



*DOCUMENTING BIODIVERSITY AND
THE NEEDS OF THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY*

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Convention on Biological Diversity

Goals:

- The conservation of biological diversity
- The sustainable use of its components
- The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources.



Work programmes

Thematic areas

- Marine and coastal biodiversity
- Agricultural biodiversity
- Forest biodiversity
- Island biodiversity
- The biodiversity of inland waters
- Dry and sub-humid lands
- Mountain biodiversity

Cross-cutting issues

- Biosafety
- Access to genetic resources
- Traditional knowledge
- Innovations and practices
- Intellectual property rights
- Indicators
- Public education and awareness
- Incentives
- Alien species

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The taxonomic impediment

As the number of species that we know **grows** at a fast rate, the number of people involved with describing and classifying and the amount of money and infrastructures that is devoted to them **decreases**

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The Convention on Biological Diversity recognized

“the general lack of information and knowledge regarding biological diversity and of the urgent need to develop scientific, technical and institutional capacities to provide the basic understanding upon which to plan and implement appropriate measures”



In article 7 it requested contracting parties to

“identify components of biological diversity important for its conservation and sustainable use”.

In article 12 it requested parties to

“establish and maintain programmes for scientific and technical education and training in measures for the identification ...of biological diversity and its components”



In article 17 it requested parties to

“facilitate the exchange of information, from all publicly available sources, relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity ... Such exchange of information shall where feasible, include repatriation of information”

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The Global Taxonomy Initiative

Programme of work

Emphasis on the need to coordinate its implementation with existing national, regional, sub-regional and global initiatives, partnerships and institutions such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF)



Driving force:

Capacity building at the national and regional levels

Designed to focus on:

- supplying the needed taxonomic information to support the major work areas of the Convention,
- the need to support capacity-building to ensure the ability of countries to undertake the priority taxonomic work required to implement the Convention



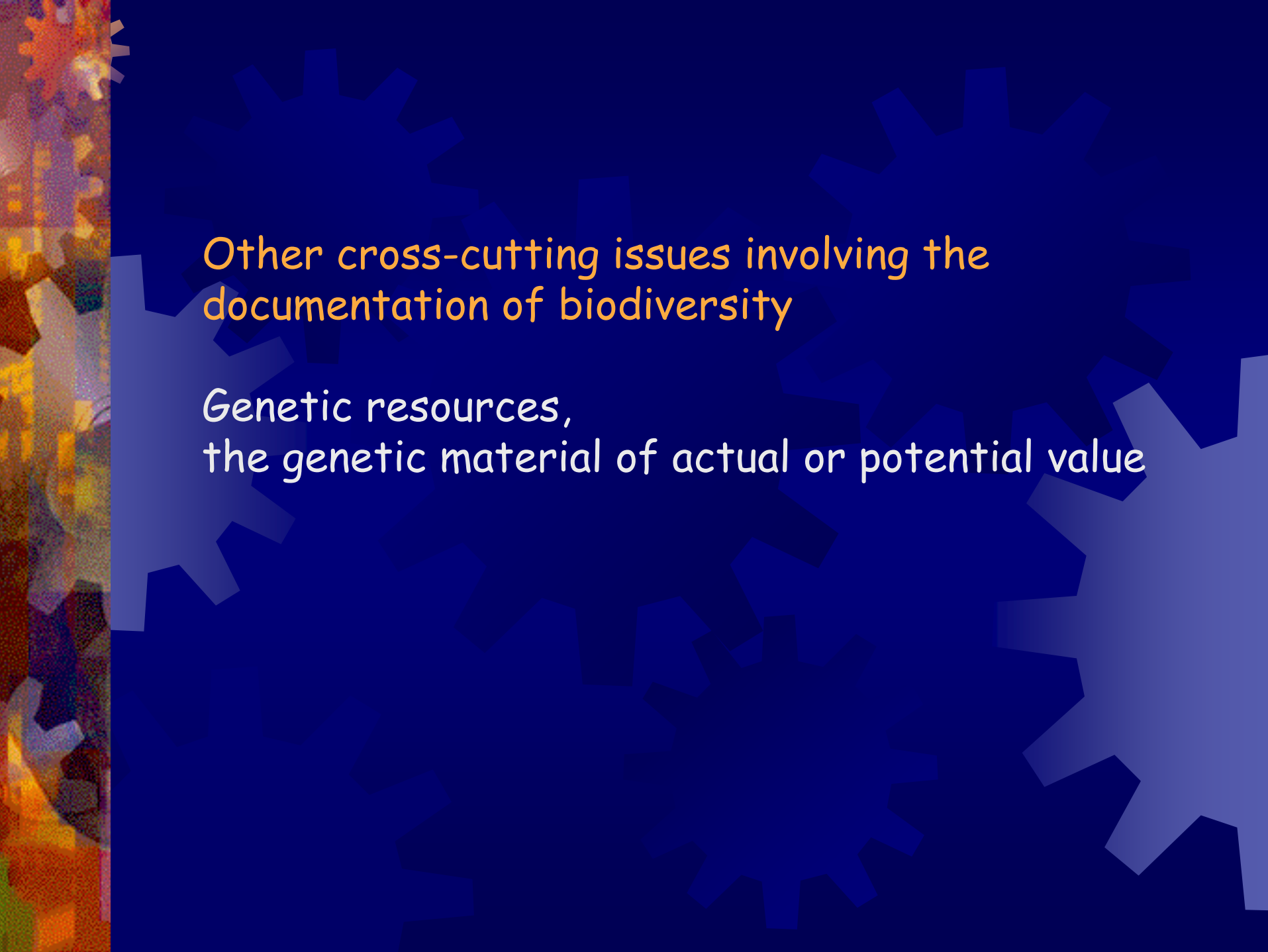
Objectives inter alia:

