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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS
(NBSAPS)**

Information note by the Executive Secretary

1. The Executive Secretary is pleased to circulate herewith, for the information of participants in the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, an information document entitled “Biodiversity Planning: An Assessment of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs): Conclusions and Recommendations” submitted by the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) as a contribution to agenda item 4 ‘Strategic issues for evaluating progress and supporting implementation’.
2. The document is being circulated in the form and language in which it was provided to the Secretariat.

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UNITED NATIONS
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... Advancing Knowledge and Promoting Learning for Policy-Making to Meet the Challenges of Sustainable Development

Biodiversity Planning

An Assessment of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations of a UNU-IAS assessment of NBSAPs carried out over the period 2008-2010 are attached as a contribution to Agenda item 4 'Strategic issues for evaluating progress and supporting implementation'.

The full report will be available on the UNU-IAS website and at COP10.

Background

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has proclaimed national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) to be the primary mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan.

Article 6a of the CBD requires all Parties to develop an NBSAP. The strategy is meant to be a roadmap for how the country intends to fulfil the objectives of the Convention in light of its specific national circumstances. The related action plan will constitute the sequence of steps to be taken to meet the goals of the strategy. The development of the NBSAP in accordance with Article 6(a) is the cornerstone for fulfilling the requirement of Article 6(b) to mainstream biodiversity and the three objectives of the CBD. This should occur across all sectors of government, economic sectors and involve other actors who have an impact on biodiversity, through relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies. NBSAPs developed in isolation from other sectoral policies and programmes will be ineffective in protecting biodiversity and the integrity of critical ecosystem functions.

By September 2010, 171 countries (89% of the total number of CBD Parties) had adopted their NBSAPs or equivalent instruments. In addition, 13 countries had informed the Secretariat that they were in the process of preparing their NBSAP. Two countries who have acceded to the Convention in the last two years, and seven others, have not prepared NBSAPs or initiated the process to do so, or have not informed the CBD Secretariat that they have done so. Forty nine Parties have revised their NBSAPs, or are in the process of doing so

Although there have been various studies of NBSAPs, especially developing country NBSAPs, so far no comprehensive assessment of all NBSAPs and their effectiveness as tools for national implementation has been carried out.

The UNU-IAS project aimed to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the preparation, content, adequacy and effectiveness of existing NBSAPs and, in the light of this assessment, offer recommendations on what steps should be taken to ensure that NBSAPs fulfil their role as the primary mechanism for the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.

The project team carried out a desktop review of all NBSAPs and equivalent national documents as well as specific studies of nine countries. The team attended most of the regional and sub-regional capacity building workshops on NBSAPs and mainstreaming of biodiversity organised by the CBD Secretariat from 2008 and 2010.

The large number of NBSAPs is in itself an achievement and an indispensable step on the road to implementation. NBSAPs have generated important results in many countries, including a better understanding of biodiversity, its value and what is required to address threats to it. Legal gaps in implementation have been filled, the coverage of protected areas has been considerably extended, and in many countries better protection of endangered species has been introduced. Recently, the fourth national reports and the series of regional and sub-regional capacity workshops on implementing NBSAPs and mainstreaming biodiversity have provided new information and insights the wealth of action for biodiversity

taking place throughout the world. This encompasses both action for the conservation of biodiversity and action related to mainstreaming biodiversity within sectoral and cross-sectoral activities at both national and sub-national level. This is an indication of another positive trend in CBD implementation.

Conclusions

In spite of these achievements and positive trends, our general conclusion matches that of earlier assessments: that NBSAPs have not attenuated the main drivers of biodiversity loss. The Global Biodiversity Outlook confirms the continuing decline of biodiversity in all three of its main components – genes, species and ecosystems. It argues that “action to implement the CBD has not been taken on a sufficient scale to address the pressures on biodiversity in most places” and “there has been insufficient integration of biodiversity issues into broader policies, strategies and programmes, and the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss have not been addressed significantly.”

Our assessment suggests that, taken together, existing NBSAPs will not be capable of changing this global picture by meeting the objectives of the CBD or the strategic goals and targets of the new Strategic Plan. This worrying conclusion does not mean however that the outlook is completely bleak; at least 184 countries have taken steps towards implementing the CBD and among these are countries whose NBSAPs are comprehensive, strategic and feasible. The challenge, to which the energies of the CBD with the support of its partner organizations should be directed as a matter of urgency, is to ensure that as soon as possible all NBSAPs are comprehensive, strategic and being implemented. This will provide the best chance for reducing biodiversity loss and meeting the strategic goals and targets of the new Strategic Plan. At the moment, although it is true that the political attention paid to biodiversity and its importance for sustainable development is growing in many countries and that biodiversity concerns are increasingly integrated into national development policies, it seems this is rarely due to NBSAPs.

