NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - INDIA

DOMESTICATED BIODIVERSITY

Thematic Concept Note[1]

The diversity of crops, livestock (including poultry), and domestic pets, is most often overlooked when biodiversity is being discussed. Domesticated plants and animals form a critical part of human civilisation and cultures. The origin of genetic diversity in crops and livestock is linked with the development of human influenced ecosystems. Since the dawn of agriculture, people the world over have developed and promoted the development, conservation, and use of plant and animal varieties to meet ecological, economic, and cultural needs and conditions. These latter include increased household food security, higher productivity, better taste, resistance to pests or diseases, the ability to withstand adverse conditions like floods, drought, or frost, cultural and ritual uses, and others. Due to the gender division of roles and responsibilities, and women's primary responsibility for household sustenance, women have traditionally played a key role in seed selection, storage and managing domesticated biodiversity, including of livestock, for maximizing household food security. By virtue of this role, women in most cultures have been the repository of unique domesticated ~~BD~~ biodiversity knowledge ~~which is normally unrecognized~~.

India has been one of the global centres of domesticated biodiversity. Its farmers~~, particularly women,~~ have developed an astonishing variety of crops, livestock, and pets, a diversity that has stood them in good stead through difficult times and helped to meet diverse human needs. However, the last 3 or 4 decades have seen a shift away from biologically diverse agriculture, to more homogenous farming and pastoral practices which has also often included a shift in decision~~-~~-making related to such matters from women to men. This shift has been a result of policies and programmes oriented towards increasing the commercial productivity of farming systems, using a rather narrow definition of productivity in terms of quantities of grains, milk, or wool alone, ignoring issues of household food security including those linked to women's reduced control over cash incomes. Such policies and programmes have ignored the importance of diversity in the lives and livelihoods of ~~women & men~~ women and men farmers, in providing a more stable and creative genetic base for agriculture, and as the bases for a holistic concept of productivity which integrates the biomass, food security and cultural needs of a community. As a result, we are fast losing indigenous domesticated species and along with this the traditional knowledge about their significance.

Within this background, the Working Group should undertake the following with regard to domesticated biodiversity:

1. Describe and evaluate the available information on diversity of agro-ecosystems, crops, livestock, and pets, and practices/knowledge related to these giving particular attention to gender and class/caste differences in roles, responsibilities and knowledge;
2. Describe and inventory its various values for women and men, at a broad/aggregate level; ~~humans - can this be done at a broad/aggregated level? if not, the exercise threatens to be too big for this two year exercise;~~
3. Identify and assess major threats, including perverse agricultural policies and programmes, habitat loss due to development projects or other forces, erosion of knowledge, ~~and so on~~ particularly the less visible knowledge of women;

[1] This note was prepared by Seema Bhatt, Member, TPCG, with inputs from other members of the TPCG.

4. Identify critical regions in India for conservation action (areas with high or unique domesticated biodiversity, areas with serious threats and erosion, and so on);
5. Identify existing measures (official, corporate, and people's) for conservation, both *in situ* and *ex situ*, and gaps in these measures e.g. attention to women's equal and informed participation;
6. Identify measures (short and long-term) needed to plug the gaps, including the policy, legal, institutional, and programmatic steps necessary, and including R&D and other actions at corporate and international levels;
7. Identify measures to integrate domesticated biodiversity, agricultural productivity, household food security and the livelihoods of farmers/pastoralists, including through appropriate changes in corporate and governmental policies and programmes;
8. Prioritise these measures (in steps 6 and 7 above) in terms of their importance and immediacy;
9. Identify the resources (human, institutional, and economic) needed to carry out these measures.