

## NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - INDIA

### GUIDELINES FOR ENSURING WIDESPREAD PARTICIPATION IN THE NBSAP PROCESS

#### Supplementary Guidelines for Executing Agencies<sup>1</sup>

Participation is very core to the NBSAP process and we need to ensure "participation" both within and amongst the institutions created for the NBSAP process, as well as the wider clientele which these institutions aim to involve.

#### **Level I: Participation within and amongst different groups of NBSAP**

##### *Are the key players on board ?*

The very constitution of institutions at various levels (SSC, LAC, EWG and TWG) must be such that it provides space for representation of all the key interest groups to be on Board. All sectors must be represented on the SSC/LAC etc. This will include representatives of community, Govt. agencies, NGOs, academicians working in the field of conservation, independent experts, private sector, people's representatives, media, armed forces etc. Special care needs to be taken to ensure that the SSCs, LACs, EWGs (and to some extent the TWGs) have membership from:

- (a) those who are most dependent on or closely linked to biological resources, viz. local farming, fishing, pastoral, forest-dwelling, nomadic communities.
- (b) such interest groups that are institutionally mandated to look after natural resource conservation in the area of their operation, like Forest Deptt, Agriculture Deptt, and so on; and
- (c) women in various sectors, as they often tend to be neglected in planning and decision-making.

If the constitution of working groups has a good balance, then its quite possible that the members representing different sectors, volunteer themselves to shoulder the responsibility of seeking the involvement of the sector they represent.

The TPCG needs to ensure that various groups created under the NBSAP process show adequate representation of various sectors.

##### *Charity Begins at Home*

Various NBSAP executing agencies (SSC, LAC, EWG and TWG) must demonstrate that within their own internal working, they care about participation. This cannot happen without developing a common vision and developing a minimum common understanding of the objectives to be achieved and the strategy to be followed. The groups may therefore like to spend enough time to create such a common understanding. Role of coordinators is quite critical in steering the group to develop a common understanding and ensuring positive intra-group dynamics. They must encourage active participation of all members, allowing full scope and time to speak, especially in the case of local community representatives who may have cultural or language constraints in formal situations.

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<sup>1</sup> This note was prepared by B.M.S. Rathore, Member, TPCG, with inputs from other TPCG members.

Equally important would be feeding in and learning from other group processes, set up for the NBSAP. For instance, the TWG may like to feed into and learn from the SSC & LAC and vice-versa. This may require appropriate forums / media / institutions. NBSAP web-site being launched shortly could be one of the options as well as the e-mail discussion groups.

## **Level II: Participation by the Wider Public in the NBSAP Process**

As repeatedly stressed in the Process Outline and other documents of the NBSAP, the process must ensure widespread participation in the formulation of action plans at various levels. There are, of course, logistic constraints on the level of participation that can be ensured, including the availability of resources and time. It is impossible to reach out to everyone in the country. However, what is critical is that opportunities must be given for all *key sectors* to have their say, make their voices heard, and in particular to reach out to the three sections mentioned under Level I above. The Guidelines for Executing Agencies, already sent to all coordinators and nodal agencies, very strongly underline this. The tools suggested in the guidelines include :

- inviting public inputs at every step through public announcements, advertisements in newspapers, radio and TV, etc.
- making all relevant information available to the public, through both written/published and oral means;
- using local languages in all key documents and events (particularly in state/sub-state processes);
- allowing for a diversity for opinions and approaches to be reflected in the whole process and in the final action plans;
- using festivals and other cultural occasions where people come together;
- making publicly available interim/draft action plans and using a transparent process to consider comments and inputs that come in.

Not all of these may be applicable to all agencies. TWGs, in particular, since they are looking at national cross-cutting issues, may not be able to do some of the above. But the spirit of reaching out and involving people should run through the entire functioning of the agencies, and the tools accordingly decided.

It is also critical that all kinds of knowledge, including local community knowledge and expertise, are treated with equal respect.

The tools and methods listed above are neither exhaustive, nor meant to be followed in all cases. Based on such a list, the executing agencies would be free to build their own strategy best suited to their requirements. Each state and substate agency may also suggest its own media campaign strategy to seek wide ranging participation; they could use the NBSAP Concept Note on the Media Campaign (already distributed to executing agencies), for formulating their own strategy.