Many NBSAPs quickly lost their momentum and, since most have not been revised and are more than eight years old, they have also been unable to serve as implementation mechanisms for some of the most important and far-reaching CBD decisions taken since they were developed. This includes key areas such as the Strategic Plan with its global 2010 target and its request for countries to adopt national goals and targets, as well as several thematic and cross-cutting work programmes adopted at COP-6 and subsequent meetings.

The inability of NBSAPs to influence mainstream development outcomes can be largely attributed to weaknesses in the process of their development. Many processes were often more technical than political, and did not manage to sufficiently influence policy beyond the remit of the national agency directly responsible for biodiversity. The need for mainstreaming across sectors is generally recognised in NBSAPs, but often in general and aspirational terms with little direction on how this mainstreaming is actually going to take place. Coordination structures may formally exist, but often with limited political and cross-sectoral ownership, as well as with limited ownership at the sub-national level. Many NBSAPs are overly ambitious and prescriptive whilst at the same time lacking a strategy for

financing their implementation. They often appear to have been addressed to external funding agencies rather than national decision makers.

However, the development process is not the only factor determining whether implementation will be successful. A number of countries have conducted excellent processes with extensive stakeholder involvement and well-structured NBSAPs, but are still faced with implementation constraints, mostly in the form of inadequate institutional, technical and financial capacity.

On the positive side, many countries have learned from the shortcomings of first generation NBSAPs. Although fewer than a third of NBSAPs have been revised, second generation NBSAPs are generally very different from the first in terms of greater stakeholder involvement in their preparation, approval at a higher political level, focus on mainstreaming, alignment with other relevant plans and policies, monitoring tools, and strategies for communication and financing. However it is striking that, despite recent strong calls to set time-bound and measurable national biodiversity targets and the many COP decisions to this effect, very few new NBSAPs include such targets. While some of the new NBSAPs are starting to demonstrate results, it is still too early to assess the impact of second generation NBSAPs on the status of biodiversity and the main drivers of biodiversity loss.

Many NBSAPs are quite comprehensive in scope, and their preparation has in itself been a major achievement for the country. Nearly all countries have applied a participatory process, and according to reports at the workshops, preparation of NBSAPs has been important in creating awareness on biodiversity issues. The workshops have revealed a lot of concrete activities and innovative thinking, generated to some extent from NBSAPs, not only in the conservation community, but also on a broader scale across sectors.

Our assessment has revealed clear differences between older and newer NBSAPs. Second generation NBSAPs – including both revised and new NBSAPs – have a stronger emphasis on mainstreaming and are far more strategic and action oriented. Notably, they include a higher degree of self-reliance when compared to many first generation NBSAPs, which often presupposed external funding for implementation

Nevertheless many obstacles and shortcomings still persist. Second generation NBSAPs are still few in numbers and their impact has yet to materialise. Hence, the overall impact of NBSAPs on the driving forces of biodiversity loss continues to be limited. Biodiversity planning is still rarely viewed as a political and economic process in which hard decisions are to be made on resource allocation and use.

The NBSAPs are quite varied in form and content. There is no clear differentiation between developed and developing country NBSAPs or among geographic regions. Development status does not predetermine the quality of national biodiversity planning and regional neighbours with shared characteristics and comparable development status often show marked differences in the approaches adopted and their effectiveness.

A large majority of countries have applied a participatory approach to NBSAP preparations. However key stakeholder categories, such as women's organisations, local and indigenous

communities and the private sector, appear to have participated less frequently in national processes. Second generation NBSAPs have typically been prepared through a broader, longer and more structured preparatory process, often also including provincial and local levels.

The momentum that was built up during these participatory preparatory processes seems to have been quickly lost in many countries. Most countries have created some kind of national coordination structure, but these typically involve fewer stakeholders than in the preparatory processes. It also seems that many NBSAP coordination structures are not functioning well, if at all, and that there is a clear connection between the limited degree of implementation and the lack of efficient coordination mechanisms.

The level of endorsement and thereby ownership of the NBSAP at the government level is also critical to its success. It appears that most first generation NBSAPs were approved at the level of the minister responsible for the national CBD focal point or below. Many of the second generation NBSAPs have been adopted at the level of the head of state or cabinet while some have been adopted by the parliament.

Developing and implementing the NBSAP have helped countries to improve their biodiversity knowledge and to identify the main causes of biodiversity loss and the response measures needed to combat the loss. At the same time it has led many countries to become aware of huge gaps in their knowledge. Therefore improvement of the knowledge base features as a key objective in many NBSAPs.

There is an uneven focus of the three CBD objectives in NBSAPs. Conservation gains most attention, especially with regard to protected areas. Sustainable use often appears in vague and general terms. Measures for access to genetic resources and the equitable sharing of benefits arising out of their use of genetic resources are absent from most NBSAPs.

