

## **NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - INDIA**

# **ASSESSING EXISTING NATIONAL DOCUMENTS RELEVANT TO NBSAP A Synthesis of the Findings<sup>1</sup>**

### **INTRODUCTION: WHY THE ASSESSMENTS?**

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) process is not the first exercise in India to prepare environment related action plans and policies. There are several predecessors, and it is vital that the NBSAP process builds on them rather than re-invent the wheel.

In an effort to assess what already exists at a national level (an exercise that state level agencies will also have to do for their respective states), members of the NBSAP Technical and Policy Core Group were requested to examine a series of documents. These included:

1. National Report on Implementation of Article 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1998
2. National Policy and Macrolevel Action Strategy on Biodiversity, 1999
3. Environment Action Programme (EAP) 1993
4. National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development 1992
5. National Forestry Action Plan 1999 (NFAP)
6. Biodiversity Conservation Prioritisation Project (BCPP) reports, 1999
7. Reports of the International Development Research Centre on medicinal plants

The National Wildlife Action Plan (in process) was also to be reviewed, but given that it was only in draft stage and subject to further modification, its review was postponed.

### **METHODOLOGY: WHAT PARAMETERS WERE ASSESSED?**

The following major questions were asked in doing these reviews:

1. How much or which of the NBSAP scope and aspects (see Sections 1 and 3 of the Process Outline) does the document cover?
2. Is this coverage adequate in terms of the points that an Action Plan should contain (see Section 2 of the Process Outline)?
3. Which of the thematic and sub-thematic areas does the document cover (see Appendices 3 and 4 of the Process Outline)?
4. What major gaps does the document leave in covering these themes and sub-themes?

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<sup>1</sup> This synthesis was prepared by Ashish Kothari, Coordinator of the TPCG, based on reviews of individual documents carried out by TPCG members MVM Wafar, Seema Bhatt, Bansuri Taneja, Darshan Shankar, PC Bhattacharjee, BMS Rathore, V. Shruti Devi, and B. Janardhan Rao on behalf of Gam Shimray. The individual reviews are available on request.

5. Does the document make recommendations for follow-up, which could become important indicators or directions for the NBSAP process to head towards? (e.g. does the document recommend further studies on Tenure and Biodiversity, or the setting up of an institutional structure which has not yet been implemented, in which case should the NBSAP process focus on these aspects?).
6. Would this document in any way contradict other existing action plans, national reviews, etc., a contradiction that the NBSAP process needs to take cognizance of?
7. Is there any indication of the *process* carried out in making this document, was it consultative, did it take on board all the relevant sectors of society? If there is, are there some obvious major gaps, which the NBSAP process can plug? Or is there no indication of the process at all?

***Overall, the reviews were to indicate the following: does the document point to ways in which the NBSAP process could avoid duplication, build on what already exists, help resolve contradictions, and home in on major gaps?***

In addition, individual members of the TPCG assessed these reports from the point of view of their own expertise or experience, e.g. whether the documents contained enough emphasis and action points on marine issues, on medicinal plants, on adivasi concerns, on agricultural diversity, on gender concerns, and so on.

## **SYNTHESIS: MAJOR CONCLUSIONS OF THE REVIEWS**

The following broad observations emerged (these may not all be relevant to each document, but are part of a general picture):

1. These documents could serve as useful starting points for the various executing agencies of the NBSAP, in particular the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), and some State Steering Committees (SSCs). For this, MoEF should be requested to provide all relevant reports/documents which were used to prepare the national level documents, e.g. thematic reports on Institutional Structures for Environment, as part of the Environment Action Programme 1993; or state-level forestry sector review as part of the NFAP 1999.
2. The documents provide a useful policy (and in some cases, strategy) base to build on, which the NBSAP executing agencies should not duplicate. In particular, the Macro-level Action Strategy, and the National Conservation Strategy, could form the baseline for all the NBSAP executing agencies.
3. Specific sections in the documents that would be relevant for each TWG and SSC, or to other executing agencies of the NBSAP, would be identified for the benefit of these agencies.
4. All documents (with the partial exception of the NFAP and the BCPP reports) restrict themselves to strategies, but do not go much into concrete actions and means to achieve them. Thus the NBSAP has the function of building on them to suggest concrete, implementable actions with estimates of resources/humanpower/expertise/institutions needed.
5. Some themes to be covered by the NBSAP were either not covered or covered inadequately in the documents. In particular, the linkages between natural resources and

health, culture, livelihoods, technology and economics, was poorly developed. From the point of view of adivasi and other local communities, the importance of biodiversity-based livelihoods, and of customary governance and management practices, was weakly dealt with. The over-arching need to re-orient the development process to make it biodiversity-friendly, was inadequately expressed. It may therefore be necessary to give these themes greater focus in the NBSAP.

6. Conversely, some themes were substantially covered (e.g. wild animal diversity under BCPP, forests under NFAP), and the NBSAP could focus on covering the gaps in these.
7. The process of these documents preparation did not appear to as participatory as the NBSAP proposes to be. The NBSAP process was therefore critical in that views and participation of diverse sections of the society would be incorporated when formulating the plan.
8. Most of the documents suggested people's participation as part of strategy/policy, but did not go into concrete measures to do this. In particular, issues of people's empowerment to take part in decision-making regarding natural resources, or their involvement right from the initiation of policy and strategic planning, was not highlighted in most documents. The NBSAP therefore needs to fill this critical gap.
9. There is a need to assess implementation and current status of the strategies/action plans and programmes suggested in these documents, especially the Conservation Strategy 1992 and the Environment Action Programme 1993, as these had been in operation for several years now. However, such monitoring and evaluation seemed to be absent, which pointed to a critical gap that NBSAP needs to fill.