

NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN – INDIA

WILD (PLANT AND ANIMAL) BIODIVERSITY

Thematic Concept Note

The wild species biodiversity of India has a very wide taxonomic range, in proportion to the enormous diversity of ecosystems and geographical conditions which these species inhabit. This enormous diversity at the species, subspecies and variety level, is a result of evolutionary processes.

However, in the last couple of centuries, and in particular in the last few decades, this diversity has faced increasing erosion. Habitat loss, hunting and over-exploitation, introduction of exotics, poisoning, and other factors including progressive disempowerment of local communities and destabilization of their traditional management systems, have caused this loss. The dimensions of the loss are as yet unclear, as baseline data, research and monitoring are poorly developed in the country. Some elements of the loss which have remained undetected or severely under-studied, include decline of the sub-species and varieties of a species. This silent erosion are not necessarily due to any anthropogenic factor, but often due to complex and less understood environmental factors.

While a number of conservation measures (notably legal protection against hunting and trade, and creation of protected areas) have been taken by the Indian government and NGOs in India, there remain critical deficiencies. The distribution of the wild biodiversity is not restricted to protected areas only, and the distribution does not follow any political or administrative guidelines. Hence, a true **national** approach is required, on the basis of the **local** and **regional** characteristic of the wildlife. Also, the focus for conservation work has to also be put on wild plants, and 'lesser' species of animals, as on the megafauna.

While a true national approach is called for, wild biodiversity issues could have international ramifications and implications, with neighbouring countries that share the same taxa.

The Wild Biodiversity thematic working group's work should be based on the recognition that:

- the wild biodiversity which is physically protected in the PAs, continue to face threats from vested interests and other human sources and from factors such as isolation and fragmentation of habitats and populations, reduction in distribution range, and so on;
- a large number of wild species are distributed in areas outside the PA network and face severe threats to their future;
- a large number of flora and fauna are endemic to India in general and to specific ecological regions in particular, and need special attention;
- basic research and information on various aspects of wild species is still seriously deficient in India;
- wild species and their diversity are critical for the well-being of the country, in terms of the ecological functions they provide, the aesthetic, cultural and spiritual inspiration that humans derive from them, their economic importance including of the relatives of cultivated plant and domesticated animals species, and so on. In particular, a major section of the women and men in rural (including tribal) areas are dependent on, associated with and knowledgeable about wild biodiversity for their livelihood and culture.

- there continue to exist strong traditions of conservation of wildlife in many sections of India's population which need recognition and integration within the framework of official conservation programmes;
- there is need for a diversity of conservation strategies and approaches, including legal protection to species and habitats, countering commercial-industrial-biotic threats, collaborative management with local communities, economic incentives, ensuring equitable distribution of costs and benefits, etc.
- Activities related to biodiversity conservation within a country have international ramifications and implications.

Given the above, the Working Group should identify the following giving due attention to the potential role of indigenous communities and their knowledge:

1. critical research and information gaps, and measures to plug them;
2. mechanisms of identifying wild taxa of importance (threatened, endemic to regions or biomes, 'primitive', high value for humans, and so on), including through indigenous technical knowledge, and measures to conserve them;
3. mechanisms of identifying relatively unknown locations of high wild taxa biodiversity;
4. mechanisms of identifying important habitats for each taxa and measures to conserve them;
5. measures to remove all threats to wildlife, in particular large-scale habitat loss due to commercial and 'developmental' projects;
6. an inclusive & consultative process of prioritisation, at local, state, and national levels, of conservation actions related to wild taxa.
7. steps to develop collaborative BD conservation strategies with local communities living in, and knowledgeable about, wild biodiversity in their area;
8. steps to develop collaborative biodiversity conservation strategies with neighbouring countries that share the same taxa (in collaboration with the WGs on Terrestrial Ecosystems, and Aquatic Ecosystems);
9. steps for the establishment of cross-boundary emergency response mechanisms, where not already existing, to address emergency threats to wild biodiversity;
10. possibilities of generating financial and resource support to neighbouring countries for biodiversity goals of common interest (e.g. for conservation of migratory species).
11. biodiversity related initiatives in other countries which India could learn from.

The measures being recommended should take into account:

1. what is already being done by communities, NGOs, and official agencies for promoting conservation and sustainable use;
2. existing official as well as community/civil society assessments on the subject, including of strategies to conserve elements of wild biodiversity that have failed or been successful, and possible reasons for such failure or success;
3. the expertise and experience available, including among academic institutions at various levels, and among the women and men of tribal and other local communities with strong conservation ethics and cultural traditions;
4. the gaps that need to be plugged through a range of actions at governmental, NGO, corporate, community, and other levels;
5. the resources (human, institutional, economic) needed for the above.

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