

Biological Diversity Act and India-UNDP BD Project Activities

The increasing concerns about dwindling biological resources due to demographic pressure, habitat destruction, environmental pollution, and other related causes led to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992. CBD provides a road map for the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of biodiversity. It emphasizes that biodiversity occurring within a nation is the sovereign property of its people. In pursuance of CBD, the Indian Parliament passed the Biological Diversity Act 2002 (BDA) for: 1) conservation of biodiversity, 2) sustainable use of its components, and 3) fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge. To implement the Act, there is provision of institutions at national (National Biodiversity Authority), state (State Biodiversity Boards), and local level (Biodiversity Management Committees). National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) has been established at Chennai in 2003, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) have been formed in 25 states and beginning has been made to form Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs). To strengthen the capacity of these institutions, and to bring in behavioural changes to manage natural resources in an integrated, participatory and sustainable manner, UNDP is supporting a project in five selected districts of the two Indian states, viz., Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. The project was launched in 2009. It is envisaged that the project will contribute to the following:

- Promote conservation, and sustainable utilization of biodiversity
- Promote *in situ*, on-farm and *ex situ* conservation
- Collect, collate and integrate biodiversity information into a database of biodiversity with networking systems and linkages
- Promote harmony, synergy and linkages for conservation and management of biological diversity and associated traditional knowledge
- Accelerate effective implementation of provisions of BDA and rules through training and awareness campaign

To address these issues, various activities have been undertaken in the two project states.

Awareness Generation: Lack of knowledge about the importance of biodiversity and the consequences of its loss is one of the major reasons that people do not get concerned about it. Hence, in the project, awareness generation to different stakeholders has been taken up on priority. This is being done by holding participatory meetings with lectures by resource persons, workshops, site visits, publications, documentary films, and radio programmes. The target groups include school/ college students, rural community, NGO's, academic community, policy makers and users of bioresources , i.e. the industries. Awareness is also being generated about the provisions of the BDA which permit only sustainable use of bioresources and at the same time benefit sharing with the holders of it. The benefits will go to a Local Biodiversity Fund which will be utilized for conservation measures as well as the welfare of the community.

Documentation of Biodiversity: To have the present status of biodiversity and its monitoring in time and space, as well as under different influences, biodiversity is being documented in Peoples Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). These PBRs are being prepared by the local community. The technical support in this documentation is being provided by the faculty and graduate students of the academic institutions and NGO's. These PBR's will be authenticated using the expertise and will be updated periodically and will be maintained on permanent basis. These can as well be used as legal documents to protect the rights of the local community over their bioresources.

Capacity building: Capacity building is being done for:

- PBR preparation, i.e. biodiversity documentation.
- Livelihood generation so as to train the local community for alternate avenues so that their dependence on biodiversity reduces. Follow up action is taken so as to see that the trainings result in entrepreneur development.
- Biodiversity conservation measures

For capacity building, the expertise is being used from the state departments/ institutions, colleges/ universities, NGO's and project staff.

Biodiversity Heritage Sites: Sites that are rich in biodiversity and can be used for *in situ* conservation of the species are being identified for which a criterion has been developed by NBA. Sites which meet such criteria will be notified by the state government and support will be provided to maintain them. Such sites have been notified in the state of Karnataka and the process is on in Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh.

Access and benefit sharing: The BDA provides that when any bioresource is accessed from any area, the local body should get a share/ royalty. A few such examples are there in other states, but it has yet to start in Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand states. These two states are very rich in bioresources, mainly medicinal plants in wild, and attempts are being made that these are routed through the BMCs with their due share.

Conservation of Rare and Threatened Species: Repositories/ conservatories are being developed, with participation of local communities, to plant and maintain plant species which come under the category of rare and threatened species.

Special studies: Studies on specific issues such as: 1) bioresource use and users in the state, and 2) invasive alien species, are being undertaken so as to see the potential as well as threats.

Further it is proposed to:

- Enlist and network the academic/ R&D institutions, NGO's, self help groups involved in biodiversity related activities and to use their achievements elsewhere.
- Prepare compendium of the biodiversity research done by the academic institutions of the area.
- Interact with bioresource using industries and encourage procurement of their raw material through BMCs on mutually agreed terms.

- Study of ex situ conservation in zoological parks/ zoos and botanical gardens in the states.
- Identify individuals/ institutions that have made significant contributions in biodiversity conservation and honour/ reward them.
- Cull out actionable information from the PBRs prepared on bioresources and traditional knowledge and put it to use.
- Introduce biodiversity related activities in the district plans of different development departments of the states so that they take care of the respective species under their jurisdiction.

The activities under the project have been so designed that the outcome could be replicated elsewhere and the districts under the project become models to be adopted.

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