

CHAPTER 2

Statement of Principles

1. Biological diversity is the central tenet of nature, one of its key defining features. Evolution has produced an amazing variety of plants, animals and micro-organisms, and the ecosystems of which they are a part, all intricately linked. Fundamental to life itself is the variability (genetic) found within each of these. Humans are but one amongst these millions of species. The survival of human societies and cultures is dependent on biological diversity, which provides essential **ecosystem services**, including hydrological and geochemical cycles and climatic regulation that form the basis for human survival. It also meets the myriad survival and *livelihood* needs of fisherfolk, farmers, forest-dwellers, pastoralists, craftspersons and others. This wonderful diversity and each of its components are worthy of conservation and **respect** in their own right. Most importantly, biodiversity is the basis of the continuous **evolution** of species and ecosystems.

2. Given the above, the two essential pre-requisites in this action plan are: **Ecological Security** of the country (or of any region within it), and **Livelihood Security** of those most critically dependent on biodiversity and its components:

Ecological security refers to:

- The diversity of ecosystems and habitats;
- The diversity of species, sub-species/varieties, populations and communities;
- The interactions between species, populations, communities and their habitats and ecosystems and their integrity, including biological productivity of ecosystems and taxa;
- The evolutionary potential of natural and agricultural systems; and;
- Critical ecosystem services.

This refers to both wild and domesticated biodiversity. **Livelihood security** refers to the security of human communities and individuals critically dependent on biological resources, including guaranteed access to, control over, and responsibility to, such biological resources and related knowledge.

3. Both ecological and livelihood security have been severely eroded, and continue to be **threatened**. Therefore there is a need to take urgent and comprehensive measures to reverse this trend.

4. Three basic goals need to be achieved to reverse this trend:

- **Conservation** of biodiversity, including the integrity and diversity of genes, species and ecosystems and their evolutionary potential;
- **Sustainable use** of biological resources, referring to the use of components of biological diversity in such a manner and at such rates that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and

aspirations of present and future generations;

- **Equity** in conservation and use, including equitable access and decision-making control over biodiversity as well as equitable distribution of costs and benefits associated with conservation and sustainable use. In particular, it includes creating democratic spaces for the voices of underprivileged women and men in defining conservation and use priorities.

5. Meeting these basic goals requires the following broad measures:

- Reorientation of the development process, ensuring that ecological and livelihood security become central concerns and that the conservation of biodiversity receives the highest priority;
- Conservation of natural and domesticated ecosystems, and of wild and domesticated species, to the fullest extent possible; and the restoration and regeneration of degraded ecosystems;
- Recognition of community tenurial rights, ensuring rights of women, children and other underprivileged sections within them;
- Recognition and integration of the full range of intrinsic as well as direct values of biodiversity into human activities;
- Recognition, respect, and revitalisation of gender-differentiated indigenous and community knowledge systems relating to biodiversity, and synergising these with mainstream knowledge systems;
- Development of alternative (including community) intellectual rights systems appropriate for indigenous knowledge, which respect the principle that life forms should not be subjected to private and monopolistic IPR regimes;
- Balancing of local, national, and international interests related to biodiversity, on the basis of principles of ecological sustainability and social equity; within these principles, local interests to get priority over national, and national over international;
- Respect for cultural diversity, and the diversity of governance systems, customary practices and laws, and other aspects of human society, in so far as these are in consonance with the basic principles of ecological sustainability and social equity;
- Elimination of absolute poverty and preventing deprivation of local communities from the natural resources necessary for them to maintain an acceptable living standard; and
- Development and strengthening of formal and non-formal education efforts at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, aimed at enhancing understanding and awareness of biodiversity, and promoting action for sustainable use and biodiversity conservation.