



GUIDELINES FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL, SUBNATIONAL AND LOCAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS – COMPANION VOLUME 3: SOUTH AFRICA

**Outline of lessons learned from applying the
Guidelines Global guidelines for the mainstreaming
biodiversity in integration of national and sub-
national biodiversity planning and management
and their connection with urban planning processes
and practices in South Africa**

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Introduction

The Global Guidelines for vertical integration of biodiversity strategies and action plans is a key resource in supporting sub-national governments achieve effective vertical integration. The mandate for these Guidelines originates from Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP 12, decision XII/9, in which the Executive Secretary of the CBD was requested "to assist Parties and subnational and local governments, and their partners, to more effectively integrate their contribution to achieving biodiversity targets." These Guidelines are therefore intended as a tool to advance the subnational and local implementation of NBSAPs, provide guidance on how to make best use of subnational and local authority knowledge in compiling and implementing NBSAPs, and coordinate planning, governance and monitoring mechanisms between different levels of government to optimize synergies (The Convention on Biological Diversity, 2017)^[1].

Effective subnational and local implementation of global and national priorities generally depends on two interconnected elements:

1. The capacity of each level of government to develop, execute and monitor their own biodiversity strategies and action plans or related instruments that mainstream biodiversity into their wider objectives and cover the obligations of an NBSAP, and;
2. The coordination mechanisms between these levels, including synergies across levels of government in planning BSAPs. Guidelines were developed to this effect: "Guidelines for an integrated approach in the development and implementation of national, subnational and local biodiversity strategies and action plans."

This document serves as a companion volume to the 'Guideline for an Integrated Approach in the Development and Implementation of National, Subnational and Local of Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans', published by the Secretariat of

the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2017. This volume builds on volume 2 which unpacked experiences from Brazil, India and Tanzania. It provides supplementary information for the Guideline by outlining lessons learned about vertical integration and mainstreaming biodiversity into planning processes in South Africa, a project country within the INTERACT Bio – Integrated Action for Biodiversity Project. It therefore provides valuable insights from mainstreaming implementation from the Global South, showcasing biodiversity mainstreaming and integration at the national, subnational, and local levels of government.

The INTERACT Bio project is funded by German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) through the International Climate Initiative (IKI). This project's main focus is to support the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) through the mainstreaming of biodiversity objectives in planning and development processes in South Africa. Over eight years (2017 - 2024), it strives to make biodiversity management a cross-sectoral priority at both local and national levels, aligning sub-national Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (BSAPs) with national ones. By promoting nature-based solutions, the project facilitates the integration of biodiversity considerations into urban planning, land use, economic development, and infrastructure design. Project mainstreaming approaches have included outreach, enhancing national-subnational dialogue and collaboration, investment cases and demonstration projects. Strengthening the capacity of city-regions to integrate nature into land use, infrastructure and development planning is a major objective of the project.

1) The Guidelines document is available [here](#)

Why vertical integration is important?

On the ground action and implementation and higher levels of governance and policy are linked in complex and important ways.

Policy directs local action. Implementation generates practical lessons and these lessons are essential as inputs into the development of new policies, laws and regulations in response to changing local contexts and changing definitions of the public interest. Thus, coupling between the local, sub-national and national subsystems is important so that there is a continual information flow to support the alignment between understanding the public interest (and codifying it through policy) and the lessons emerging from practical interventions (Roux et al., 2023; Nkhata and Breen., 2010). In a multi-level biodiversity mainstreaming context, vertical and horizontal policy integration are essential in achieving alignment and adjustment of public interest across levels of governance from local to global (Schleyer et al., 2015).

For example, natural capital is very important to national economies – from farming and forestry to leisure and tourism. The total value of these benefits are estimated at US\$125 trillion every year globally (WWF,n.d.). In low-income countries, populations are more directly reliant on water, land, forests, soil, wildlife, and fisheries for their livelihoods. Climate change is threatening these benefits as extreme weather events and slow-onset climate impacts degrade ecosystems and natural resources—many of which have been historically conserved and sustainably managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in some cases. Thus, within each context, local relationships with natural resources impact and are impacted through unique pathways with national policies (USAID, 2022).

