

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - INDIA

**INVOLVING THE CORPORATE SECTOR
IN THE NBSAP PROCESS
A Note for Executing Agencies**

The public and private corporate sector has an important potential contribution to make in conserving biological diversity and promoting sustainable development. A wide range of biological resources is used in industry to provide foods, medicines, fabrics and an assortment of other products. As a number of industries rely on natural resources of one type or another it is clearly in their best interest to ensure that the supply of those resources is not interrupted, diminished or lost forever. In fact, ensuring that these resources are continuously available is essential for business. Further, biodiversity is of great importance for sectors such as pharmaceuticals and agro-industry, as it provides them with a rich source of genetic materials. Some of these materials are likely to contain unique compounds or properties which one day may provide remedies for currently untreatable diseases. Conservation of biodiversity is therefore important in economic as well as ecological sense.

Despite this resource dependency, the corporate sector has not so far actively involved itself in biodiversity conservation process, and indeed, has largely had a negative impact in terms of over-exploitation (e.g. of medicinal plants), habitat destruction by diversion and pollution, displacement of rural livelihoods based on bio-resources, and so on. As society becomes increasingly aware of the critical need to protect the natural environment, such behaviour will not be accepted for long. Sooner or later, the corporate sector has to move towards more responsible and just modes of functioning. Further, a number of national actions are following up the Convention on Biological Diversity, launched in 1992 and ratified by most countries of the world including India. Amongst these are a proposed Biological Diversity Bill, and the ongoing National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. These and other moves will affect several business sectors involving the use of biological sources. Some of the areas, where the effects are likely to be felt are as follows:

- Restrictions on long-term access to, and availability of, biological resources
- Restrictions on land and water access for exploration and development
- More stringent requirements for environmental impact assessments
- Restrictions on trade in products determined to be “biodiversity unfriendly”, including threatened species
- Voluntary and legislative measures to protect biodiversity
- Liability for not protecting biodiversity
- Strict codes for ensuring safety in biotechnology
- Public support to “biodiversity friendly” products.

Although biodiversity has a broad impact on all business operations, it is an essential foundation for development in many sectors, e.g. the seed industry, pharmaceutical companies, beauty product companies, agro-industries, and others. Some considerations are common to all sectors such as research and training, financial measures for environmentally friendly operations, and the conservation of land around operations, whereas a few issues are

specific to a particular sector. Biodiversity related issues in some of these sectors are as under:

1. *Pharmaceutical*
 - Equitable sharing of benefits from the use of bio-resources and related knowledge
 - Access to biological resources for collection, use, and transfer
 - Technology transfer
2. *Agriculture*
 - Use of genetic resources for agriculture
 - Minimizing the use of agrochemicals affecting biodiversity
 - Use of living modified organisms from biotechnology determined to be safe
3. *Forestry*
 - Use a diversity of native species, rather than monocultures and exotics, in afforestation
 - Avoidance of chemicals
 - Linking industries with farmers, for provision of raw materials in ways that are sustainable and do not displace small farmers or food-producing lands
 - R&D for non-wood alternatives to reduce demand on forests
4. *Fisheries*
 - Sustainable use of marine resources and 'mariculture' practices.
 - Priority to small-scale fisherfolk over large-scale commercial ventures.
5. *Petroleum*
 - Access to land, marine and coastal areas
 - Detailed environmental impact assessments (EIAs)
6. *Manufacture/Retail*
 - Public interest in biodiversity-friendly products.
 - Appropriate technology transfer
 - Pollution control measures in manufacturing process
 - Boost to small-scale biodiversity enterprises

Keeping in view the above, it is vital that the corporate sector should actively participate in biodiversity conservation initiatives by accepting responsible roles in implementing and managing various conservation and sustainable use programmes. A key entry point for corporate sector is through the country's national biodiversity planning process where its knowledge and expertise can be utilized effectively. It would also help corporate sector as its legitimate interests would be represented in the development of government policies and programs, guidelines and other management tools. Conservation of biodiversity should be at the heart of the company's management strategy. This means, it should help to try to retain natural areas wherever possible, to restore degraded areas and to harvest resources sustainably. It should also respect and support the livelihoods and rights of communities dependent on biodiversity, and promote cultural diversity and values relevant to biodiversity. In fact, the companies may develop a formal biodiversity policy or incorporate biodiversity into its existing environmental policies. A stress on labour-intensive methods would be one step in this. Biodiversity strategy and policies of individual companies should reflect or recognize the national biodiversity strategy, and should adhere strictly to existing and proposed laws on wildlife and biodiversity. They should keep abreast of the discussions and developments relating to national guidelines for incentive measures, biosafety, equitable

benefit-sharing, intellectual property rights, monitoring of biodiversity indicators and other related topics.

In light of the above, it is proposed that corporate sector may be involved in a two-way process in the NBSAP: to provide inputs into the process, and to learn from it to imbibe and integrate biodiversity concerns into corporate attitudes, programmes and policies. The instances where biodiversity concerns have been integrated into the policy and programmes of the corporate sector may be analyzed in order to replicate or learn from them during NBSAP process. The various aspects, which should be addressed during action plan preparation include:

1. Encouraging participation of representatives from progressive industries and industry associations in the action plan process in the Thematic Working Groups (TWG) at national level, in State Steering Committees (SSC) at the state level, and where relevant, at substate and ecoregional levels.
2. Encouraging corporate sector for developing in-house biodiversity policies and strategies to manage the biological resources the company affects and also respect the concerns of local communities and other stakeholders. Methods for education and training to instill a biodiversity conscious culture within company management should be explored.
3. Developing and analyzing models of equitable sharing of information, knowledge and practices with the local communities (lessons from examples such as the benefit-sharing arrangement between the Kani tribe, the Tropical Botanic Garden Research Institute, and the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy Ltd, to develop a herbal drug based on adivasi knowledge, can be learnt from).
4. Encouraging the corporate sector to adopt measures, which ensures sustainable use of biological resources. The measures may be explored for the moral responsibility of corporate sector going beyond monetary and material consideration such as respecting the sanctity of critical natural habitats and threatened species.
5. Creating awareness regarding the need for appropriate intellectual rights regimes, respecting the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities and ensuring that collection and use of biological and genetic resources is done within a framework/guidelines of such respect.
6. Encouraging active partnership amongst corporate sector, research institutions and biodiversity conservation organizations as well as with the general public and with local communities for the management of important species and ecosystems. In this, the corporate sector needs to accept the guidance of biodiversity specialists and local communities. The research collaborations should be encouraged to have appropriate financial agreements, training of/by scientists, and transfer of appropriate technologies.
7. Instituting incentives and awards for members of the corporate sector who adhere to a definition of "progressive" in terms of being biodiversity-friendly and respectful of local community livelihood rights.