

## IIED

# Mainstreaming Biodiversity and Development: A Framework for Peer Review of Policies, Strategies and Plans

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## 1 What is peer review in the context of policies, plans and strategies?

**Peer review** is the evaluation of work by one or more people of similar competence to the producers of the work (peers). Often is used as a form of self-regulation by qualified members of a profession within the relevant field. Peer review methods are employed to maintain standards of quality, improve performance, and provide credibility.

Peer review is based on the concept that a larger and more diverse group of people will usually identify aspects of the work (positive as well as negative elements) of the work in question (in this case an NBSAP) than will just the group responsible for developing (or implementing) the NBSAP. They will usually be able to make a more impartial evaluation of it. Those engaged in the peer review will be able to bring their own experiences to the evaluation, and indeed share them with those being reviewed as well as with other peers – in effect supporting mutual learning. In this way, gaps and areas for improvement can be identified that might be addressed during implementation or during further revision.

In academia, peer review is often used to determine an academic paper's suitability for publication. A journal editor usually sends advance copies of an author's paper to other researchers or scholars who are experts in the field, and they provide feedback comments.

The OECD offers its member countries a peer review framework to compare experiences and examine "best practices" in a host of areas from economic policy to environmental protection (see <http://www.oecd.org/site/peerreview/>). Each OECD member country's policy in a particular area is examined by fellow members on an equal basis. The process allows countries to learn valuable lessons from each other on what has worked and what has not. This can save time, and costly experimenting, in crafting effective national policies. The recommendations resulting from such a review can also help governments win support at home for difficult measures. And perhaps most importantly, because everyone goes through the same exercise, no country feels it is being singled out. Other international organisations have also adopted the method, although the practice has been most extensively developed at the OECD. More recently, members of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) have asked the OECD to help them bring peer review to their region.

The peer review approach has also been applied to national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) – to take stock of NSDS progress, successes and challenges, raise awareness of SD issues and the role of an NSDS, engage stakeholders in debate about a strategy and more widely about SD, and to build stakeholder commitment (across government, civil society and the private sector) to engage in and commit to NSDS processes. The first such NSDS peer review was initiated by the French government in 2005 which led to the development of a core approach which has been adopted by the EC and used by several other countries (eg Netherlands). The approach is flexible and can be modified to suit needs and situations (eg stage in strategy cycle a country has reached), but the main steps usually include the following elements:

1. Defining the objectives and means.
2. Preparatory phase:

- Production of a background report (describing the administrative structures and decision-making in the country and the actual process of developing the NSDS and harnessing views on key issues and challenges).
- 3. Peer review workshop (4-5 days):
  - With participants from the focus country and partner countries;
  - Facilitated discussion sessions to address issues/ questions (set by peers) on the NSDS process, strategy content, outcomes, monitoring and successes and challenges.
- 4. Preparation of a report on the outcomes and recommendations.
- 5. Deciding how to use the outcome report, eg to benefit and improve the NSDS of the focus country, to influence change – in the focus country, in partner countries, and internationally.

## 2 Options for peer review of biodiversity - development mainstreaming

The first project workshop of the *NBSAPs 2.0* project agreed the following definition of mainstreaming:

*“Biodiversity mainstreaming is the integration of biodiversity concerns into defined sectors and development aims, through a variety of approaches and mechanisms, so as to achieve combined biodiversity and development outcomes” (Maun Statement on Biodiversity and Development Mainstreaming)”*

There are two important targets for peer reviewing biodiversity-development mainstreaming:

1. To examine the quality or effectiveness of biodiversity mainstreaming in key development policies, strategies and plans in a country – particularly at national, local or sector levels.
2. To examine the quality of a NBSAP as a vehicle for such mainstreaming. This could focus on process or content, or both.

Sections 4 and 5 suggests key questions that can be used as a framework for peer review (PR) for each of these purposes. They provide a platform of issues to be addressed through either research (eg for a background paper for the PR), interviews, dialogue and debate in meetings and workshops, and engaging with different actors. The particular process that a country might adopt for a PR will depend on need, context, time (in relation say to concluding or revising a policy, strategy, plans or other instrument) and, of course, available budget.

Whichever process is followed, a number of broad options are available:

- A **domestic PR** commissioned by the lead organisation involved (eg the Ministry of Planning/ National Planning Commission or equivalent for a PR, or the relevant line ministry for a PR of a sector policy/strategy/plan, or the Ministry of Environment for a PR of a NBSAP). This might involve requesting a mix of other ministries, NGOs and independent national experts to engage in the PR process.
- Of course a lead organisation could use the framework questions to undertake an **internal review** without engaging other ministries, organisations or individuals – to help it assess performance and progress and identify areas for improvement, etc. – although this would not really be a peer review as such.
- A **international PR process** – commissioned by the relevant lead organisation (as above) but involving equivalent ministries and other actors (NGOs, individual experts) from one or more other countries.