In addition, successful and durable coping strategies rely on the continual alignment and realignment between policy and action. It is found that many cities are not adequately prepared to deal with the increased heat associated with climate change and may be overwhelmed by the magnitude of potential impacts and the substantial investment needed in infrastructure, leaving certain communities and nations incapable of absorbing both immediate and long-term effects of swift and chronic climate change impacts. Key opportunities exist for aligning national policy and local action – that can anticipate and address these impacts and in doing so, significantly reduce the impact of global climate risks (WEF, 2024).

In the previous volume we defined vertical integration and differentiated it from biodiversity mainstreaming. In this volume the focus remains on vertical integration which is concerned with alignment between vertical levels of governance, i.e. between local and national. Enhancing coordination and collaboration with subnational governments, cities and other local authorities provides an important opportunity for national governments to revise policy that directs local action, achieve national goals for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and contribute to attainment of global targets such as those set by the Convention on Biological Diversity's Global Biodiversity Framework (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2017).



Purpose of the guidelines

The purpose of Volume 3 is the same as for Volume 2: As in Volume 2, Volume 3 provides practical, case material and lessons from South Africa. This section provides a summary of the guidelines outlined in volume 2. These Guidelines (Volume 2) aim to serve as a user-friendly and efficient resource for national, subnational, and local governments to improve their biodiversity planning and management. They emphasize practical insights and strategies derived from experiences in the Global South, while also making comparisons with practices in the Global North. This approach aims to create a comprehensive manual for promoting vertical integration in biodiversity planning and management.

Target audience

The target audience for these guidelines are subnational governments and local authorities. The Volume 2 guidelines aimed to:

1. Capacitate relevant government officials responsible for biodiversity planning and management including and not limited to town planners, engineers, environmental officers, administrators, department managers and policy/decision makers.
2. Leverage and catalyse external and private sector involvement and empowerment by showcasing a 'whole of society approach' through on the ground cases.

Volume 2 proposed a framework for making sense of, and giving direction to efforts in vertical integration. The framework outlines thirteen key areas for promoting integration, coordination, and cooperation. This structure aids users in accessing the most pertinent guidance for their specific situations.

- Specifying and institutionalising collaboration and coordination in policy and strategy: The role of subnational and local authorities can be set out and reported on in policy and strategy documents and reports related to biodiversity, including NBSAPs and National Reports.
- Clarifying mandates, institutional roles and responsibilities: Roles and responsibilities of subnational and local authorities on biodiversity can also be established through basic legal frameworks at all levels of governance, as well as norms, regulations and corporate strategies and policies for public agencies and bodies.
- Establishing institutional coordination and cooperation mechanisms and forums: Whether or not the roles of different levels of government are codified in formal documents, subnational implementation can be strengthened through appropriately designed councils, agencies, permanent or regular consultative bodies and even informal forums.
- Coordinating strategies to ensure alignment with NBSAP and Global Biodiversity framework (GBF) Targets: Each level of government can define appropriate strategy and action aligned to relevant guidance of the CBD, such as its programmes of work and cross-cutting issues, its tools and guidelines, its COP decisions and its Strategic Plan and GBF Targets.
- Planning for action together: When Parties plan their national strategies and action plans in coordination with subnational and local authorities or their representative bodies, institutional capacity is built for coordination. Agreeing on indicators appropriate to the different levels can help to coordinate decision-making between all levels.