Nearly half the NBSAPs do not consider biodiversity in a broader development policy context. Amongst those that do the treatment varies considerably, from thorough analysis and actions linked to development policy papers to very general statements with no elaboration or concrete proposals for action. In addition, the degree to which development objectives have been reflected in NBSAPs does not necessarily reflect the degree to which biodiversity has actually been incorporated into national development policies. In many cases NBSAPs are more than ten years old and no longer influence national policy. The implication is that in some cases even robust language on linking biodiversity to broader development policies has not led to this integration, whilst in other cases integration has occurred despite the NBSAP.

A study was undertaken of 45 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) completed after 2004 on the extent to which they address environmental issues in general and biodiversity in particular. The study revealed that there has been a steady improvement in the degree of environmental mainstreaming within PRSPs, but that biodiversity-related issues receive limited attention compared to environmental issues such as water and sanitation. The study also revealed that in many cases there was limited correlation between the NBSAP and the PRSP, suggesting that each had been prepared in isolation from the other.

A study of reports on implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also showed similarly weak consideration of biodiversity compared to other environmental issues. The incorporation of the 2010 biodiversity target into goal 7 on environmental sustainability is largely ignored in the MDG reports. However the study did reveal that a number of countries have included biodiversity-related targets and a trend towards greater recognition of the importance of biodiversity for development.

Only a minority of NBSAPs address the question of climate change and, when they do, this is mostly in the form of simply reflecting on the impact of climate change on biodiversity and not in the form of specific objectives and actions. Very few NBSAPs emphasise the role of diverse and robust ecosystems in mitigation and adaptation.

A study of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) under the UNFCCC revealed that the majority included actions related to biodiversity.

Preliminary analysis of the extent to which biodiversity is integrated into National Action Plans under the UNCCD reveals a strong correlation between NAPs and NBSAPs.

Most NBSAPs place a strong emphasis on planning at the national level, and only a minority explicitly acknowledge the benefits of sub-national BSAPs. Those countries where sub-national BSAPs have been developed tend to be large countries with a federal or other decentralised structure. Even in countries that clearly acknowledge local co-responsibility for biodiversity planning, the actual communication of the NBSAP to the sub-national authorities and the empowerment of these to act has often been unsuccessful due to weak local institutional capacity.

Many COP decisions and in particular the different thematic programmes of work are used only rarely as points of reference in the NBSAPs or even referred to at all. Many of the thematic and cross-cutting programmes of work and other decisions were adopted after the majority of NBSAPs were prepared, but even so it is striking how little they seem to influence national biodiversity planning.

From discussions at the workshops and with interviewees we have detected a general consensus that the CBD should focus more on implementation than has been the case until now. Substantial resources have been put into policy development in the form of the negotiation, adoption and revision of decisions, work programmes and guidelines. The view is increasingly expressed that the Convention now needs to move beyond the stage of refining its guidance and focus on delivering tangible results on the ground. Indeed, when countries were asked in the fourth national reports to describe implementation outcomes, they tended to report the development of new plans, programmes and strategies rather than concrete action to meet their commitments under the Convention.

However, the action needed to halt the loss of biodiversity will have to seriously address the root causes of biodiversity, and addressing root causes and not just treating symptoms is a complex cross-sectoral issue that requires a political and economic planning process with compromises and trade-offs. This planning process is envisaged in Article 6 of the CBD, but in most countries did not take place or took place with only limited success in the first phase of

the life of the Convention. A new strategic plan for the post-2010 period with measurable targets will provide a framework for a new phase of national biodiversity planning that can address the issues that have not been properly addressed so far. A number of recently prepared NBSAPs have already begun to pave the way. This is not a question of delivering yet another 'document', but of establishing an ongoing, cyclical, participatory process with regular reviews.

Countries are being asked to redouble their efforts over the coming decade to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss and meet the strategic goals and targets of the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. NBSAPs are the primary mechanism for determining and implementing national efforts to meet these goals.

The guidance provided by the COP in decision IX/8 for developing, implementing and revising NBSAPs provides the basis for a new cycle of national biodiversity planning designed to be capable of meeting the objectives of the CBD and the goals and targets of the Strategic Plan. What also needs to be put in place is a biodiversity planning support network that can complement and assist national efforts by marshalling existing knowledge and expertise and facilitating access to these by national biodiversity planners.

On the basis of its assessment of how NBSAPs have been developed, implemented and revised to date, UNU-IAS offers a set of recommendations on how countries might approach the new biodiversity planning cycle and how organizations with the relevant expertise could support countries in their endeavours. These recommendations are contained below.

Achievements

The large number of NBSAPs is in itself an achievement and an indispensable step on the road to implementation. NBSAPs have generated important results in many countries, including a better understanding of biodiversity, its value and what is required to address threats to it. Legal gaps in implementation have been filled, the coverage of protected areas has been considerably extended, and in many countries better protection of endangered species has been introduced.

Recently, the fourth national reports and the regional and sub-regional capacity workshops on implementing NBSAPs and mainstreaming biodiversity provided new information on a plethora of actions for biodiversity throughout the world. This includes action related to mainstreaming biodiversity into sectoral and cross-sectoral activities at both national and sub-national levels and is an indication of a positive trend in CBD implementation, though one not always tied to NBSAPs.

