



Regional Dialogue on Promoting Regional Cooperation through National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)

29 August 2024 | Chennai

Meeting Report



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*BOBP-IGO had committed during the **Regional Capacity Building Workshop for East, South, and South-East Asia** organised by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD under the aegis of Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) during 05-08, September 2023, in Seoul, Republic of Korea, that the Organisation would strive to form a BOB Global Biodiversity Framework Working Group (BOB-GBF WG), which would serve as a platform for experience and knowledge sharing in mainstreaming fisheries in the NBSAPs of respective countries.*

During this Regional Dialogue organised by the WWF and BOBP-IGO, the representatives from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka resolved to expand the Working Group with expert members and develop this as a vibrant platform for sustained interaction among the members.



Background

The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) in December 2022 after multiple consultations and intense negotiations, which lasted almost four years. This ambitious and much required Framework supports the need for transformative actions to reverse nature loss and reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. The four Goals and twenty-three Targets set out in the KM-GBF are the minimum required effort to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.

Given that the KM-GBF will be implemented at national and sub-national levels, South Asian region Parties to the CBD need to include concrete actions permitted by national circumstances to protect, conserve and sustainably use biodiversity while ensuring fair and equitable sharing of its benefits to secure a nature positive future in their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). South Asia has to strengthen its regional cooperation through NBSAPS to ensure that biodiversity conservation efforts are being harmonized across borders, reducing habitat fragmentation and increasing ecosystem connectivity. It will also allow the countries to cooperate on the conservation of transboundary species like birds, marine mammals, which usually migrate across the borders. This regional dialogue has enabled the participating countries to see the possibility of aligning policies, sharing scientific research and compiling financial and technical resources for more effective biodiversity conservation efforts.

Target 20 of the GBF recognizes and stresses on the need to strengthen capacity and promote technical and scientific cooperation, including through South-South cooperation, to meet the needs for effective implementation, particularly in developing countries, fostering joint technology development and joint scientific research

programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and strengthening scientific research and monitoring capacities to ensure each country contributes towards the goals. Hence a regional approach would equip the countries with strategies like coordinated responses to tackle challenges like climate change, invasive species and pollution.

South Asia is a very diverse region with many mega biodiversity hotspots and varied hydro geological features along with important topographic regions and ecosystems. It is also home to 19 of the world's 235 ecoregions, with around 16% and 12% of the world's flora and fauna, respectively. Around 19% of the region's total land area is still under forest cover, accounting for 27% of the world's total forest area.

The following cooperation frameworks / arrangements demonstrate the commitment of the countries in this region to work together on issues of mutual concern.

- India and Bangladesh MOU on Conservation of the Sundarbans
- South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme
- Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organization
- Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project
- Central Asian Flyways

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that South Asian countries, particularly Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and India, which share their marine areas and rich biodiversity, incorporate conservation actions in their NBSAPs. This dialogue was a critical step towards achieving the global biodiversity framework and promoting regional collaboration and cooperation. The Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO) in collaboration with World Wide Fund for Nature India (WWF-India) organized this dialogue to promote awareness

and support consensus building among the countries - Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka in including enabling elements and actions in their respective national biodiversity strategy and action plan.

Objectives

The broad Objectives of the workshop were to:

- Facilitate dialogue and cooperation among South Asian countries to address shared biodiversity challenges, particularly in marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Ensure that NBSAPs of participating countries are aligned with the goals and targets of the KM-GBF, especially in areas where regional cooperation can accelerate progress.
- Promote the exchange of technical knowledge, best practices, and scientific research among South Asian countries.
- Identify and include specific actions within their NBSAPs that promote regional cooperation, such as joint research initiatives, data-sharing protocols, and transboundary conservation efforts.
- Identify opportunities to scale up existing bilateral and multilateral agreements and programs.

Officials and experts from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka have attended this regional dialogue on National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). Experts from research organizations, academic organizations, fisheries and conservation organizations have also attended the program, along with the country representatives.

Expected Outcomes

- Development of a framework or roadmap outlining specific actions and commitments for regional collaboration in biodiversity conservation among South Asian countries, with clear roles and responsibilities.

- Establishment of mechanisms for ongoing knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives.
- Enhanced implementation and scaling up of existing regional agreements and program.
- Increased awareness and engagement of key stakeholders in regional biodiversity conservation efforts.

Welcome & Opening Remarks

The dialogue was opened on 29th August 2024 by the Director, BOBP-IGO, Dr. P. Krishnan. He welcomed all the national delegations and other participants to the dialogue. He underlined the importance of fighting climate change and biodiversity loss for the region, as it is particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.

He thanked the World Wild Fund for Nature India, the delegation from all the four countries and other partners for their support in organizing the dialogue. He urged all the parties to fast-track the revision or updating of their respective NBSAPs. He also highlighted the importance of ensuring the national targets of





the countries are at a matching level with the goals and targets of the global framework. He also pointed out the relevance of capacity building, sharing of scientific knowledge and resource mobilization that are required for achieving the conservation and sustainable targets of biodiversity.

