

## **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan**

### **INTEGRATING BIODIVERSITY CONCERNS INTO DISTRICT PLANNING**

*(The discussion below primarily draws upon early experience in decentralized district planning following 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment in the state of Madhya Pradesh. However, the precepts and the practices will hold good for other states as well)*

#### **District Planning as Part of Decentralization Process**

With the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution, district has become the first level of democratic decentralization, ultimately leading to Gram Panchayats and the Gram Sabhas as the prime movers for decentralized planning across the country. State Governments are required to set up district planning committees with well defined roles and responsibilities. The Govt of Madhya Pradesh enacted necessary legislation in 1995 to provide legal backing to decentralized planning at district level and below. District Planning Committees (DPCs) were accordingly constituted for each district in the State. Further impetus to the process in the state came in the year 2000, when the State Government decided to go full throttle on the district planning process as an essential adjunct to State Planning beginning year 2001-2002. The resources for the district planning were specified well in advance and the district planning committees required to articulate an inter-sectoral district plan. 30% of planned budget for the state has been marked for the district planning process for the next financial year.

#### **District Planning Committee: Some Key Roles**

- Identification of local needs and objectives within the framework of national and state level objectives.
- Each Gram Panchayat/ Gram Sabha to be treated as unit of planning at the grassroots level.
- Collection, compilation and updation of information relating to natural and human resources of the district to create a sound database for decentralized planning.
- Determination of programmes and schemes for development of district in order to ensure maximum and judicious utilization of a viable natural and human resource base.
- Formulation of draft 5 year and annual development plans of the district in their socioeconomic, temporal and spatial dimensions. Consolidation of the plans prepared by the Panchayats/ Gram Sabhas and the Municipalities as well as district sectors and submission of the same to the State Government.
- The draft district plan to ensure that the concerns of environmental conservation are duly met in the plans/ schemes of different sectors (section 3, purpose of constitution of the DPC).
- Conducting monitoring, evaluation and review of progress under the schemes and the programs being implemented under the decentralized planning framework, including central sector and the centrally sponsored schemes.
- Ensuring participation of the voluntary sector in the overall process.
- Making suggestion to the State Government with regard to the State Sector Schemes having significant bearing on the process of development of the district.

- In allocation of the sectoral and subsectoral outlay within the overall framework of the plan, the DPC to ensure necessary coordination between and amongst various sectoral plans and schemes.

Each DPC to be constituted to discharge the above functions, will have inter-sectoral representation to ensure ownership of the entire planning process. The committees will function through thematic working groups (4 such working groups have been listed that address primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of our economy).

### **Mainstreaming Concerns of Biodiversity Conservation**

Amongst the many reasons listed for constitution of DPC, ensuring environmental conservation in an array of disparate activities is one. However, very little has been proposed in terms of a mechanism to ensure that the activities/schemes proposed conform to environmental concerns including the concerns of biodiversity conservation. Therefore, the sectors within the government, the NGO sector, and the corporate sector need to mainstream concerns of biodiversity conservation into their respective sectoral planning. District planning process could be instrumental in ensuring such linkages. In order to do this, district planning will need to ensure some of the steps suggested below.

1. The District Planning Committee in each district must put up a Working Group that facilitates development of District Biodiversity Resource Book. The process that needs to be followed in developing such resource book could be same as spelt out for State / Sub state plans under National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (refer guidelines for implementing agency in the NBSAP compendium Guidelines and Concept Papers). The composition of the working group should be such that it brings in ownership of different sectors in building up "their" resource book. The group should obviously follow a process that is all inclusive. ***The DPC as well as the working group set by it will need to go an extra mile to first clarify its own doubts and then convey in most unambiguous terms to all concerned that focus on biodiversity is essentially linked to livelihood security of hundreds and thousands of rural and tribal people; as well as for the ecological security of the area that they inhabit.***
2. The resource book should deal with a range of biodiversity in the district, both wild as well as domesticated. It should try to answer the question of where and what of biodiversity (to the extent possible) and also prioritize the areas/ species within the district for greater focus. The linkages with the biodiversity rich contiguous patches in the adjoining district, or other inter-district issues such as trans-boundary poaching and wood theft, pollution of air/water in one district caused by activities in another district, soil erosion in one district caused by deforestation in another, and other such phenomenon, could be spelt out.
3. Equally important will be to dwell on the "why" of biodiversity conservation, which will also lay down the foundation of awareness strategy that will go on simultaneously with the process of building up the resource book. It would be critical to "value" biodiversity, including the full range of services and benefits that it provides in the district or beyond it; such values could be expressed in financial, economic, material, and social ways.
4. It will need to identify the key partners/ stakeholders whose actions have a definite bearing on the conservation of the biodiversity of the district.

5. The threats to the range of diversity within the district should then be analyzed. The ongoing programmes/ schemes of various sectors and their impact, both positive and negative, on the biodiversity should be critically assessed. The strategies and the actions that are required to plug the gaps will have to be worked out and an action plan suggested. For instance the thrust of Agriculture Department on high input intensive farming with focus on high yielding varieties using chemicals and replacement of wide array of traditional crops with high yielding cash crops could seriously undermine crop biodiversity in areas that still support rich agro-biodiversity. The possible actions in such areas would obviously be to support organic farming with most promising cultivars of traditional crops. Similar examples could be cited from different sectors showing both positive and negative impacts. *Annex.1 shows a suggested matrix for such sectoral analysis that could be used to by the development agencies and organisations including Gram Sabhas.*
6. Individual sectoral plans (including the plans from the PRIs and the Municipalities as well that of government and NGOs), and the draft district development plan collated by the DPC must ensure that the schemes and the programmes suggested in respective sectoral plans do conform to the biodiversity concerns as articulated in the district resource book. The monetary support needed at the DPC level to help the sectors undertake such an analysis need to be provided for.
7. There must be monetary provisions made for the districts to put up the district biodiversity resource book – a document that describes as well articulates collective concerns of biodiversity conservation and sustainable utilization.
8. In order to ensure that the suggested actions are taken up by the DPC, there will be a need to build capacity of the DPCs/ inter-sectoral teams and the village level institutions like Panchayats and Gram Sabhas, so that they are able to handle decisions/planning relating to biodiversity/environmental issues. The resource institutions / organisations (government, communities, institutions, and NGOs) that could significantly contribute in such capacity building endeavor will need to be identified. The first step obviously could be to look at the range of existing capacity building programme being taken up at different levels and integrate the skills required to undertake the biodiversity / environmental concerns at such levels. Relevant departments (such as the the Department of Biodiversity & Biotechnology set up in the State of Madhya Pradesh), will be required to facilitate the process.
9. **The State Planning Boards ought to bring in a caveat, that no draft plan for district development put up by the DPC shall be approved unless biodiversity conservation concerns are duly mainstreamed. A similar caveat from the Planning Commission could go a long way in ensuring that 10<sup>th</sup> five year plans from various states integrate biodiversity conservation concerns in district as well as in state plans.**

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*Concept note prepared by B.M.S. Rathore, with inputs from Ashish Kothari and other members of Technical and Policy Core Group of NBSAP.*