Shortcomings

In spite of these achievements and the positive trend, the general conclusion in 2010 is similar to those of earlier NBSAP reviews: NBSAPs have not seriously affected the main drivers of biodiversity loss. Political attention to biodiversity and its importance for sustainable development is growing, and biodiversity-related concerns are increasingly being integrated into national development policies, but this is rarely due to NBSAPs.

Many NBSAPs quickly lost their momentum and, since most have not been revised and are more than eight years old, they have also been unable to serve as implementation mechanisms for some of the most important and far-reaching CBD decisions taken since they were developed. This includes key areas such as the Strategic Plan, with its global 2010 target and its request for countries to adopt national goals and targets, as well as several thematic and cross-cutting work programmes adopted at COP-6 and subsequent meetings.

For many of the first generation of NBSAPs in particular, the shortcomings of NBSAPs in influencing mainstream development are largely attributable to weaknesses in the process of their development. Many processes were often more technical than political, and did not manage to sufficiently influence policy beyond the remit of the national agency directly responsible for biodiversity. The need for mainstreaming across sectors is generally recognised in NBSAPs but often in general and aspirational terms, with little direction on how this mainstreaming is going to take place. Coordination structures may formally exist but often with limited political and cross-sectoral ownership as well as limited ownership at the sub-national level. Many NBSAPs are overly ambitious and prescriptive while at the same time lacking a strategy for financing implementation. They often appear to have been addressed to external funding agencies rather than national decision-makers.

However, the development process is not the only factor determining whether implementation will be successful. A number of countries have conducted excellent processes with extensive stakeholder involvement and well-structured NBSAPs, but are still faced with implementation constraints mostly in the form of lack of institutional, technical and financial capacity.

Learning from experience

On a positive note, many countries have learned from the shortcomings of first-generation NBSAPs. Although less than a third of NBSAPs have been revised, second-generation NBSAPs are generally very different from first-generation ones in terms of more inclusive stakeholder involvement in their preparation, approval at a higher political level, focus on mainstreaming, alignment with other relevant plans and policies, inclusion of monitoring tools, and inclusion of strategies for communication and financing. It is however striking that, in spite of recent strong calls to set time-bound and measurable targets for biodiversity conservation and the many COP decisions to this effect, very few new NBSAPs include such targets. While some of the new NBSAPs are starting to demonstrate results, it is still too early to assess the impact of second-generation NBSAPs on the status of biodiversity and the main drivers of biodiversity loss.

There seems to be general consensus that the CBD should focus more on implementation than has been the case until now. Substantial resources have been put into policy development in the form of the negotiation, adoption and revision of decisions, work programmes and guidelines. Increasingly the view is being expressed that the Convention now needs to move beyond the stage of refining its guidance and producing documents to focusing on delivering tangible results on the ground. Indeed, when countries were asked in the fourth national reports to present implementation outcomes, they tended to report the

development of new plans, programmes and strategies rather than concrete action to meet their commitments under the Convention.

However, the action needed to halt the loss of biodiversity will have to seriously address the root causes of biodiversity, and addressing root causes and not just treating symptoms is a complex cross-sectoral issue that requires a political and economic planning process with compromises and trade-offs. This planning process is envisaged in Article 6 of the CBD, but did not take place or took place with only limited success in most countries in the first phase of the life of the CBD. A new strategic plan for the post-2010 period, with new targets, should provide a framework for a new phase of national biodiversity planning that can address the issues that have not been properly addressed so far. A number of recently prepared NBSAPs have already begun to pave the way. This is not a question of delivering yet another document, but of establishing an ongoing, cyclical, participatory process with regular reviews.

Do NBSAPs provide the right framework?

The question is thus whether an NBSAP is the right framework for national biodiversity planning. The fact that better mainstreaming of biodiversity concerns across sectors is the key measure of success, and that such progress towards mainstreaming continues is largely missing in most countries, points to the option of using or adapting other, broader and politically more visible frameworks to achieve the objectives of the CBD. This is a possibility that the CBD allows.

Yet there is no clear answer as to which approach is best. It depends fully on national circumstances. In most countries, stand-alone strategies and action plans for biodiversity may probably still serve biodiversity best because of their important role in raising the generally low levels of awareness of biodiversity and its importance for sustainable development. Integration of biodiversity concerns into broader policies without this awareness, and in competition with many other concerns, could lead to a dangerous disregard of biodiversity. Moreover, NBSAPs have been efficient frameworks for more conventional nature protection tools, such as the designation and management of protected areas, and these will continue to be important.

As already demonstrated by some countries, an approach whereby biodiversity is directly integrated into sectoral and cross-sectoral plans and policies could work well where there is already high awareness of and political attention to biodiversity.

In any case the function is more important than the form. The nub of the matter is to fully align the biodiversity planning process with the mainstream national planning process.