Dr. Krishnan underscored the key role the officials from the fisheries ministry from the respective countries need to play in finalizing and implementation of the NBSAPs in their effective.

Regional Cooperation for NBSAP: Setting the context

Ms. Vishaish Uppal, Director, Governance, Law and Policy, WWF India presented the context and importance of KM-GBF and the NBSAP and why it is relevant for the countries while working towards the 30x30 targets. The CoP 15 which paved the way for reaching the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature, has 4 goals

and 23 targets which need to be achieved by 2030. To achieve these goals and targets, the countries need to take some actions. Ms Uppal stressed the need for South Asian countries to come together and develop joint actions for conserving biodiversity and promoting its sustainable use. She explained the 23 targets of the KM - GBF in a nutshell and added that under almost every target, one can incorporate a small regional component as an action point. She also pointed out that often NBSAPs focus mainly on terrestrial biodiversity and the fisheries and marine biodiversity aspect may get less priority. Hence this is an effort to focus on this region's immense coastal and marine biodiversity and prioritize it through NBSAPs.

Ms. Uppal highlighted a few KM-GNF targets which enable regional cooperation like target 1 which deals with the land/sea use change and the spatial planning component for addressing the usage of sea and marine areas as well as its effective management marine protected areas (MPAs), mapping the elements in the MPAs etc. Similarly, target 3, which deals with designating

30% of Earth's land and ocean area as protected and conserved areas by 2030 which is a powerful tool and can help the region to declare OECMs and other conservation areas to protect habitats and species. In addition, Target 5 on the trade of wildlife species, Target 6 on invasive alien species management and prevention, Target 10 for sustainable fisheries etc are very relevant targets for all our countries to work together.

Ms. Uppal pointed out that the entire GBF comes with very strong monitoring indicators and the Parties are still refining some of the indicators especially since there are data deficient areas too. Although many such challenges are existing for countries, the target 20 under the GBF gives a unique opportunity to talk about south-south cooperation and capacity building, joint research, triangular cooperation etc. and thereby allowing the countries to jointly monitor their biodiversity, invasive and alien species entry through transient water as well as monitor IUU. These 4 elements under this target can be looked at, for establishing regional level indicators and the use of relevant technology like satellite trackers, and acoustic recording devices mentioned under this target need to be utilized for the region.

She pointed out that unless the region strengthens collaboration and cooperation, we cannot reverse biodiversity loss and live in harmony with nature. Ms. Uppal ended her talk by stressing that working together is the main way to conserve South Asia's biodiversity.

Reflections from National Delegations

1. Bangladesh

There are several ministries and government agencies involved in dealing with biodiversity and ecosystem-related matters in Bangladesh. The country has conducted some stakeholder meetings to discuss the NBSAP. There were several ideas shared by the stakeholders and the

ministries are currently in the process of summarizing these points and then the country will decide on which action they will be taking to protect and conserve its biodiversity. They also mentioned that the fisheries ministry is also involved in the process. The fisheries ministry will work as a major partner while forming the national biodiversity strategy plan for Bangladesh.

2. Sri Lanka

The country has received early action support from GEF/UNDP as a one-year project. Under this, Sri Lanka has appointed a consultant and is currently in the process of setting the national biodiversity targets. Target 3 from the GBF is their major focus area. A rapid screening and review of the key thematic areas for the NBSAP is being conducted to determine coherence between national targets and action points with the KM-GBF goals and targets. Sri Lanka is keen to conserve 30% of its territorial sea. However, if they are not able to do so, they will then try and achieve this 30% target by expanding it to the EEZ area. The delegate also stated that there is very limited data on their oceans and very little research has been done till date. Before the upcoming COP, Sri Lanka is planning to finalize the national targets and submit them to the CBD. For this, Sri Lanka is reaching out to all Ministries and even its districts.

3. Maldives

The environment ministry of the Maldives has just initiated the work to develop its NBSAP. Since both the representatives participating in the workshop were representing the fisheries ministry, they were unable to provide details on how the Maldives is gearing up in the process of preparing its national biodiversity strategy and action plan. They agreed that since many of the economically important species are transboundary, regional cooperation is necessary. They also informed that the environment ministry has sought to collaborate with several stakeholder agencies in relation to

the NBSAP, highlighting their work with the tourism ministry, in particular. Maldives is also looking at Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures as a potential avenue to help fulfil Target 3.

Suggestions and Inputs from other Participants

National Aquatic Resources research and development Agency (NARA) Colombo, Sri Lanka

NARA suggested that for regional cooperation, India is in a position to set up an institution to monitor wildlife, particularly marine mammals. Under target 20, India in collaboration with other South Asian countries should take the initiative to run an observation network to monitor marine mammals.

Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) Cochin, India

CMFRI appreciated the purpose of the workshop and stated that through specific collaborative efforts, the region can tackle common challenges like climate change impacts in the marine sector as well as knowledge sharing and management. It was also stressed that sharing the resources and mutually connecting for the common goals are essential while ensuring regional cooperation. There was a suggestion that such dialogues must be done periodically as these add to the collective efforts.

