

Report on
State Level Workshop on Biodiversity for Sensitization of Stakeholders
28th September, 2012
NEDFi House: Guwahati

A “State Level Workshop on Biodiversity for Sensitization of Stakeholders” was organised by the Assam State Biodiversity Board on 28th September 2012 at NEDFi House Guwahati. The Workshop had the main objective of

1. Sensitizing the Stakeholders, primarily the State Government Departments, NGOs, Research and Educational Institutes about the concerns of Biodiversity
2. Familiarize the Stake Holders with the provisions of the Biological Diversity Act-2002 and the Assam Biodiversity Rules 2010 - spelling out roles and responsibilities, and
3. Working out collaborative approaches for implementations of the Act and the Rules

The program details are at **Annexure-1**

Inaugural Session:

Chief Guest: Shri Rakibul Hussain Hon’ble Minister, Environment & Forests Panchayat & Rural Development, Government of Assam

Dignitaries on Dais: Shri P. P. Varma, IAS Addl. Chief Secretary & Chairman-ASBB

Shri V. K. Vishnoi, IFS PCCF & Head Forest Force-Assam

Shri Saraswati Prasad, IAS, Principal Secretary- Environment & Forests

Dr. Ranjana Gupta, IFS Chief Conservator of Forests (Wetlands) welcomed the delegates to the Workshop.

Inaugurating the workshop, the Chief Guest, Hon’ble Minister Environment & Forests, Panchayat & Rural Development, Government of Assam, Shri Rakibul Hussain said that implementation of the Act and Rules is a challenging task and for this sensitization of primary stakeholders namely the people and the Government departments is crucial. Appreciating the efforts being made by the Board he desired that a series of such sensitizations workshops be organised at Districts level and sub Divisional Level to take the mandate to the grass root level. He

emphasized on the need for greater coordination between different departments like Forest, Agriculture, Horticulture and Fishery. He stressed that at Anchalik Levels there was a need for greater involvement of women and children into biodiversity programmes.

The Chairman of the Board, Shri P. P. Varma, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, highlighted the need for coordination amongst various departments for taking forward the mandate of the Board of empowering people to conserve biodiversity and benefit from its use. He urged upon the delegates to discover the many different ways in which the nature offers solutions to our problems. He added that when we try to invent ways and means to fulfil our needs, the sustainability aspects of nature gets impacted adversely. He appreciated the support being rendered by the Forest Department and requested the Divisional level field officers to be the torch-bearers of the Biodiversity Board. He requested the agriculture department to facilitate awareness raising amongst farmers.

The Chief Guest released Information Brochure of the Assam Biodiversity Board in English and Assamese language.

The Web-site of the Board asbb.gov.in was launched ceremoniously by the Chief Guest; he was joined by Shri Tasiruddin Ahmed, Scientist-E of the NIC Guwahati.

The Member Secretary of the Board, Shri A. K Johari proposed the Vote of Thanks for the Inaugural Session.

First Technical Session: Biodiversity Act/ Assam Biodiversity Rules

In Chair: Shri P. P. Varma, IAS, Chairman ASBB/ Addl. Chief Secretary Assam

Panel: Shri Saraswati Prasad, IAS, Principal Secretary (Environment & Forest)

Dr Anil Goswami, Member ASBB

Rapporteurs: Ms Oinam Sunanda Devi, Ms Binita Dahal

In this session Shri A. K. Johari, Member Secretary- Assam State Biodiversity Board made a detailed Presentation covering the following aspects:

1. Present day Concerns of Biodiversity
2. Major objectives of the Biological Diversity Act
3. Assam Biodiversity Rules: Facilitating provisions
4. Roles and responsibilities of Stakeholders
5. Scope for collaborative Approaches

It was stressed in the presentation that the Biodiversity Act opens up enormous opportunities for empowering local people to not just conserve but also benefit from the locally available biological resources. Need for raising awareness about the provision of the Biodiversity Act and Rules was emphasised for guarding these biological resources against any unauthorised access and exploitation. Delegates from various government departments were urged upon to facilitate inventory and documentation of biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge. Necessity for collaboration with research and educational institutes and with non-governmental organisation was highlighted.

At the end of the presentation an outline of the Interactive Technical Sessions that were to follow was presented.

The presentation was followed by question answer session.

Second Technical Session: All about BMCs and PBRs

In Chair: Shri O. P. Pandey, IFS, Additional PCCF (Projects)

Panel: Shri R. C. Goswami, IFS (Retd), Member-ASBB

Dr (Smt) Aparajita De Professor, Silchar University & Member ASBB

Rapporteurs: Ms Oinam Sunanda Devi, Ms Binita Dahal

In this interactive session, first an overview of the progress vis-a-vis targets was presented by the Member Secretary. It was informed that with the help of the Divisional Forest Officers and the District Administration as many as 46 Biodiversity Management Committees had been constituted at *Anchalik Panchayat* (Blocks) level. Regarding Peoples' Biodiversity Register it was informed that detailed discussion had been held with the University of the Tezpur for coordinating and preparing a Biodiversity Register for Sonitpur District. It was informed that all 27 Biodiversity Registers will be made one each for the District, including the three Autonomous District Councils.

During the interactions, the following questions were raised and issues highlighted:

1. How the Board proposes to keep the BMCs engaged once the works of preparation of People's Biodiversity Registers get completed.
2. How the BMCs would get Funds for their office establishment and activities.