As well as aligning NBSAPs and broad national development plans there is also in most countries a clear need to create frameworks for the integrated and coherent implementation of all three Rio conventions in order to address in a coordinated and mutually consistent way the issues of climate change, desertification and biodiversity loss. The three issues and the ways to deal with them are inextricably linked. The fact that each has its own convention highlights how important they are considered to be, but at the same

time this has unfortunately led to widespread fragmentation in national implementation at the expense of mutually supportive and cost-effective action.

Recommendations

There are good reasons why the only binding commitments on Parties to the CBD are the obligation to develop an NBSAP and the obligation to report on measures taken to implement the provisions of the Convention and the effectiveness of these. National biodiversity planning and reporting to other Parties on the effectiveness of this are the two central mechanisms for implementing the Convention. Given the multiplicity of links between biodiversity and the social, economic and ethical issues a government needs to address, these are really the only feasible global commitments possible under the current system of state-based international governance. Ensuring that these two mechanisms are useful, efficient and effective is central to ensuring that the CBD is useful, that it makes a difference and that biodiversity is maintained.

This report, based on our assessment of NBSAPs, has sought to highlight their successes and failures. In 2010, COP-10 can and should mark the start of a new era in the life of the Convention. If the new strategic plan and the new targets for reducing biodiversity loss to be adopted in Nagoya are to be implemented and action is to be mobilised on the ground, a new generation of NBSAPs will be needed. Clearly the lessons of the last 20 years of biodiversity management must play an important role in shaping the approach for the next 20 years.

Despite the various challenges and opportunities each Party faces, based on the experience so far there are some general lessons and issues that every Party will need to consider regarding its NBSAP. The following recommendations are offered as relevant to all Parties and all NBSAPs.

1. A new generation of NBSAPs should be prepared in response to the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011-2020 to be adopted by COP-10 marks a new beginning for the CBD. Progress made under the first Strategic Plan was insufficient to meet the 2010 biodiversity target and the rate of loss of biodiversity at global and national levels remains high, with the consequent risks for human wellbeing and security. A new generation of NBSAPs should be prepared as national policy tools for implementation of the CBD and the other biodiversity-related conventions. Many existing NBSAPs are outdated, have lost momentum or are insufficiently strategic or comprehensive. Countries should revise and update existing NBSAPs. Those that have no NBSAP in place should develop and adopt one as a matter of urgency. A new generation of NBSAPs should be adopted and under implementation at the earliest possible date, but no later than 2014.

2. NBSAPs should be comprehensive and designed to cover all the provisions of the CBD, in particular its three objectives, and the strategic goals and targets of the Strategic Plan; they should include time-bound and measurable targets, and measures for monitoring and implementation.

Existing NBSAPs vary considerably in design and content which makes it difficult to measure and compare progress in their implementation. To the extent possible, whilst acknowledging that each NBSAP will represent the outcome of nationally-specific circumstances and processes, the new generation of NBSAPs should include common elements that clearly correspond to the strategic goals and targets of the Strategic Plan, in particular through inclusion of time-bound and measurable national targets and of mechanisms for monitoring and implementation. They should cover all the components identified in the guidance provided the COP-9 in its decision IX/8. This guidance is still valid, but has had limited impact as nearly all existing NBSAPs predate 2008. NBSAPs should include strategies and actions plans for undertaking the CBD programmes of work relevant to the country.

3. NBSAPs should be strategic and prioritised

If a country is unable to develop or implement a fully comprehensive NBSAP though lack of resources, capacity or scientific knowledge, it should focus in the first instance on those goals that are achievable. To the extent possible, these should be priority goals for reducing biodiversity loss. Countries that have developed a fully comprehensive NBSAP will nonetheless need to prioritise in terms of the allocation of financial and human resources and investment in consensus-building. First order priorities should be those where successful outcomes will result in the greatest biodiversity gains or where business-as-usual constitutes the greatest risk to biodiversity. Mechanisms to review and update the NBSAP and its priorities in the light of the experience of implementation or improved scientific knowledge are essential.

4. NBSAPs should address both the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss and focus on stemming the loss of biodiversity as an absolutely vital requirement for the maintenance of ecosystem services in a rapidly-changing world.

While not neglecting direct nature conservation measures such as protected areas, new NBSAPs should put greater emphasis on tackling the drivers of biodiversity loss and thereby promote the mainstreaming of biodiversity across sectors and the acknowledgement of the role of biodiversity in guaranteeing ecosystem services. NBSAPs should constitute the means for decoupling the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss (such as consumption and production patterns) from the direct drivers (such as habitat loss, overexploitation and pollution).

5. NBSAPs are not ends in themselves, but dynamic and adaptive instruments for achieving the three objectives of the CBD.

An NBSAP is a framework for national biodiversity planning and action designed to achieve the objectives of the CBD. It should not be thought of as a one-off process leading to the adoption of a document, but rather as a comprehensive, participatory and cyclical mechanism that involves all relevant stakeholders and allows for the NBSAP to be reviewed and updated in accordance with evolving conditions.