the generation of information needed for decision-making in conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and its components



Activities

- A number of regional workshops
- Establishment of national focal points for GTI in a number of countries
- Initiation of collaboration between international organizations such as BIONET and UNESCO



Other cross-cutting issues involving the documentation of biodiversity

Genetic resources,
the genetic material of actual or potential value

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The Convention recognizes the sovereign rights of States over their genetic resources and the authority to determine access to these resources



Countries of origin are entitled to a fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources

These benefits rise to high monetary values mostly as a consequence of new advances in genetic engineering

As a consequence, these countries may pose strict limitations to collecting and documenting of biological material



The Bonn guidelines on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their utilization

A series of steps involved in the process of obtaining access to genetic resources and sharing of benefits:

Activities prior to access, research and development conducted on the genetic resources

Activities prior to their commercialization and other uses

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Such steps may be:

- A procedure involving prior informed consent
- The development of mutually agreed terms
- The establishment of mechanisms of benefit-sharing
- The drafting of material transfer agreements



Contradiction between the need to document and the need to exploit

Exploitation cannot be carried out without documentation

At the same time, countries of origin are unable to provide adequate documentation

They rely on external assistance but at the same time pose severe limitations to the ability to document by imposing strict measures that apply both to bioprospectors and to academics

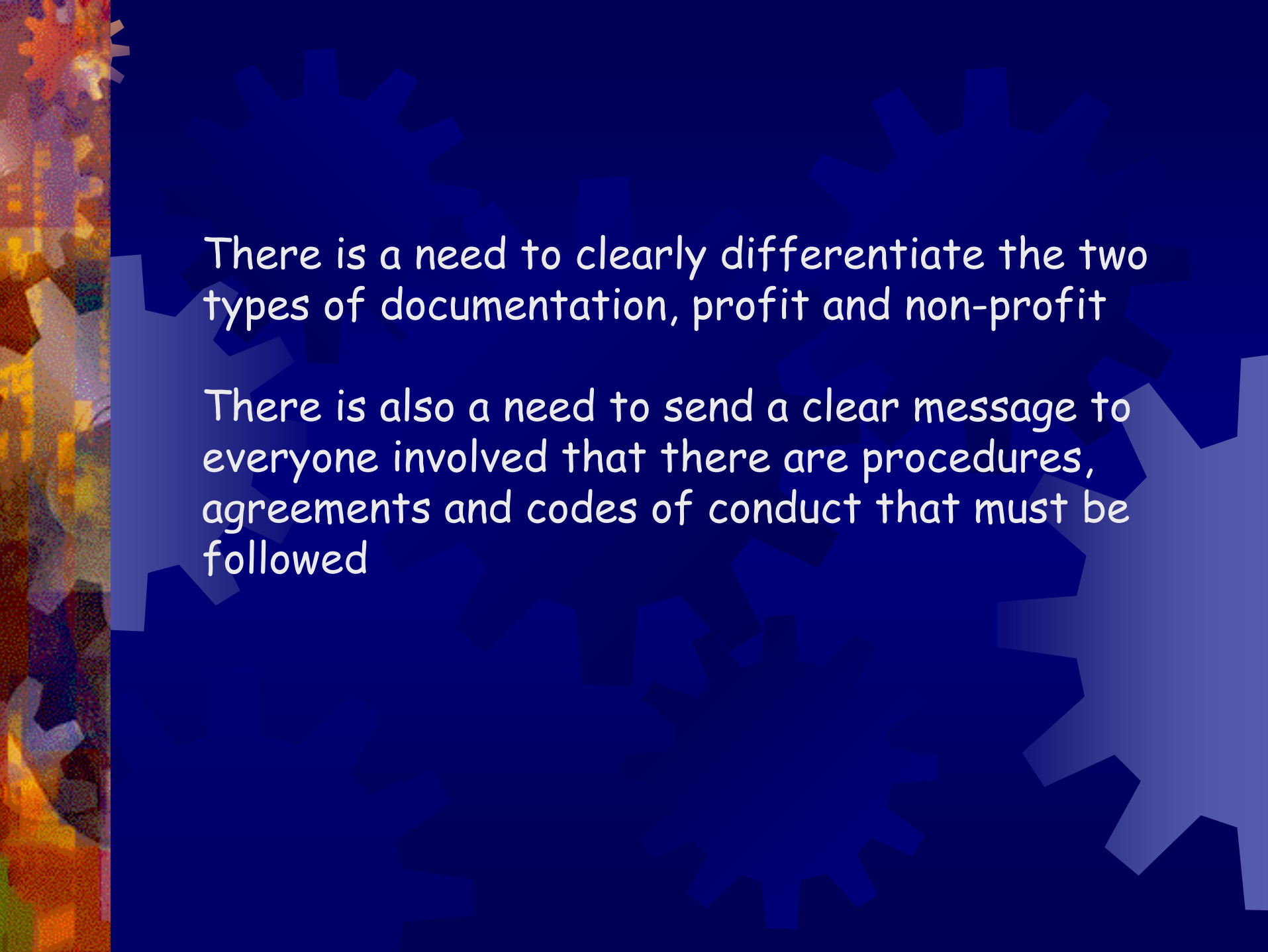


Long-term solution:

Capacity building and transfer of technology to countries of origin who are mostly developing countries, so that they themselves can carry out the documentation

This will take a long time since biodiversity is not a primary issue in many of these countries

In the meantime, academics and bioprospectors from the developed countries will continue their efforts

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There is a need to clearly differentiate the two types of documentation, profit and non-profit

There is also a need to send a clear message to everyone involved that there are procedures, agreements and codes of conduct that must be followed

