

Translating Universal Sustainable Development Goals to Country Action



Member countries of the United Nations are embarked on a promising new path to achieve poverty eradication, economic development, social priorities and a healthy environment, building on the work of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the core elements of the “post-2015 development agenda” is a set of ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide for an integrated approach to achieving sustainable development.

The SDGs establish a set of universal goals and targets, to be achieved through the collective action of member countries and partners. While discussions have begun regarding how to track and report on progress made at the national, regional and global levels, a major element that must be considered is how to translate global goals and targets to national-level action. What will countries be expected to undertake as part of the post-2015 development agenda? How will they establish their priorities? What will they report on?

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, a UN-wide framework for action, has many parallels to the SDGs, with global goals and targets and a process for national actions. It provides a useful model that may help inform the discussions on the architecture of the post-2015 development agenda and SDGs, including with respect to an approach for establishing national-level commitments.



Convention on
Biological Diversity

I - THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR BIODIVERSITY 2011-2020

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 was adopted in 2010 at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD has nearly universal membership, with 196 parties. The Strategic Plan takes an integrated approach, seeking to mainstream biodiversity into economic and social policies.

The Strategic Plan sets forth a long-term vision, five goals, twenty targets (known as the “Aichi Biodiversity Targets”), and a series of tools and mechanisms for implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation.

The five goals of the Strategic Plan address the mainstreaming of biodiversity into other sectors, reducing the pressures on biodiversity, improving the status of biodiversity, enhancing the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services, and providing for a participatory process of implementation. With this approach the Strategic Plan links the three aspects of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental.

The characteristics and various components of the Strategic Plan illustrate an approach that may be relevant to the SDG process. In particular the Strategic Plan:

- represents a set of **global commitments by all Parties**;
- is primarily implemented at the national level through a **national strategy** adopted as a **high-level policy** instrument;
- provides a flexible framework so that countries can contextualise the global commitments to fit their national conditions and priorities;
- contains practical means to support its implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation; and
- provides a mechanism to keep progress and needs under review.

1. Universality - Global Commitments

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets establish a set of global goals and targets agreed to by all Parties. It provides the overarching strategic, policy and monitoring framework on biodiversity, not only for the Parties to the biodiversity-related conventions, but for the entire United Nations system, and creates the framework for action by partners at all levels. The importance of the Strategic Plan was affirmed by leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, known as “Rio+20”, and by the UN General Assembly.

2. A flexible framework focused on national priorities

Like the discussions for the post-2015 development agenda, a central challenge for the Convention on Biological Diversity was how to create a means for coun-

tries to meaningfully contribute to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity given its global nature, as well as how to taken into account national differences and priorities.

The approach taken to address this challenge was an agreement that each country would adopt a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) as the principal instrument for implementing the Strategic Plan at the national level. An NBSAP is a policy instrument in which a country states where it wants to go and which route it will take to get there. Its role is to identify and prioritize national targets within the framework of the global Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and the action required to meet the targets and fulfil the objectives of the CBD for the country. National targets are set in relation to national circumstances, priorities and potential constraints, which in turn will outline the actions and contributions of the country to the global effort to meet the objectives of the Strategic Plan and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. This approach recognizes that each country has particular needs and circumstances and can therefore tailor its actions accordingly all while contributing to an overall collective vision.

3. Practical means for implementation, monitoring and accountability

The Strategic Plan establishes requirements for monitoring and reporting. It includes a range of measures to assist countries with its implementation. It includes provisions for partnerships, technical and scientific cooperation,

and support mechanisms for research, monitoring and assessment.

- While flexible in nature, the Strategic Plan calls on Parties to monitor and report on their progress through mandatory national reports submitted to the Secretariat. These reports are shared publicly. In order to review overall progress, a separate initiative was agreed to develop a common set of biodiversity indicators to be used to assess the status and trends of biodiversity, drivers of biodiversity loss, benefits to society, and policy response, through the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP).

- The Parties also agreed on a number of steps for keeping implementation of the Strategic Plan on track. A “mid-term” review of progress took place at the twelfth meeting of Parties in October, 2014, where Parties agreed on next steps to ensure that implementation stays on course. A subsidiary body on implementation was also created by Parties to monitor progress and provide recommendations for how to overcome obstacles. Each successive COP will review progress made towards implementation.

- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is the major international funding mechanism supporting Parties in implementing the Convention and the Strategic Plan. The Parties also adopted a Strategy for Resource Mobilization, which includes not only conventional means of support but also identifies and accesses a range of innovative domestic and international financial resources. It includes the development of

concrete initiatives, targets and indicators, and processes for developing innovative mechanisms in order to provide adequate, predictable and timely new and additional financial resources, in support of the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Parties also agreed to report regularly on resource mobilization, both from international and domestic sources.

- Likewise, the Parties also called on the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to set up a clearing-house mechanism for knowledge-sharing and technology transfer, and the Secretariat has also developed an innovative approach to facilitate technical and scientific cooperation.

Finally, the Parties have stressed the need for partnerships in implementing the Strategic Plan. The Secretariat has formalized relationships with many key partners, including other UN agencies, scientific institutes, and other entities, to take ownership of the Strategic Plan and work towards its implementation. The major biodiversity-related conventions have agreed to cooperate, and align their own work programs with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.

II - TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND COUNCILS

The elaboration of the SDGs has many parallels to the experience of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. The SDGs are to be universal, yet must take into account different national situations. They are to be monitored in the

long-term, yet need specific milestones and indicators to measure progress. Implementation should be driven by country-based priorities, but will require adequate institutional arrangements as well as partnerships with stakeholders and creative means for financing, both from domestic and foreign sources.

The implementation and achievement of the SDGs will require a strategic and coordinated approach, including a long-term and integrated perspective, linking various national processes, related, among other things, to sectoral and cross-sectoral policies, data production and processing, monitoring and reporting. It will also require some vertical linkages, so that local, national and regional policies and actions in support of the global goals and targets are coordinated and mutually supportive, as well as partnerships among the many stakeholders involved in sustainable development.

National Sustainable Development Plans

The current discussions in the post-2015 development agenda have recognized the need to consider national priorities and circumstances when shaping how member states will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. There has also been some discussion regarding monitoring progress, and the need to consider different models and capacities. Yet there has been little discussion of **how** the global goals would be translated into national action – i.e., on **what** countries would be reporting upon.

Member states may wish to consider adopting an approach whereby countries can develop their own national Sustainable Development Plans (SDPs). The plans would highlight the relevant considerations in a country – the priorities and the challenges. It could set forth a set of national actions to be taken, possibly in the form of goals and targets. Importantly, the plan would ideally be adopted at the highest levels of government, after an inter-ministerial process. A process for seeking inputs from stakeholders would also help shape the plan.

National Sustainable Development Councils or Committees

Parties to the CBD have utilized numerous internal coordination mechanisms to help to create and implement an NBSAP that integrates the priorities and interests of all relevant ministries. One such mechanism used by numerous parties is the establishment of an inter-agency or inter-ministerial committee. Such a mechanism provides an effective formal forum for exchange of views, enhancing the opportunity for better mainstreaming and integration.

Member states may wish to consider the establishment of an inter-ministerial process or mechanism by which to develop the SDPs. Such a mechanism could include a high-level body of ministers, and a working-level group of policymakers from various agencies or ministries.

Such a mechanism could also be useful for countries to ensure collaboration across agencies and ministries with respect to



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR BIODIVERSITY 2011-2020

THE VISION

By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Goal A: Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society

Goal B: Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use

Goal C: To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity

Goal D: Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services

Goal E: Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building

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implementation of the SDPs, reporting, and highlighting areas of need, such as capacity building and other areas of support. It can also be a means to provide inputs of stakeholders and members of civil society with respect to scientific and technical data, technical expertise, as well as policy development and implementation.

A similar kind of mechanism was proposed as part of the Earth Summit in 1992, in Agenda 21. Agenda 21 stressed the importance of setting up coordinated and participatory mechanisms at the national level to implement sustainable development. Many countries created National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs), supported by inter-ministerial committees. However, many other countries did not follow this path, or such councils faded over time.

Given the cross-cutting nature, the magnitude and the level of

ambition of the SDGs, such an inter-ministerial approach could be extremely useful as countries seek to focus their efforts on implementation. Such a mechanism could also be a way of revitalizing or providing a framework for what many countries are doing or planning to do as efforts shift to implementation.

III - CONCLUSION

In order to move from aspiration into action, translate global goals into steps that could be taken at the national level, and ensure an integrated approach, member states will need to consider possible mechanisms. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the mechanisms to implement it provide one model that may usefully inform the post-2015 development agenda and SDGs.