6. NBSAPs should be developed through a wide, but targeted participatory process which should allow enough time to ensure full transparency and widespread ownership.

Most existing NBSAPs have been prepared through stakeholder involvement, but some key stakeholders such as women, the private sector, indigenous communities and sub-national authorities have not been effectively engaged. Due to donor requirements many NBSAP preparation processes were rushed, which may underlie the lack of broad ownership and the weak implementation of many NBSAPs. It needs to be accepted that a new round of national biodiversity planning will take time, not least because of the need in many cases to identify and involve sub-national stakeholders in the national process. However, whilst it is essential that the development and adoption of NBSAPs be done properly, it is equally essential that the urgency of their development and adoption be recognized and that the process be completed in as timely a way as national circumstances permit.

7. A national biodiversity planning framework can be adopted through means other than an NBSAP if this is better suited to national circumstances.

The biodiversity agenda has a very wide scope and, with the growing understanding of the links between biodiversity and ecosystem services, the scope has become even wider and largely overlaps with the general 'environment' agenda. If this is better suited to national circumstances, countries are not obliged to prepare a stand-alone NBSAP, but to adopt a framework for achieving national implementation of the Strategic Plan through the inclusion of biodiversity concerns into wider strategies and plans, such as national environmental plans or joint plans for the Rio conventions. Form should follow function, and the important thing is to get the process and content right. It is important, however, that such an approach does not lead to a delay in defining biodiversity policies or to a downgrading or dilution of the importance or effectiveness of biodiversity policies and actions.

8. NBSAPs should be approved at the highest political level and implemented by law.

The 'ownership' of the NBSAP needs to occur across government departments and throughout the national society. This implies that it needs to be adopted at the highest political level. In recognition of its importance and its cross-cutting political nature, and of the fact that its implementation will often need to be supported by adoption of new legislation, the NBSAP itself should be enacted into law. In many countries this will enable monitoring of the effectiveness of implementation by parliamentary or other oversight mechanisms.

9. High-level inter-ministerial and stakeholder steering committees should be established for the preparation of the NBSAP and as elements of an overall national implementation mechanism.

The cross-sectoral nature of biodiversity planning requires strong coordination structures. On paper most existing NBSAPs provide for coordination structures across ministries and interest groups, but often these have had limited or no effect on coordination and implementation. A high-level inter-ministerial body and a stakeholder committee, or a combination of the two, should be established to ensure comprehensive coverage and political buy-in for the development of the NBSAP and subsequently to oversee implementation. Whether these are deliberative or advisory bodies is for the country to decide; the important thing is to ensure the broadest level of participation and buy-in, create

permanent forums for considering new scientific information and policy options, and ensure effective monitoring and oversight. Where there are sub-national BSAPs similar mechanisms should also be established at the appropriate level.

10. Biodiversity policies, goals and targets should be incorporated into wider strategies and action plans to ensure that biodiversity receives high attention and that the Strategic Plan framework is applied across all relevant economic sectors.

Effective mainstreaming will not occur just through the adoption of broad policy objectives in the NBSAP. The NBSAP process should directly provide for incorporation of biodiversity concerns into sectoral and cross-sectoral plans and programmes including overall national environment, poverty alleviation and MDG plans. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a key tool for this.

11. NBSAPs should provide for sub-national BSAPs.

Decisions and actions that affect biodiversity are often taken at the local level, and the overall NBSAP will only be implemented if corresponding strategies and action plans are also developed and implemented at the relevant sub-national level(s). Decentralisation of biodiversity planning to sub-national levels has been largely neglected in existing NBSAPs and this is one of the main causes of poor NBSAP implementation.

12. NBSAPs should recognise the need to integrate the economics of biodiversity.

Biodiversity should be treated as a natural capital asset and the economic costs of the loss of biodiversity acknowledged. The NBSAP should be an instrument for ensuring that the true value of biodiversity is incorporated into decision-making, indicators, accounting systems and prices. While exercises to estimate the economic value of the ecosystem services guaranteed by biodiversity can be an important pedagogical tool for demonstrating to planning and production sectors the importance of biodiversity, the NBSAP should also make clear that such valuation exercises are ultimately academic as the ecosystem services in question are essential to human wellbeing and survival, irreplaceable and therefore priceless.

13. NBSAPs should include clear provisions for communication, education and public awareness (CEPA).

Action to reduce biodiversity loss will only take place if decision makers and the public understand its importance. CEPA features prominently in all NBSAPs, but rarely in the form of concrete provisions on how to raise awareness among the various target groups. NBSAPs rarely include a strategy to communicate the NBSAP itself. Education and communication experts have an important contribution to make to the development of NBSAPs that contain effective provisions for communication, education and public awareness. The 2007 CBD/IUCN CEPA toolkit provides useful guidance.