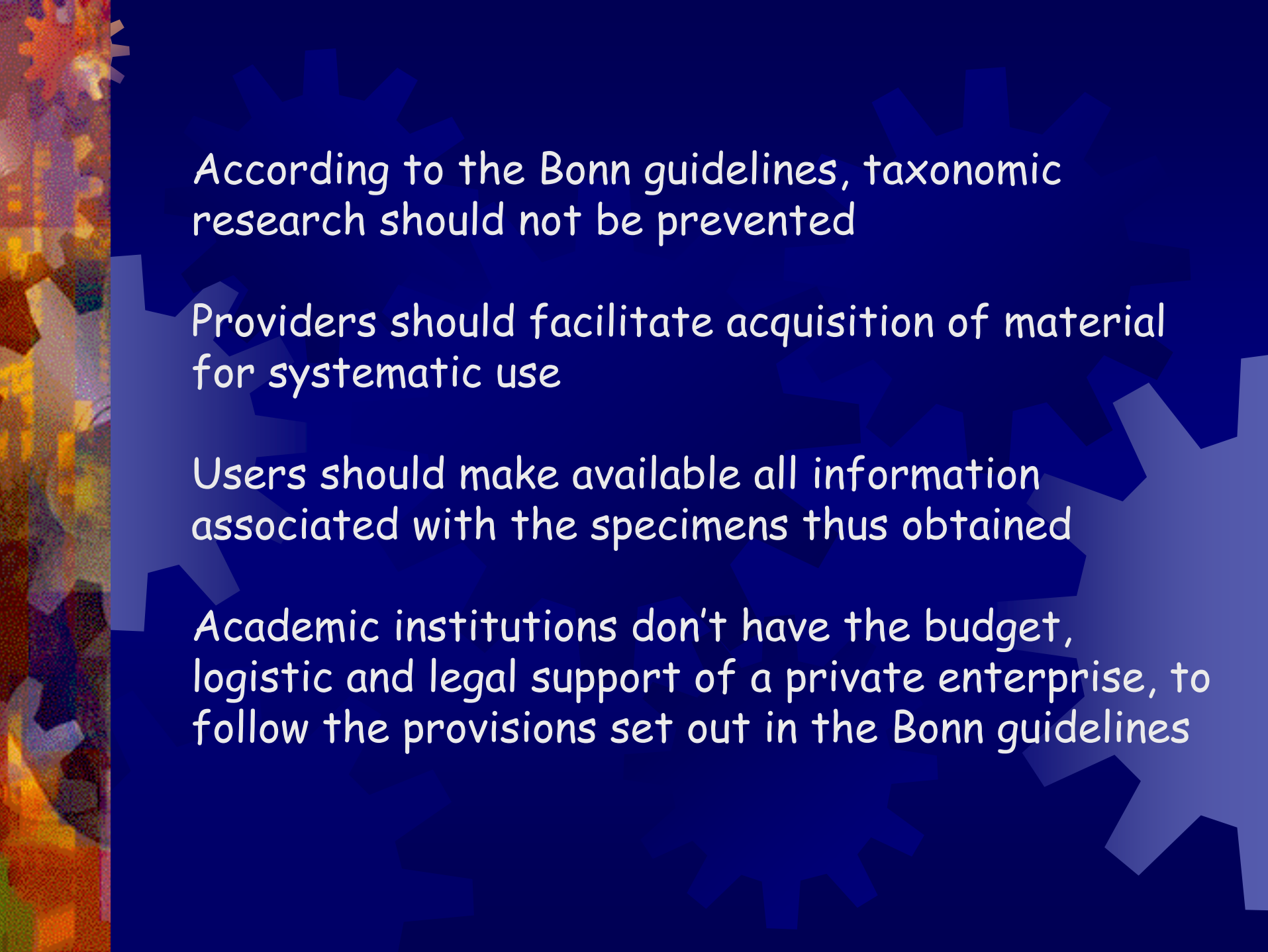
The academic world

- should limit itself to the non-profit study of the biota
- should collaborate closely with the local scientists and scientific institutions
- should provide educational and scientific material and infrastructure
- should repatriate all information



The countries of origin

- should facilitate the local and foreign researchers
- should give priority to projects involving capacity building in taxonomy



According to the Bonn guidelines, taxonomic research should not be prevented

Providers should facilitate acquisition of material for systematic use

Users should make available all information associated with the specimens thus obtained

Academic institutions don't have the budget, logistic and legal support of a private enterprise, to follow the provisions set out in the Bonn guidelines