### 3. Peer review of the quality or effectiveness of biodiversity mainstreaming in key policies, strategies and plans in a country

All countries have some kind of overarching development plan or strategy to guide economic growth. In many cases this is called a National Development Plan (NDP) – but may also be a Poverty Reduction Strategy, Growth Strategy and so on. In some cases there are multiple strategies/plans (eg an NDP, a national Vision, MDG strategy, National Sustainable Development Strategy or National Poverty Reduction Programme) and often these are implemented in parallel. All countries also have sectoral policies, strategies and plans and also provincial/regional and district level plans. These strategies/policies/plans can be interrogated for their attention to biodiversity.

The term “biodiversity” may not be commonly used in a plan, - there may be more attention to “wildlife” or “natural resources” or “environment”. It should be reasonably obvious where the terms are used interchangeably. However, in some cases the terms should not be interpreted as being the same as biodiversity – for example, natural resources such as fossil fuels and minerals. In these cases, investment in natural resources may be in conflict with biodiversity conservation it will be important to distinguish between these uses of different terms.

The following questions provide a checklist of issues that a peer review of a development plan/policy/strategy would want to address in order to explore the degree to which biodiversity has been mainstreamed. In all cases we have used the term ‘plans’ as a shorthand which also embraces policies and strategies.

- **Vision:** Does the plan contain or refer to a national vision or development objective(s) and, if so, how does this address biodiversity – directly or indirectly (e.g. within a wider environmental context)? For example:
  - Is biodiversity considered in the plan in terms of the provision/maintenance of ecosystem services or transitioning to a green economy?
  - Does the plan acknowledge in any way that its implementation has any relevance/link to biodiversity?
- **Biodiversity chapter/section:** Does the plan document have a dedicated section on biodiversity, or within another on e.g. environment or natural resources?
  - How is biodiversity addressed in this chapter? (eg in terms of: its nature or status, value (eg to the economy), commitments to take action to protect, manage or invest in biodiversity specifically or environment more generally, conflicts between particular development thrusts and biodiversity, etc).
  - Is discussion skeletal or analytical, shallow or comprehensive, positive or negative?
  - Is biodiversity considered as an *opportunity* that can contribute to national development objectives or as an *obstacle* that needs to be managed or mitigated?
- **Cross-cutting coverage of biodiversity:** How is biodiversity addressed in other chapters?
  - Is there any discussion of biodiversity links or consequences in discussions of key development sectors? And, in this discussion, is biodiversity viewed as an opportunity or obstacle?
  - Does the plan cross-reference to other key national/sectoral policies/strategies that are relevant to biodiversity? And does (and how) the plan support the biodiversity commitments in these other instruments through particular actions or allocations of resources?

- **Biodiversity activities:** What actions are proposed in the plan, if any, on biodiversity?
- **Biodiversity impact assessment, mitigation and monitoring:** Does the plan address the likely impacts or outcomes of its provisions (either positive or negative) on biodiversity?
  - Does the plan make any provision for mitigating and/or monitoring any such impacts?  
Does the plan include any monitoring provisions (including indicators) and how do these address biodiversity?
- **Finance:** What financial assessments and budget provisions of the plan can be linked to biodiversity? (eg for monitoring, conservation and park management, supporting green investment, etc.)
- **Engagement of biodiversity expertise:** To what extent were institutions, officials or experts concerned with biodiversity (in particular) or environment/natural resources (more generally) involved in the process of developing the plan? What were their 'entry points' and roles in the process, how they were able to influence and shape the document, and how will they be involved in monitoring? What potential entry points and roles, including in plan implementation, seem not to be used?
  - Did they make written submissions/recommendations, attend workshops/meetings, make presentations, receive feedback from the drafting team, etc.

#### **4. Peer review of the quality/effectiveness of a NBSAP as a vehicle for mainstreaming biodiversity**

The second generation of NBSAPs are intended – according to the CBD – to act as effective “vehicles” for mainstreaming biodiversity. This means they need to be cognisant of development issues and priorities both in their content and in the process through which they were developed. The questions below therefore seek to understand whether and how development actors were involved in the NBSAP revision process, how the revised NBSAP has sought to ensure coordination and integration of biodiversity concerns with development priorities – rather than focussing on biodiversity in isolation – and the convincing case that the NBSAP makes for biodiversity as a development opportunity.

The issues listed below aim to provide a framework for desk review of a NBSAP. Section 5 provides additional questions that might be added where a more formal peer review process is required.

##### **A. How was the NBSAP revised?**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- Who was responsible for leading the NBSAP revision process (eg which agency, institution(s) or individual(s), independent secretariat)?
- Any guidelines provided (or restrictions imposed) which determined the approach taken to revise the NBSAP?
- Any structures that were established or proposed to guide the NBSAP revision process, eg committees, working groups, communication/information mechanisms ?
- The roles played by different ministries and other government agencies?

