



## Best Practices in Preparing National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

By March 31, 1999, the GEF had approved \$24.8 million for biodiversity enabling activities in 121 countries. Of these, 28 countries reported having finalized their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and 20 having their NBSAP in draft form as of March 31, 1999. Thirty-three countries had submitted their first national reports on Convention implementation and 32 countries had submitted interim or draft reports.

Most countries carried out worthwhile and cost-effective national biodiversity planning, or are doing so now. Most of the NBSAPs reviewed by the team were well-informed and impressive documents, containing reasonable assessments of current biodiversity status and trends. Given that the stated objectives of enabling activities are extremely ambitious and set a very high standard for any country to achieve, it may be more realistic to think of these activities as setting the stage for starting national biodiversity planning. Notable and significant progress has indeed been made by many countries, but developing and implementing national plans that can slow current rates of biodiversity loss, and enhancing the commitment and capacity to implement such plans, are still some way off.

### Lessons Learned

In the course of conducting the assessment, the team identified several best practices for preparing NBSAPs. They can be grouped into 12 categories, all of which are best understood in the country contexts in which they were successful. They show how creativity and flexibility can aid in developing NBSAPs.

### IN THIS ISSUE

*The GEF recently completed an **Interim Assessment of Biodiversity Enabling Activities**, which help recipient countries (1) develop national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) as required by Article 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and (2) prepare their first national reports to the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD.*

*The assessment was a formative evaluation to assess how well GEF-supported enabling activities have assisted countries to meet the relevant obligations under the CBD. It was based on interviews and reviews of key documents, as well as special studies and discussions with key people in a sample of 12 countries that received funds for enabling activities: Argentina, Belize, Cameroon, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, Gabon, Kenya, Mexico, Poland, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe. Additional case studies were conducted on India, Nepal, and the Philippines. Broader reviews were commissioned for two regions, the Arab States and the South Pacific Islands. The assessment was undertaken by a team of staff members from the GEF Secretariat, UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank. The team leader was an international consultant.*

*This issue of GEF Lessons Notes presents best practices identified by the study team.*

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*1. Follow an iterative approach to project preparation to develop a workable implementation plan.*

In Gabon, planners faced budgetary constraints and an overambitious schedule of activities. In consultation with the UNDP, activities and budget lines were revised to make funding allocations and time frames more workable.

*2. Organize a committed professional team to lead and coordinate implementation.*

The experiences in Cuba, Gabon, and Mexico show that the success of enabling activities is enhanced by a committed professional team: one that understands project objectives and methodologies, knows how to access resource materials, and implements a participatory approach. In Cuba, each team member had a personal commitment to the project. In Mexico, the recruitment of a coordinator considered to be an expert in the field, with high credibility and experience and good contacts, was an important factor for effective implementation.

*3. Implement with flexibility to adapt to local situations and needs.*

Countries able to adapt materials to their particular needs made the best use of the planning guidelines provided by World Resources Institute, United Nations Environment Programme, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. For example, in Mexico, the process of NBSAP development was allowed to evolve into a “Mexican approach.” A similar approach was taken in Egypt. In Ukraine, implementation was expedited by using a new model for procurement, and consultants were hired using environmental NGOs.

*4. Aim for representativeness in selection of sites and participation of stakeholders.*

Organizing work so ecological, biogeographical, and political zones are taken into account (as was

done in Argentina, Eritrea, and Egypt) ensured complete stocktaking and an appropriate assessment of options and strategies.

In Argentina, the NBSAP development was expanded beyond academic and NGO stakeholders to include central, provincial, and local governments and some productive sectors. Given this broad base, the resulting document enjoys a high degree of support. Cuba’s experience also showed the value of good coordination with provincial governments.

*5. Conduct the process in a highly participatory manner and use innovative mechanisms to enhance popular participation.*

Belize promoted active participation by stakeholders and demonstrated how biodiversity issues could be made more relevant. Locally perceived threats to biodiversity inspired the themes for each district meeting (e.g., Orange Walk focused on timber and livestock, and Mango Creek incorporated bananas, aquaculture, and tourism into its discussion).