Bioprospectors and countries of origin

should follow closely the rules set out in the guidelines

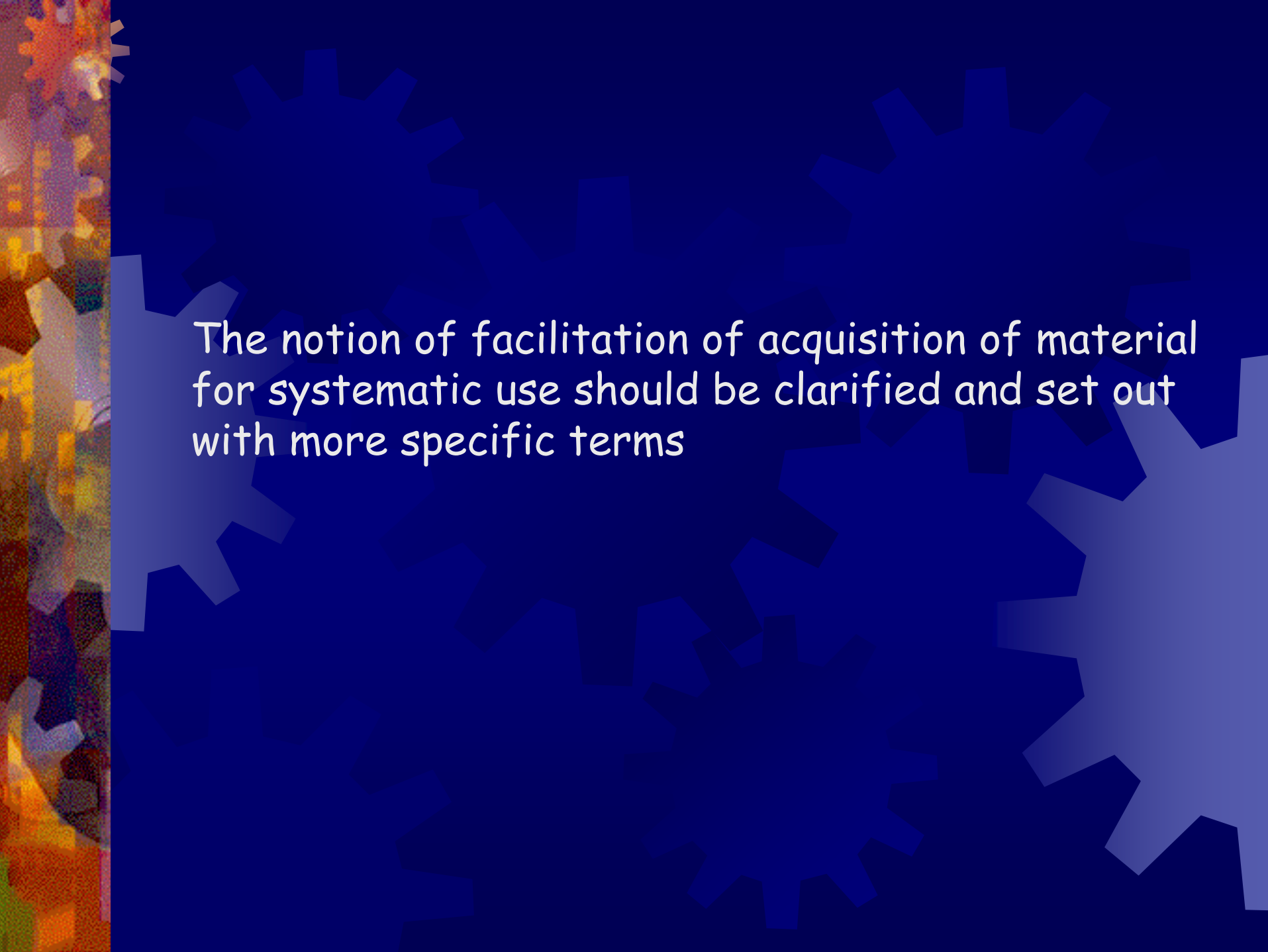
The CBD

must intervene and act as intermediary between academics, bioprospectors and countries



Means to solve the problem could include the establishment of

- a Charter of Good Conduct
- a guideline
- a series of guiding principles
- a protocol
- other international legal regimes

