodiversity Information Management System
(http://arbims.arcosnetwork.org)

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Origin of the Albertine Rift BIM System (ARBIMS)

- **1995**: ARCOS established;
- **2007**: ARCOS initiated development of a collaborative Albertine Rift Biodiversity Monitoring Framework;
- **2009**: 5 institutions, each representing a country of the Albertine Rift region, signed MoU to share biodiversity data, ARCOS to host the secretariat;
- **2009**: ARCOS joins GBIF (adopts the biodiversity data standards used in the GBIF network);
- **2011**: ARBIMS portal development started with funding from the JRS Biodiversity Foundation; Data-holding and capacity needs assessment conducted;
- **2011+**: ARCOS conducts stakeholder consultations and organizes many training courses for biodiversity data managers in the region;
- **Data mobilization** initiatives such as digitization of herbarium specimens also undertaken ......
What are key success factors about ARBIMS?

- **Regional aspect:** coverage for transboundary ecosystems (most freshwater and mountain ecosystems in the region are transboundary);
- **Collaborative aspect:** mutual benefits, more robust in terms of sustainability (many partners contributing data and working together to mobilize funds to sustain the scheme);
- **Common Standards:** The adoption of widely accepted biodiversity data standards (GBIF) adds value to the data mobilized;
- **Open-source tools:** use of open-source tools increases cost-effectiveness of the system;
- **Ease-of-use:** separation of geographical as well as thematic coverage e.g. African Mountains and Great Lakes Freshwater Ecosystems makes it easy to find required data.
Challenges

• Lack of complete and accurate checklists to be used as the backbone of the species’ lists;

• **Limited capacity** in the region (both technical and logistical);

• Governments in the region are interested in data sharing and exploring ways for legal/policy framework establishment but there is need for **resources and time to incentivise Individual Data Holders** for data sharing.

• Lack of initial critical mass of data to demonstrate the contribution of biodiversity data in decision-making.

“We have lots of information technology. We just don’t have any information.”
Lessons/Needs

• Much more to be done to convince data holders that data publication is as valuable as papers’ publication. One way is to promote the concept of data papers;

• Formalization of partnerships with potential data holding institutions is a pre-requisite to data publication since the process requires staff time and resources and staff need to find a way to justify the spending of this time/resources;

• Government-led studies (e.g. EIAs) generate biodiversity data but existing policies/laws don’t insist on harmonizing and keeping these data beyond the lifetime of the project. A legal framework is thus a pre-requisite for wider biodiversity data mobilization in the region;

• Promoting information management and sharing takes time at national level. Doing it at regional level is even harder; building trust for regional information sharing and adopting common standards takes time.....

• Need to improve the data management tools used in natural history institutions to integrate them with the TDWG standards used by GBIF (for instance, one cannot easily export data from BRAHMS into DwCore Archive format).
In addition, going forward......

• With the data sharing platform operational, ARCOS has undertaken the process to **renew the data-sharing agreement** with partners and mobilize even more stakeholders;

• **A regional bioinformatics training programme** is being developed to keep building capacity and catalyse biodiversity data mobilization and **use for research and support to decision-making.**