

# INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE SUMMARY: LOCAL GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into decision making at national, state and local levels

21 May 2019 | Gangtok Municipal Corporation, Gangtok



**INTERACT-Bio**  
Integrated action on biodiversity





## 1. Framing the context

To bring about local engagement within the satellite cities and involve local actors in decision-making and mainstreaming biodiversity, dialogues on identifying ecosystem service opportunities were held in Panaji and Gangtok. The dialogues aimed at connecting the civil society and private sector actors with public authorities on issues of biodiversity and ecosystem services within their respective cities.

In this context, the next instalment of the satellite city dialogues was held in Gangtok Municipal Corporation in Gangtok city on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2019. Relevant local stakeholders including municipal staff, local residents, representatives of community-based organization (CBOs), local businesses and NGOs that are affected by or hold interest in the selected city-region's ecosystem services participated in this dialogue.

Gangtok, Sikkim's largest city, accounts for more than 65 percent of the total urban population of Sikkim. It also continues to be the state's fastest growing region. Flourishing urbanisation of the city has led to drastic changes in the land use pattern, especially conversion of green cover into built up area and encroachment in and around the city-region, causing environmental degradation, pollution, and loss of critical habitats. Tourism and its related activities are putting an ever increasing stress on the region's ecological systems.

There is an urgent need for the assessment and appreciation of the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity within and around city-regions and to formulate and implement sustainable strategies, which offset investments

in conventional infrastructure that has high carbon lock-in and leverage ecosystem services in a sustainable and inclusive manner. Decisions and actions that affect biodiversity are often taken at the local level, and hence corresponding strategies and action plans need to be developed and implemented at the relevant local level.

The workshop aimed to discuss the following aspects with the participants:

- Critical issues around biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services for the city of Gangtok and which ecosystem services are important for the city
- Actors and activities which influence these ecosystem services
- Management measures or policy instruments needed to improve ecosystem services within Gangtok

## 2. Emerging themes

### 2.1. Identification of critical ecosystems and their associated threats

Water and aesthetics within the city were ecosystem services that received a lot of attention. These are primarily devolved by the Ratey chu glacier, river and Ratey chu reserve forest. *Jhoras* and *Kholas* (streams) of the city which used to act as important natural drainage and water supply systems in the city and were perennial water



sources, are now dry or choked with plastic and other waste. The participants agreed that the city's biggest draw for tourism is its natural beauty which comes from the various natural ecosystems around especially the forests around Chandmari, Burtuk and Ranipool. The biggest threat also comes from tourism as the city hosts a floating population which is more than three times the residential population.

Landslides can often result in damage to the water source of Gangtok, which leads to disruption of water supply. Participants felt that a more permanent solution to this should be looked into, rather than mitigation actions such as post-disaster construction activities. Water scarcity is the main problem in the City, especially given the increased demand during tourist season. Defining the carrying capacity for the city's sources can help in development of a better management plan. Solid waste is also an issue which threatens several ecosystem services.

Participants also added that other than the more tangible and direct services, regulatory services such as that of air quality regulation, erosion prevention and biodiversity value should also be considered. They stated that these types of regulatory services become crucial during extreme climate events such as high intensity, short duration rainfall in Gangtok, which significantly impacts the city.

### **2.2. Solutions that will strengthen Ecosystem Service Provision in Gangtok**

In terms of securing Gangtok's water, some solutions which were proposed included protection of the water source, sustainable design and construction of distribution pipes, regular de-siltation activities, stream water recharge, urban and rural rain water harvesting, construction of small unpaved roads and footpaths which allow for recharging ground water, fencing and beautification of jhoras, awareness drives, development of a water security policy for Gangtok Municipal Corporation, grey water treatment, infrastructure development and a citizen based programme for adopting natural springs.

To improve the air quality in Gangtok it was suggested that the feeder roads leading to the main highway should be improved so that traffic movement is made easy, footpaths should be beautified and enhanced with greenery to make it attractive to walkers, processing of organic and farm waste into manure rather than burning, diesel vehicles should eventually be phased out and eco-friendly vehicles be promoted. There should be regular monitoring of emissions from the industries and construction activities by the State Pollution Control Board, and stringent rules should be applied to motor vehicles.

City biodiversity can be enhanced by developing vertical gardens and terrace gardens, forming relevant institutional groups, inventorying biodiversity to record location specific flora and fauna, training of tourist guides (eco guides), development of parks and gardens, celebration of events like State Biodiversity Day, maintaining greenery and conserving the green cover of Gangtok and largescale awareness programmes. Public participation was also underlined as leaving everything to the Government will not result in a desirable outcome within the timeframe stipulated.

### **2.3. How can ICLEI South Asia facilitate the various entire action points described above?**

ICLEI South Asia has already developed a City Resilience Strategy (CRS) for Gangtok which outlines various vulnerable service sectors within the city that will be further impacted by climate change. The document also details several interventions that can be taken up by the local government and other stakeholders to secure climate resilience for the city. Given the precarious position of water, especially viewed through the lens of tourism, ICLEI South Asia can take the CRS one step further by offering technical support to Gangtok in the development of an Integrated Water Resource Management Plan with strong inclination towards the use of nature based solutions.

The city has also requested support from ICLEI South Asia on inventorying its biodiversity in the form of a People's Biodiversity Register. The Register is a document which contains comprehensive information on locally available bio-resources including landscape and demography of a particular area. This document, along with the Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of the city, which is being developed by ICLEI South Asia, will not only assist in local alignment of national priorities but support better informed planning and conservation of biodiversity.

### 3. Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework implications

Going forward, the dialogue and the points raised can be viewed through the Post-2020 lens, specifically in point 5 of ICLEI's 10 Point Framework, which promotes the creation of an enabling environment that supports the mainstreaming of the multiple social and health benefits of nature at the local and subnational levels to improve the quality of life and resilience of communities, enhance social cohesion and lead to financial benefits and savings for both individuals and governments. In addition, Point 3 promotes the creation of an enabling environment for significantly increased private sector investment and development aid in nature-based solutions at local and subnational levels, as they are closer to the mainstreaming sectors and best positioned to build and sustain functional and resilient ecosystems and urban-rural linkages. In this regard, both points highlight the necessity for the issues raised in this dialogue to be addressed, as their resolution can prove to be hugely beneficial to India and the Post-2020 agenda.

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### INTERACT-Bio project at a glance

**Full title:** Integrated subnational action for biodiversity: Supporting implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans through the mainstreaming of biodiversity objectives across city-regions

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