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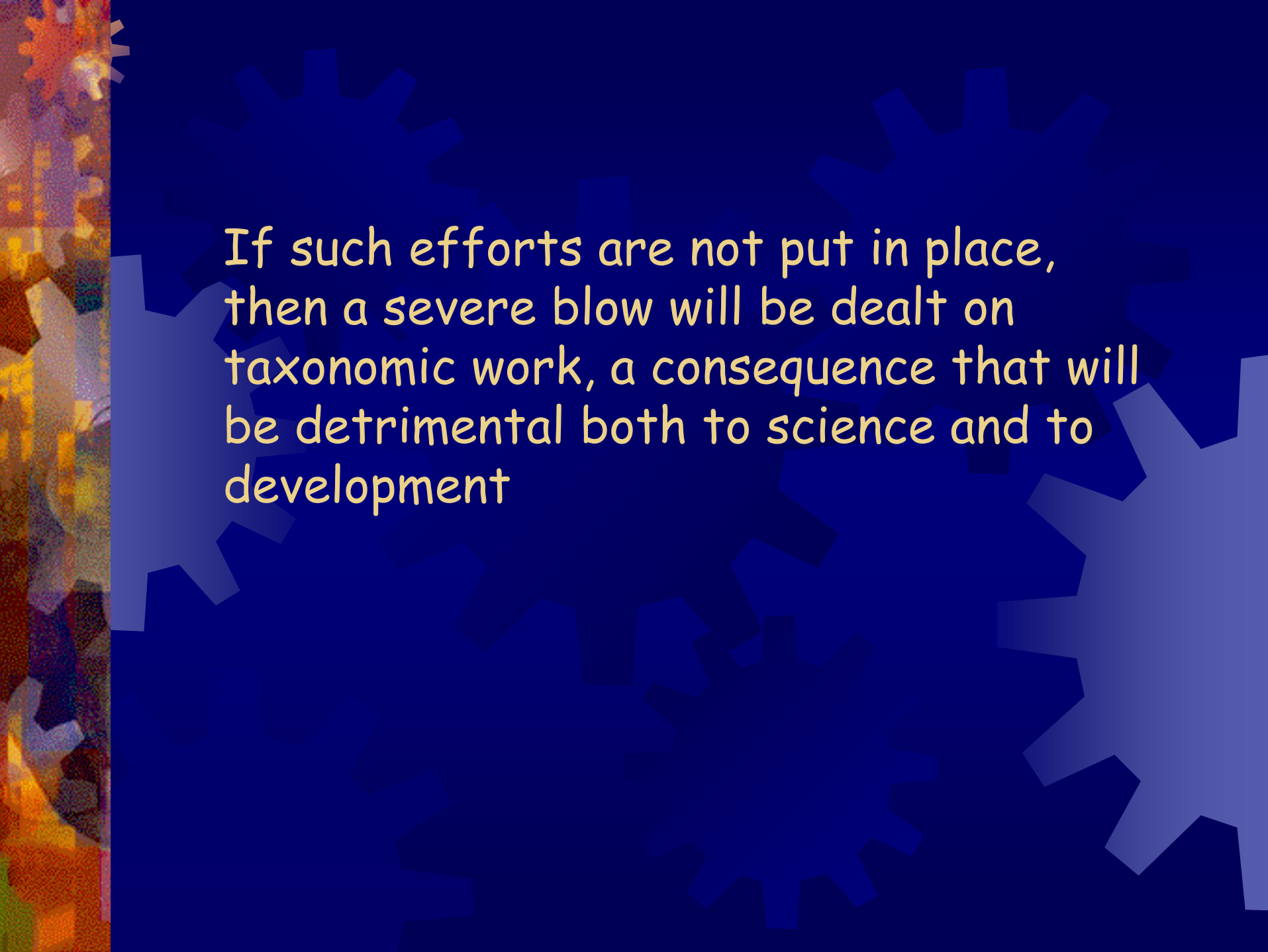
The notion of facilitation of acquisition of material for systematic use should be clarified and set out with more specific terms



The Coordination Mechanism of the Global Taxonomy Initiative has already advised the Executive Secretary of the CBD

to urge Parties to the Convention to facilitate efforts of international cooperation for taxonomic research as are needed to help implementing activities of the Convention

by *inter alia* establishing clear and unambiguous mechanisms for granting the necessary permissions for approved research projects, field work, collection of biological specimens, and free exchange of personnel, data and relevant materials

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If such efforts are not put in place,
then a severe blow will be dealt on
taxonomic work, a consequence that will
be detrimental both to science and to
development