- Cross-sectoral planning and cooperation: Mainstreaming biodiversity into the planning of sectoral programmes and projects, particularly those with potential biodiversity impacts, and cooperation among sectoral agencies at the operational level, offers indirect yet effective opportunities for joint implementation of NBSAPs.
- Cooperation across political borders: Because ecosystems and nature do not follow political borders, cooperation between national, subnational and local authorities on common assets such as wetlands, river basins and forests, or protection of migratory or charismatic species is necessary for managing and reducing the ecological footprint impact across borders and effective coordination of trans-boundary actions in achieving NBSAP targets.
- Facilitating consultation and participation: Independent of other aspects of coordination and collaboration, actions by national authorities to ensure consultation and involvement of subnational and local authorities, or their representative bodies, will encourage and support implementation at all levels.
- Financial support and incentives: Very often, subnational and local authorities do not have access to dedicated financial resources to work on biodiversity, and even less to coordinate with other levels of government. National governments are encouraged to identify funding avenues and incentives towards supporting subnational and local authorities in the implementation of NBSAPs. Financial support and incentives provide a direct and effective way to ensure coordination and collaboration at all levels.
- Technical support and non-financial incentives: The provision of technical support and other non-financial forms of recognition (awards, competitions, acknowledgement through media or visibility, etc.) by national authorities or other relevant organizations also facilitates action by subnational or local authorities for biodiversity.
- Capacity building and sharing lessons learned: Many Parties and their national authorities already offer web-based or in-person training opportunities, or compilations of effective practices, for subnational and local authorities on the implementation of NBSAPs, whether of their own production or by contracting appropriate institutions or bodies.
- Cooperation on science, information, monitoring and evaluation: Effective NBSAPs and related plans or programmes require a solid scientific base of data in order to define goals and targets, and to develop a system for monitoring and evaluating their implementation. Subnational and local authorities often possess valuable information and can contribute with scientific and technical data. With a common scientific basis, vertical coordination is naturally easier and more effective.
- Communication and awareness raising: Coordination across levels of government in implementing NBSAPs requires specific messaging, joint positioning and production of communication materials, so that all levels of government are represented, with their concerns and contribution acknowledged.



Case study

This volume focuses on showcasing lessons from biodiversity mainstreaming experiences in South Africa, specifically the pilot region, Waterberg, Limpopo. Lessons and insights from various project team members who were closely involved with various mainstreaming processes, were gathered and consolidated.

Waterberg, Limpopo Province

The Waterberg District Municipality (WDM), formed in 2000, is located in the western part of the Limpopo Province in South Africa. It is the biggest of five district municipalities in the province, covering an area of approximately 45 000 km². The District comprises 5 local municipalities, which are Bela-Bela, Lephalale, Modimolle-Mookgophong, Mogalakwena and Thabazimbi.



The Waterberg District Municipality boasts diverse climates and landscapes, from hot and semi-arid in the north and west to more humid and cooler in the south and east. This biodiversity hotspot is home to many endemic and threatened species across its varied habitats, including savanna and grassland biomes. Ecotourism thrives here, supported by protected areas like nature reserves and the UNESCO-recognized Waterberg Biosphere Reserve. While tourism is a primary source of income, agriculture and game farming also contribute, particularly in transition areas.

The region's low human density preserves vast wilderness areas, crucial for numerous endangered species. However, environmental challenges like mining, farming, urbanization, and climate change threaten its delicate balance. Water scarcity, exacerbated by irrigation, urban, and mining demands, is a pressing issue. Geological richness, especially the Bushveld Igneous Complex with its platinum reserves, shapes land use patterns, with tourism and game industries being central and mining mainly on the periphery. Recognizing its economic and ecological importance, the Waterberg Catchment has been prioritized nationally for development.

Mainstreaming efforts in the WDM

During the development of the WDM LBSAP, coordination between national and district levels was enhanced by the active participation of a representative from the national department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE). This vertical engagement guided the frame to define the LBSAP vision, the strategic objectives, outcome and associated projects. The vision and strategic objectives were purposely designed to be closely aligned with South Africa's national NBSAP. The strong engagement from the national DFFE is supported by a secondment of a DFFE representative to the Waterberg District municipal level. This arrangement bolsters environmental and biodiversity capacity at the District level.