Where the academic community is strong, the selection of universities to lead local consultations had several advantages. In Egypt, where universities are regarded as centers of knowledge and have very high credibility, the word of a university president is “heard.” Universities thus issued invitations that people accepted voluntarily. If such consultations had been led by politically powerful local leaders, people would have been likely to view such invitations as obligations.

*6. Provide creative mechanisms to foster sharing of scientific data and expertise.*

In Mexico, the lead organization—the National Council for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO)—developed agreements of mutual interest with scientific experts. When scientists shared their data, CONABIO published it under the expert’s name. This resulted in data being shared nationally as well as “repatriated” from experts in

other countries. The agreement enabled the production of a rich Biodiversity Country Study and Biodiversity Data Management System.

*7. Include capacity building in the process of implementation.*

Egypt helped prepare the “next generation” of experts by involving graduate students in its Biodiversity Country Study. Graduate students were employed to conduct inventories, consolidate archival material, and help assess biodiversity within their fields of study, none of which would have been possible otherwise.

*8. Develop effective communications to expand awareness.*

Egypt’s Biodiversity Country Study was published in both Arabic and English with colored pictures and illustrations that could be understood and used by a wide range of users, including politicians and other decision makers.

The Marshall Islands plans to publish its NBSAP as a reference book that can be used by organizations and schools. The Philippines published its Biodiversity Country Study as a book, *Philippine Biodiversity: An Assessment and Action Plan*, for use by educators and as a reference for those preparing and implementing operational projects. For wider distribution, a joint venture for commercial publication was launched.

*9. Build linkages and integrate with other relevant initiatives.*

In Zimbabwe, a linkage was established between the NBSAP and the DEAP (District Environmental Action Plans implemented by the Ministry of Local Government) that made use of the two projects’ differing but complementary structures: the NBSAP

starts at the macro-policy level and reaches down through local consultations while the DEAP takes a bottom-up approach, highlighting local issues requiring attention at the macro-policy level.

*10. Make effective use of local and regional expertise.*

In Egypt, Ukraine, Poland, and the Philippines, active participation of national experts and consultants generated interest and enthusiasm among the local academic and scientific communities and strengthened their networks. It should be noted, though, that where academic expertise is focused on particular biological fields but lacking in the application of planning guidelines and provisions of the CBD, it is useful to hold orientation workshops to enable experts to develop a common and more comprehensive understanding of the work to be done.

*11. Integrate groups at the highest levels into larger overall development activities.*

In Egypt, efforts were made to ensure that the NBSAP was recognized as integral to the country’s economic and development plan. The approved organizational plan for implementation also established a Supreme Council to be led by the First Lady. This high level of involvement ensured buy-in from all major government departments and ministries.

In the Philippines, the NBSAP was supported from the very beginning by the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development, under the Office of the President. The NBSAP was also based on national priorities that have been clearly outlined in approved sustainable development frameworks. The final NBSAP was enhanced by a Presidential Executive Order requiring all government agencies to integrate appropriate elements into their sectoral plans and programs.

*12. Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience with other institutions and countries.*

A workshop for NBSAP national coordinators and project managers organized by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in the South Pacific helped countries in the early stages of their NBSAP development to learn from the experience of others.

Countries well advanced in the preparation of the NBSAPs found a forum to share their proposals regarding activities to follow up on NBSAPs. Similarly, a workshop for countries in the Middle East organized by UNDP gave participating coordinators an opportunity to explore experiences in the region and assist each other in identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing options for biodiversity and in preparing their NBSAPs.



Feedback and Suggestions

We hope the *GEF Lessons Notes* series will be a catalyst for an ongoing dialogue on what is working, what is not, and how people involved in the GEF have found solutions to challenges that face all of us. We welcome your reactions to this edition. We would also like your suggestions of topics of interest to you. Please send us an e-mail at

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or contact us at the coordinates listed below.



Other GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Publications of Interest

The full report and a Summary Evaluation Report of the *Interim Assessment of Biodiversity Enabling Activities* are available in English, French, and Spanish on the GEF Web site ([www.gefweb.org](http://www.gefweb.org)) or from the GEF Secretariat Monitoring and Evaluation team.

Other recent GEF Monitoring and Evaluation publications include the *1998 Project Performance Report* and an *Evaluation of Experience with Conservation Trust Funds*. Earlier issues of *GEF Lessons Notes* are also available in English, French, and Spanish.

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