#### **B. Who participated in the revision of the NBSAP?**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- The different types of stakeholders who were involved in the revision process (nationally, more locally, government, NGOs, private sector, civil society, etc) and how they were involved (eg consultation workshops, focus groups etc)?
- The extent to which the revision process was:
  - (a) consultative (eg who commented on draft documents or proposals – both organisations and individuals) ?
  - (b) genuinely participative (eg which organisations and individuals were directly involved in determining/influencing the process itself and making inputs to the development or implementation of the NBSAP)?

#### **C. Monitoring**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- Alignment with the Aichi Targets?
- The use of clear indicators and targets to monitor progress to the Aichi Targets?
- The use of clear indicators and targets to monitor progress in the effectiveness of biodiversity-development mainstreaming?

#### **D. Evidence of attention to development issues**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- Recognition of the poverty status of the country or of particular localities or social groups?
- Discussion of the value of biodiversity and its role in contributing to poverty reduction and local/regional/national development?; and recommendations, measures or clear strategies regarding how to maximise this potential?
- Awareness of development processes that drive the loss of biodiversity, and recommendations, measures or clear strategies regarding how to address these?

#### **E. Relation of NBSAP to other policies, strategies and plans – and how internal and external elements relate to each other**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- Clear links with the National Development Plan? Does the NBSAP recognise and respond to the objectives of the NDP?
- Clear links with other national, regional and local strategic planning processes (eg environmental strategies/action plans, strategies for particular resources or sectors, CBNRM programmes) and decision-making systems? .

#### **F. Relationship of NBSAP to particular sectors or projects**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- Whether/how biodiversity loss might threaten, undermine or reverse the outputs or outcomes of particular sector projects or programme's?
- How particular sector programmes / projects inadvertently contribute to biodiversity loss?
- How particular sectors use their core mandates to help reduce the loss of biodiversity or to mitigate the impact of ecosystem degradation or even make a positive win-win contribution?

## **G. Financing NBSAP implementation**

Is there any indication or inclusion in the NBSAP of :

- Provisions or plans for mobilising financial resources to implement recommendations and actions set out in the NBSAP?

## **5. Questions that might be additional be addressed in a more formal peer review process**

In some circumstances, a country may feel it useful to commissioning a formal peer review of its NBSAP. For this, initial background work will be valuable to support the peer review process. This might best be undertaken by an independent consultant to dig into the issues raised in the questions below and produce a background paper for the peers. The consultant could also be engaged to continue to act as a facilitator and secretariat to the peer review team.

### ***Notes***

- A) *The following questions, when combined with those in section 4, can be used as a framework for discussions and interviews, focus group meetings, and workshops, and should not be used as a rigid questionnaire.*
- B) *Some interviewees or participants will have been involved in only one stage of developing the NBSAP. Some may have been involved in several or all.*
- C) *Most of the questions are generic, but some relate more specifically to one or other components. For ease, they are not separated.*

## **A. NBSAP revision process**

1. In what capacity were particular individuals, organisations and stakeholders involved in the development or implementation of the NBSAP?
2. What previous NBSAP processes (a) have been undertaken, and (b) how did the current version build on or link/relate to these?
3. When was the NBSAP revision initiated and by which institution(s) ?
4. Were there any terms of reference ? What were these and who set them?
5. How long did the process take? (start – finish)

## **B. Key factors, issues and problems**

6. Were there any factors that particularly assisted the development of the NBSAP (eg a past NBSAP as a point of departure, existing public pressure and willingness to cooperate, genuine government commitment to pursue a route towards biodiversity conservation or sustainable development)?
7. What were the key problems faced during the development of the NBSAP?
8. Has it yet been implemented, and if so, how?

9. Were there any key issues that the NBSAP had to resolve (eg environmental degradation, land ownership, poverty) which determined the approach/process?

10. Were any major issues/areas not covered ? Which ones and why?,

### **C. Resolving problems and conflicts**

11. Were there any difficulties in defining or resolving different opinions about particular issues?

- How were such difficulties resolved?
- How were choices made?
- What process was used to resolve conflicts/disputes: arbitrators, drafting sessions, round tables leading to compromise texts?

12. To what extent is there consensus about the process and content of the NBSAP (a) within the national government, (b) at regional and local levels, (c) amongst broader stakeholders ?

### **D. Parliamentary and wider debate – at national and local levels**

13. Was there, or will there be, a parliamentary process concerning the NBSAP, eg a parliamentary committee or debate on the NBSAP and the issues it raises?

14. To what extent has the NBSAP facilitated a ‘greening’ of the political, business and consumer mainstreams, and of values, lifestyles and choices that underlie and shape them?

15. Did the NBSAP receive any regional/national press coverage? Was it extensive? Are copies available ?

### **E. Lessons from the experience of revising the NBSAP**

16. What were the good/successful aspects of the process, and what were the constraints?

17. What opportunities exist for improving it in the future ?

18. What opportunities exist for developing a system for monitoring and reporting on progress in implementation of the NBSAP?

19. How can the NBSAP better reflect the priorities / views of key stakeholder groups? (civil society organisations / developing countries etc)