

INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE SUMMARY: PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

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

19 September 2018 | Narmada Conference Hall, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Delhi



INTERACT-Bio
Integrated action on biodiversity



1. Framing the context

A dialogue on mainstreaming biodiversity was held for national, state and local authorities from the National Following the multi-level dialogue held in Kochi, a national dialogue took place at a meeting of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) on the 19th of September 2018 at Narmada Conference Hall in the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC). The dialogue was held under the Chairmanship of Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta, Additional Secretary of the MoEFCC, with national and sub-national administrators responsible for planning, promotion, co-ordination and overseeing the implementation of India's biodiversity and forest conservation policies and programmes. The dialogue centred on strategies that would strengthen the integration of biodiversity management at all levels of governance, as well as the benefits of adopting nature based solutions in the urban regions of Kochi, Panaji and Mangaluru.

This dialogue was next in a series aimed at promoting and strengthening biodiversity mainstreaming. These dialogues are intended to bring together national, subnational and local actors for a vertically and horizontally integrated dialogue on the importance and benefits of biodiversity conservation, as well as providing an opportunity for knowledge sharing and information exchange on the mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Cities feature different types of infrastructure such as built, social, political and institutional which serve various purposes such as food provision, water, shelter, transportation, energy supply¹. A major component which has been overlooked in city planning and administration is urban nature, which provides innumerable services, supporting the sustained growth and development of the city.

Biodiversity in cities provide numerous benefits such as “ecosystem-based solutions to water provisioning and to urban water run-off, climate control. Green areas in cities help reduce the incidence of violence, enhance human health and well-being and strengthens communities.”²

With the recognition of the role of biodiversity in sustainable development and an increasing focus on the benefits that nature may provide, the term Nature based Solutions (NbS) is gaining impetus especially within cities. NbS is defined as “actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits”.³

1. Grimm, Nancy and Schindler, Seth. (2018). Nature of Cities and Nature in Cities: Prospects for Conservation and Design of Urban Nature in Human Habitat. In Rethinking Environmentalism: Linking Justice, Sustainability, and Diversity (pp.99-125), MIT Press.

2. <https://www.cbd.int/2011-2020/about/biodiversity>

3. <https://www.iucn.org/theme/ecosystem-management/our-work/a-global-standard-nature-based-solutions>



This dialogue thus seeks to contribute to the global conversation having direct impact on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, to make cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable as it seeks to understand what steps a city can take to harness nature and its benefits. It also has impact on SDG 13, as the project cities, are coastal and therefore at risk from sea level rise. Hence nature based solutions to make the cities more resilient will also be explored. The dialogue also has links with the Strategic Plan (2011-2020) contributing directly to Aichi Target 2, which promotes the integration of biodiversity values into national and local development and planning processes.

2. Emerging themes & knowledge shared

2.1. Identification of critical ecosystems and associated restorative actions

The cities of Kochi and Panaji and State Biodiversity Boards of Kerala and Goa have been actively participating in the project activities. Through the project, backwaters and mangroves have been identified as the critical ecosystems for the city of Kochi. After extensive stakeholder consultations, the pilot projects shortlisted for the city of Kochi include, Well Restoration and Urban Farming at Manappattiparambu, Well Restoration at Palluruthi Janatha Junction, Development of Butterfly Garden and Nature Interpretation Centre at Subhash Park and Thevera Canal Restoration. A detailed study on the site specific ecosystem services provided by mangroves was also proposed to be undertaken. Solid waste management in Kochi city was flagged as a major concern by the Mayor of Kochi. She lamented that the canals which are no longer used for transport, are encroached upon and polluted, adversely affecting fish catch and livelihoods of people.

2.2. Strategies to mainstream biodiversity concerns at the city level

It was pointed out that one of the main issues faced by urban local bodies was finance and therefore the project should help the cities to prepare bigger projects for accessing funds from others sources such as Green India Mission, to improve basic infrastructure and incorporate nature based solutions into traditionally grey projects. Noting the decline in mangroves in Kerala, the need to protect this ecosystem in view of its significance for aquifer recharge, as nursery for fish, and as the first layer of protection from cyclone erosion was also highlighted. The key messages which need to emanate from this project should be why biodiversity is important and integral to the urban environment, and how interventions focussed on biodiversity can improve the quality of environment by providing clean air and clean water.

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

The city authorities and stakeholders in all the three project cities are not very well aware of the concept of ecosystem services and steps that can be taken to promote integration of nature based solutions into urban planning. In order to ensure deeper impacts of project in the long run, regular consultations, capacity building and interaction with stakeholders need to be carried out. Already three workshops have been organised in Kochi which have resulted in identification of the critical ecosystems and the services provided by the same. It was hoped that ICLEI South Asia would be able to help Kochi in addressing their problems and achieve convergence among various programmes. Schools have already been targeted through a series of activities like lecture series, painting competitions, quiz competitions etc. Various interventions, other than workshops have been shortlisted. These include activities which aim at biodiversity communication with the citizens.

A road map for developing green and sustainable cities through nature based solutions for each project city needs to be developed. This road map will consist of a basket of interventions (short term implementation as well as long term implementation) that the city government can prioritize and take steps for implementation of the same.



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

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