World Bank, India office

It was suggested that regional collaboration can also open up funding opportunities for the region. Regional climate fund, as well as GEF 9 cycle, will have a theme on International Waters (IW), hence it would be pertinent if the region can collaborate effectively and solicit funding from these sources to effectively conserve their marine areas

FAO/CAFI SSF Network

This initiative was appreciated and it was informed that the regional focus should also look

at capacity building of fishers and fisher organisations. It also promotes suitable financial services for especially artisanal fishers. It was mentioned since target 14.6 prohibits forms of fisheries that contribute to overfishing and eliminate harmful subsidies that contribute to IUU, this will incentivize artisanal fishers to support this target.

Overall Discussion

The participants agreed that a regional approach can ease the process of funding in comparison with the country level approach. The funding resources like the GEF international waters are provided only when two or three countries come together, but such funds seldom get used and such funds are getting lapsed. During the dialogue, several participants shared their concerns about the lack of clarity on conserving 30% of the planet by 2030 and the potential application of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) and recognized the need for capacity development in this domain.

All participants also appreciated the draft suggestions circulated by WWF and BOBP on possible action points for the NBSAPs. They all agreed that this will be shared with the CBD focal points of their countries.

Closing Session

Dr. Krishnan, Director of BOBP informed that BOBP has established the Bay of Bengal Global Biodiversity Framework (BOB-GBF) Regional Working Group, a virtual network of representatives from South Asia formed in the side lines of the CBD's Regional Capacity Building Workshop organized under the aegis of Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) held at Seoul, South Korea. He suggested that the knowledge network will benefit by the inclusion of the experts who participated in the Regional Dialogue and underscored the potential of leveraging the network for sustaining the dialogue.

Key Follow-Ups

| No | Action | Responsibility |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Strengthen the BOB-GBF Network and develop it as a platform for knowledge and experience sharing | BOBP-IGO & WWF |
| 2 | Develop proposals for regional capacity development for achieving the KM-GBF targets, with special reference to those concerning coastal and marine areas. | WWF & BOBP-IGO |
| 3 | Provide guidance to the group on integrating statements in the NBSAPs for mainstreaming regional cooperation | All members of BOB-GBF |

The CBD focal point from Sri Lanka stated that they will reach out to WWF India and other participants for their NBSAP work and thanked BOBP and WWF for organizing this workshop.

Ms. Vishaish Uppal expressed gratitude to all participants for attending this workshop and providing their input. She also suggested that this dialogue should be maintained and other topics like DSI (Digital Sequence Information) on marine genetic resources should also be discussed to understand its implication and enhance our understanding. This was especially relevant as the upcoming Conference of Parties (COP) under CBD will be taking some decisions on DSI associated with genetic resources which will be relevant for future BBNJ discussions too. She also requested the participants to add their suggestions on the draft document circulated with all, so that it could be refined and recirculated.

She once again thanked all participants and closed the meeting.



List of Participants

A Country Representatives

| No | Name | Country |
|----|------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Dr. Kazi Kamrun Nahar | Bangladesh |
| 2 | Mr. Shoukot Chowdhury | Bangladesh |
| 3 | Ms. Hawwa Raufath Nizar | Maldives |
| 4 | Mr. Mohamed Ahusan | Maldives |
| 5 | Ms. R. M. Nilmini Ranasinghe | Sri Lanka |
| 6 | Ms. J.P.I. Swarnalatha | Sri Lanka |

B Experts from Organizations

| No | Name | Organization |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Dr. P. Krishnan | BOBP-IGO |
| 2 | Ms. Vishaish Uppal | WWF-India |
| 3 | Mr. Muralidharan Manoharakrishnan | WWF-India |
| 4 | Dr. Anupam Joshi | World Bank |
| 5 | Dr. K.V. Akhilesh | CMFRI |
| 6 | Dr. K.R. Sreenath | CMFRI |
| 7 | Dr. K. Arulananthan | NARA |
| 8 | Dr. Rahman Shafiqur | BFRI |
| 9 | Ms. Suchitra Upare | FAO/CAFI SSF Network |





World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

WWF India is a science-based organization which addresses issues such as the conservation of species and its habitats, climate change, water and environmental education, among many others. Over the years, its perspective has broadened to reflect a more holistic understanding of the various conservation issues facing the country and seeks to proactively encourage environmental conservation by working with different stakeholders- Governments, NGOs, schools and colleges, corporates, students and other individuals.



Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)

The BOBP-IGO is a regional fisheries advisory body with Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka as its contracting parties. It is mandated to enhance cooperation among its member countries and other countries (especially Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand for sustainable fisheries management in the Bay of Bengal region. The organisation evolved from the erstwhile Bay of Bengal Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Founded in 1979. The BOBP-IGO Secretariat is hosted by the Government of India and is located in Chennai.

Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation

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