

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - INDIA

LIVELIHOODS, LIFESTYLES & BIODIVERSITY

Thematic Concept Note¹

Historically, communities have depended on using local biodiversity for sustaining their lives and livelihoods. This has shaped diverse cultures, gender relations, resource use and management traditions, and spiritual beliefs. In India, an estimated 100 million forest dwellers living within and near forest areas with a preponderance of poor women among them and another 275 million people continue to depend on forest biodiversity as an important source of their survival livelihoods. Several tens of millions more women and men depend on freshwater and marine biodiversity for their sustenance. Even in the country's present predominantly agricultural belts, several communities, particularly women have preserved and maintained cultural traditions centered on conserving biodiversity through sustainable use for meeting livelihood needs. Agricultural biodiversity itself is a critical base for meeting economic and cultural requirements.

However, current models of development have devalued the critical links between biodiversity and livelihoods. A predominant thrust towards urban and industrial oriented development has often differentially alienated women and men of communities from their natural surrounds, and forced them into producing or working for urban markets and industrial processes or be compelled to resort to unsustainable use. In forestry, pastoralism, fisheries, agriculture, and other 'primary' sectors of the economy, external market-driven extraction and production has resulted in reduction of biodiversity and destruction of biodiversity-based livelihoods. Urban and elite lifestyles, in particular rampant consumerism, is also driving biodiversity loss through over-exploitation of raw materials and destruction of natural habitats. The corporate sector has focussed on producing an ever increasing range of consumer goods, with little regard for the impacts on biodiversity in particular and environment in general

Simultaneously, instead of building upon the wealth of gender-differentiated indigenous knowledge and conservation traditions in official conservation programmes, wildlife protection approaches treat communities as threats to be excluded. The sudden delegitimation of their livelihood systems, resource rights and access alienates the very people with primary stakes in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, thereby leading to damaging conflicts and loss of indigenous knowledge.

In recent times, however, a reverse trend is - being seen. - Thousands of communities, on their own or aided by NGOs or government officials, are reviving their natural resource base and livelihoods dependent on this. Self-initiated forest protection measures, Joint Forest Management, organic and bio-diverse farming, community-based coastal and marine conservation, and widespread resistance to destructive commercial and industrial processes, are rapidly increasing.

Given the above, this thematic group shall undertake the following:

¹ This note was prepared by Madhu Sarin, Member, TPCG, with inputs from other members of the TPCG.

1. Review the current status of knowledge about the relationship between biodiversity and local livelihoods systems, and about community integration of diverse livelihoods needs in different ecosystems (terrestrial and aquatic); giving particular attention to gender differences in livelihood needs and priorities.
2. Assess the current situation of biodiversity-based livelihoods, what threats they face, how they have changed or are changing; and how these are impacting women and men differently.
3. Assess how changing lifestyles in rural and urban areas are impacting on biodiversity;
4. Review strategies and approaches developed within and outside the country for combining livelihood security of local women and men with biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.
5. Study gender differentiated community perspectives on appropriate conservation strategies which would link local livelihood security with biodiversity conservation by making them primary stakeholders in ensuring sustainable use;
6. Based on an analysis of the above, identify the property rights regimes (including IPRs), institutional arrangements (including the roles and responsibilities of state agencies and local institutions), and devolution of authority required for promoting integration of local livelihood security with biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; which also protect women's independent entitlements.
7. Identify the measures needed to contain and eliminate the negative impacts of changing lifestyles, especially consumerism, on biodiversity, and to promote biodiversity-friendly lifestyles and values in rural and urban areas; Explore long-term benefits of investments by the corporate sector in R&D towards making consumer products more environmentally friendly.
8. Identify the opportunities and constraints of community controlled technological inputs (including sustainable and safe biotechnology) for value addition and market linkages to enhance returns from sustainable use practices;
9. Prioritise the measures needed for promoting sustainable livelihood and lifestyle options, based on their differing importance and immediacy for women and men;
10. Identify the resources (human, institutional, economic) needed to carry out these measures.

Several other themes of the NBSAP may also feed into this. For example, economics and biodiversity; access, benefit-sharing and IPR; education and training; technology and industry; policies, law and planning.