14. NBSAPs should address the ecological footprint of the country on other countries.

This applies, in particular but not solely, to the ecological footprint of developed countries and should include examination of whether and how trade policies and national consumption and production patterns contribute to biodiversity loss in other countries and how such impacts can be minimised or eliminated.

15. NBSAPs should be integrated with biodiversity, climate change and land degradation policies, including REDD+ policies, and thereby promote coherence in the implementation of all the three Rio conventions.

The issues each of the three Rio conventions addresses are inextricably linked. Biodiversity is increasingly threatened by climate change, not least through desertification. Climate change increases the risk of greater levels of desertification. The maintenance of healthy ecosystems is simultaneously crucial for halting biodiversity loss, for climate change mitigation and adaptation and for combating desertification. Nevertheless very few countries align their biodiversity, climate change and land degradation policies. There is unexploited potential for win-win-win solutions, including through the design of REDD+ policies. Rather than developing strategies and action plans for each of the three conventions, a country could develop a unified Rio conventions strategy and action plan if this is best suited to national circumstances.

16. NBSAPs should be an instrument for implementation of all the biodiversity-related conventions and thereby promote coherence in national implementation of these.

The creation of a biodiversity cluster through enhanced cooperation and coordination among the global biodiversity-related conventions is currently being discussed as part of the wider review of international environmental governance arrangements. Whatever the future outcome of these discussions, countries should promote coordinated and coherent action at the national level to meet their commitments under the various conventions. NBSAPs should provide the overall framework for national biodiversity planning and should be an instrument for achieving the objectives of all the global biodiversity-related conventions to which the country is a party. Countries may find useful the UNEP/IUCN TEMATEA tool which structures the various commitments and obligations of the biodiversity-related agreements into a logical issue-based framework.

17. Gender issues should be mainstreamed into NBSAPs

Most NBSAPs lack any consideration of gender issues despite the role of women as the primary land and resource managers in many parts of the world. Gender considerations need to be given much greater attention in the new generation of NBSAPs, in line with the 2010 CBD Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into NBSAPs.

18. NBSAPs should highlight the need for community-based management and conservation and for preserving traditional knowledge.

Existing NBSAPs generally recognise that community-based management and traditional knowledge is essential for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and many examples from the ground attest to this. However, because the links between the national and local levels have often been missing in NBSAP preparation and implementation, the

benefits of community management of biodiversity have not been demonstrated. As a consequence, inappropriate policies determined at the national level are often ineffective or ignored at the local level. A wider use of sub-national BSAPs would help address this issue.

19. NBSAPs should provide a platform for national implementation of the CBD provisions on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing (ABS), especially if the International Regime is adopted at COP-10.

The third objective of the CBD has been largely neglected in existing NBSAPs and a legal vacuum exists in many countries as a large number – both provider and user countries – have not adopted the basic legislation to implement the provisions. Implementation of the ABS provisions should form part of the NBSAP and the provisions should be implemented as a matter of urgency regardless of when negotiations on the international ABS regime are finalised.

20. NBSAPs should be realistic, prioritised and clearly distinguish between actions that can be achieved within existing budgets and capacity and those which will require external funding and/or capacity development

Many early NBSAPs contained long, un-prioritised and over-ambitious lists of project proposals that depended entirely on external funding that was never forthcoming. Clearly greater financial flows are required in the case of many countries to enable them to implement their NBSAPs. However in biodiversity planning, as in other areas, locally-determined and implemented activities are often more cost-effective and lead to better outcomes than nationally-determined and managed projects. This is another reason for the NBSAP process to include all relevant stakeholders in its development and implementation. By recognising local knowledge and expertise and by being open to new ways of doing, countries may often be better placed than they realise to reduce dependence on external funding and promote self-reliance. This is however not to deny the fact that successful implementation of NBSAPs and meeting the goals and targets of the Strategic Plan will depend on agreement on an ambitious resource mobilization strategy for biodiversity and its early and effective implementation.

21. The operations of the CBD should be re-oriented from a focus on negotiations to a greater emphasis on supporting and facilitating implementation

The greater part of the available time at COP and subsidiary body meetings has been devoted to lengthy negotiations on decisions and programmes of work and their subsequent revision. Far less time and attention have been paid to providing for and reviewing their actual implementation. This assessment has revealed that the programmes of work and other COP guidance have had limited impact on national biodiversity policies. The GBO-3, fourth national reports and this assessment all identify a large implementation deficit. The time has arrived for the COP to now devote the greater part of its attention to facilitating and reviewing national implementation, in line with article 23 of the Convention.

22. There needs to be increased support for capacity development and this should be targeted to strengthening national implementation capacities especially with regard to mainstreaming biodiversity into broader plans and policies and to sub-national implementation

Lack of financial, technical and human resources and capacities is the main obstacle to NBSAP implementation and increased support to developing countries to overcome these constraints is clearly needed. A lot of the support has so far gone into analyses, plans, policies and other types of enabling activities. Whilst plans and policies are clearly essential, there is a serious lack of action on the ground, and capacity building should therefore be targeted to developing capacities to increase understanding of biodiversity and to plan, implement, monitor and enforce policies and programmes. Capacity development is needed in particular to ensure that biodiversity is properly addressed in the implementation of sectoral and cross-sectoral plans and policies and in taking action for biodiversity at the sub national level.