Subsequently the project hosted a multi-stakeholder forum and four dialogues with participants including, local government, national government and the private sector. The aim of the dialogue was to improve information and knowledge sharing, encourage institutional capacity building, facilitate multi-stakeholder discussion and to encourage multi-level collaboration. Three sessions were hosted in the Waterberg region, session one focused on biodiversity finance to create an understanding of the tools and their impacts and explore the opportunities of financing with the business sector. Session two focused on gender mainstreaming in biodiversity, the session



highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming in biodiversity efforts and underscored the merits of adopting a human rights perspective in projects. The last session focused on the lessons learnt throughout the project lifespan, this session focused on two key areas: lessons learned and the opportunities for public-private partnerships. This session aimed to foster a collaborative learning environment where diverse perspectives converge to drive innovation, inform future endeavours in support of sustainable development.

In the Waterberg region, the District Development Model (DDM) championed by President Cyril Ramaphosa, was introduced in November 2019. The DDM is designed to address problems with service delivery by allowing all spheres of government, from local municipalities to national government, to work together in a more effective and coordinated way. Through this model, there is hope for greater partnership between national, provincial and local governments. In addition, the goal is to see increased partnership between government, the business sector, labour and community in the district. This development approach will ensure that planning and spending across the three spheres of government is integrated and aligned (COGTA, 2016).

The Public Private Growth Initiative (PPGI) was formed in response to President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation (SONA) speech in February 2018. This is a plan based on the Japanese model of cooperation between the private sector and government to stimulate economic growth. The purpose of the PPGI is to promote rapid growth in the South African economy, to rebuild and strengthen a relationship of

trust and cooperation between the public and private sector, and to spur the private sector to organise and engage, and focus its engagement with appropriate and relevant government departments. Three PPGI projects were announced at the Investment Conference in November 2019: the Automotive Industry Transformation Fund, Agricultural Development Agency and Limpopo Eco Industrial Park (Intransformation, 2022).

Overall, the integration of national and district-level efforts through initiatives such as the DDM and the PPGI, alongside the active multi-stakeholder engagement in the Waterberg region, exemplifies a comprehensive approach to fostering sustainable development and collaboration across government, business, and community sectors in South Africa.

Synthesis (lessons learnt)

During the WDM LBSAP development process, there was much discussion around the need for an LBSAP and the functional relationship between the LBSAP and other instruments such as the Bioregional Plan. This was an important insight because, while national governments may be well versed with the importance of global biodiversity targets and the UN processes (e.g. Conference of the Parties) set up to discuss and set such targets, sub-national bodies may question the relevance of global biodiversity policy to their level of work. Their day-to-day work as well as more strategic plans are typically crafted in response to pressing national policies and emerging local issues. CBD processes and 'requirements' are voluntary, whereas sub-national governments prefer to focus their efforts on



statutory/mandatory requirements from the national level, due to capacity and funding constraints and the need to be legally compliant.

In the case of the WDM, it was important to tailor the LBSAP to reflect their concerns. They asked for two aspects specifically in their LBSAP: (1) An explicit explanation and schematic to indicate the relationship and relevance of the LBSAP in relation with other, statutory planning tools; and (2) A fast track to identifying practical/implementation projects and to align these strongly with the finance mobilization goal of the LBSAP. This was an important deviation from conventional LBSAPs and may well be a more practical LBSAP model for cities in developing contexts.

This process also showed that sub-national governments need clear incentives to engage global biodiversity goals. With limited capacity and funding, CBD (global biodiversity policy) requirements can be seen to lose relevance, given other, statutory pressures at sub-national levels of governance.

The WDM LBSAP development process highlighted the critical importance of contextualizing global biodiversity goals within the realities of sub-national governance. By responding directly to local needs, such as clarifying the LBSAP's relationship with existing statutory tools and prioritizing actionable, finance-aligned projects, the process produced a grounded and actionable plan. This approach not only increased local ownership but also demonstrated a potential model for making global biodiversity policy more relevant for cities and regions with constrained resources. For the CBD agenda to be meaningfully advanced at the local level, future LBSAPs provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between global ambition and local practicality, but require dedicated support and capacity for their development and implementation.

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