23. An NBSAP support mechanism should be established to assist countries to develop and implement their NBSAPs and to monitor and analyse the experience of implementation.

At previous meetings the COP has invited a number of international organisations and other partner organizations with relevant expertise to contribute to activities in support of implementation. However support provided to countries for biodiversity planning has often been fragmented and uncoordinated. To maximise the opportunities for meeting the goals and targets of the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, greater efforts should be made to promoting coordination and coherence. There need to be arrangements in place for ensuring that available capacities are effectively employed to the greatest effect, that an overall picture of ongoing support initiatives is available, that gaps and unmet needs are identified, that lessons learned are systematised and disseminated. Given its existing expertise and capacity, the CBD Secretariat is the organisation best placed to facilitate such a network. The two-year action plan to support national implementation of the CBD recently agreed by the Secretariat and UNDP is indicative of how such a support mechanism could operate.

24. Countries should be able to call upon the support mechanism for advice

Many countries were formerly cautious about discussing constraints to national implementation. However, this earlier reluctance to reveal problems and seek advice appears to be changing. Many countries have provided frank self-evaluations of their NBSAPs in the fourth national reports and at regional and sub-regional NBSAP workshops. Countries should be able, on a voluntary basis, to ask the Secretariat to identify sources of advice and assistance. Such sources could include international and regional organizations, biodiversity planners from other countries, scientific and research organizations, non-governmental organizations or any other source of relevant expertise. Any advice or assistance given would be by mutual agreement.

25. Regional cooperation for the preparation and implementation of NBSAPs should be facilitated and enhanced

The regional and sub-regional NBSAP workshops organised between 2008 and 2010 were important for reinforcing the importance of NBSAPs and the need for their revision and updating. They brought national biodiversity planners together, were important learning experiences and revealed a high potential for enhanced regional cooperation. Greater opportunities for regional cooperation are seen as a priority by most national biodiversity planners and such cooperation should be supported. The quality of existing NBSAPs varies considerably even within regions and countries will benefit from the exchange of experiences and best practices within their region, as well as the possibilities this creates to better coordinate trans-boundary actions.

26. A biodiversity planning knowledge network should be established

Most countries report insufficient human resource capacity for implementation of the CBD and the NBSAP. They have insufficient staff to effectively meet the full range of responsibilities and these in turn often have only limited access to the information they need and insufficient resources to analyse this information. However, as this assessment has confirmed, there is in fact a wealth of information, expertise and experience residing in countries and in partner organizations. The challenge is to marshal this knowledge and experience to support implementation of NBSAPs. This will involve enhancing the CBD clearing-house mechanism and supporting regional and national clearing-house mechanisms and enabling these to facilitate scientific and technical cooperation, to promote access to and transfer of technology, and the exchange of information as envisaged by the Convention. Such a biodiversity planning knowledge network would enable all countries, in particular the developing countries, to access and use high quality information that would better enable them to develop and implement their own NBSAPs. The collection, systematisation and dissemination of such information would form part of the overall clearing-house mechanism provided for by the CBD and would build upon existing good practise for knowledge management that already exists in a number of countries and organizations. It would focus on information to support national implementation and complement, and not compete with, scientific information facilities such as GBIF or the proposed intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

27. Practical, user-friendly guidelines for integrated biodiversity planning should be developed.

A new generation of streamlined NBSAPs focussing mainly on mainstreaming of biodiversity concerns across sectors requires new consolidated, practical and user-friendly guidance. Decision IX/8 provides guidance primarily on which components should be included in the NBSAP rather than on the practical cross-cutting planning process. There is a wealth of guidance from both within and outside the CBD context which explicitly or implicitly addresses integrated biodiversity and ecosystem services planning. This includes guidance on economic valuation and incentives, operational guidance on the ecosystem approach, the Addis Ababa Principles on sustainable use, guiding principles for Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and, outside the CBD context, the

conceptual framework of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. In most cases however, these guidelines and principles need to be translated into advice and recommendations for their practical use, based on existing experiences of application. Guidelines or toolkits reflecting best practices should be designed and widely disseminated. This should be a priority activity for the support mechanism and its knowledge management mechanism.

28. The support mechanism should assist eligible countries upon request with biodiversity enabling activities

Objective Five of the GEF-5 Biodiversity Strategy is to “integrate CBD obligations into national planning processes through enabling activities”. The enabling activity funding available in the period 2011-2014 can assist eligible countries to revise and update their NBSAPs as recommended by COP-10. GEF Implementing Agencies and other partner organizations should encourage countries to apply for enabling activity support and be ready to assist countries, upon request, with designing and implementing national planning processes to improve national capacity to implement the CBD.