The House was informed that the PBR was not a static document and would need continued up-dations. Documentations of Traditional Knowledge would also need sustained efforts. Moreover, conservation and sustainable

utilization of biological resource is an ongoing activity and if adequate funds could be mobilised, the BMCs could sustained their activities round the year.

3. BMC feedback: experiences and problems encountered during formation of BMCs at Anchalik Panchayat Level were shared by the Divisional Forests Officers. It was also highlighted that the BMC members were very enthusiastic about their potential roles in Biodiversity conservation.
4. Replying to a question, the House was informed that for the present the Board has target of forming 195 BMCs at Anchalik Panchayat level including the Autonomous Council areas. So far 46 BMCs have been constituted covering 6 Districts. Many DFOs informed that a lot of ground work has already been done in their areas and many more BMCs would be constituted shortly.
5. Sri A K Singh, IFS CCF suggested that people, particularly the farmers may be made aware of bio-piracy threats.

Third Technical Session: Understanding the Legal Provision

In Chair: Shri B. B. Dhar, IFS, Additional PCCF (Administration & Vigilance)

Panel: Dr Satyendra Singh, IFS, CF (Legal Cell)

Sri K N Barman, IFS, DCF Publicity & Legal Matters Expert

Rapporteurs: Ms Oinam Sunanda Devi, Ms Binita Dahal

The Chairman in his opening remark said that the Biodiversity Act is a powerful Act and if implemented properly, it would lead to empowerment of local people on one hand and conservation of biodiversity and environment on the other. He mentioned that the Penal provisions of the Act are very strong and could be used by the Forest Officers for safeguarding the forest and biodiversity particularly under difficult situations.

After detailed discussions, the following significant suggestions emerged:

1. There is a need for empowering BMCs/ Board to take steps against destruction of biodiversity and prevent unsustainable utilization of biological resources. If required, an amendment may be made accordingly.
2. In view of growing criticism of the Act by various research organizations for the difficulties faced by them in accessing biological resources for research purposes there was need to review the existing provisions and come out with a clear stand on allowing such proposals. If required, necessary amendment may be made to remove any contradictions and ambiguity.

3. Legal analysis is required on the issue as to whether 'informed consent' of BMCs would be necessary if a development project is to be implemented that involves land and biological resources of the BMC ?

While concluding, the Chairman of this session suggested that a detailed analysis of this issue may be got done by the Board involving legal Experts for clarity on the issue.

Special Technical Session: Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC), supported by French Development Agency: **Possibilities and Preparedness**

Key Note Speaker: Shri O P Pandey

Rapporteurs: Ms Oinam Sunanda Devi, Ms Binita Dahal

In this session, the Addl. PCCF (Projects), Shri O. P. Pandey, IFS spoke in details about various components of the APFBC. He pointed out various opportunities that exist for facilitating implementation of the Biodiversity Act/ Assam Biodiversity Rules through the components of this project. He urged upon the Forest Field Officers to be in readiness for implementing various components of the project.

After the presentation, discussions followed, during which Dr. Deepa Dutta, Executive Director of Institute of Research and Documentation of Indigenous Studies (IRDIS) introduced her organization. She mentioned that her organisation is committed to carrying out research and documentation projects on the diverse ethnic communities dwelling in the remote areas of Assam on issues which will directly impact their lives in terms of preservation of their rich traditional and indigenous knowledge, indigenous culture and language and their eventual empowerment. In order to document the rich indigenous knowledge of the various communities in Assam on their environment, their knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs and ways to conserve them, their ailments and herbal way of curing, IRDIS would like to take up a project on the "Documentation of the Indigenous/ Traditional Medicinal Knowledge of the Ethnic Communities of Assam".

Shri Pandey informed the House about some of the direct interventions/assistance that the APFBC can provide to support the mandate of the Biodiversity Board. Shri Pandey made following announcements:

1. That the Project will provide financial assistance to the Board for preparation of model Biodiversity Register.
2. Financial assistance could also be extended for developing criteria for identification of Biodiversity heritage Sites.

Concluding Session:

In Chair: Shri B. B. Dhar, IFS, Additional PCCF (Admin & Vig.)

Panel: Dr. (Smt) Ranjana Gupta, IFS, CCF (Wetlands)

Dr. (Smt) Alka Bhargawa, IFS, CCF

A. K Johari, IFS, CCF & Member Secretary-ASBB

Rapporteurs: Ms Oinam Sunanda Devi, Ms Binita Dahal

The Chairman recapitulated the significant issue that had been discussed during the previous Sessions and mentioned some of the recommendations that have emerged.

Dr. Ranjana Gupta, IFS, CCF (wetlands) stressed upon the need to retrieve and compile the existing literature on biodiversity. She quoted the example of one draft document related to Medicinal Plants of Assam by the late Mr. Saharia, Botanist of the Office of CF (Research & Education) that had very detailed description of a wide variety of medicinal plants of Assam. She urged the concerned Forest Officials to retrieve and publish the book if not already published for the benefit of Forest Officers and BMCs. She also stressed on the need to take up preparation of model PBR on a pilot basis in the different regions of the State to facilitate the works in other Districts.

Dr. (Smt) Alka Bhargawa, IFS, CCF suggested that instead of all the project proposals being framed in the Board Headquarters, the Field Officers at grass root level i.e. DFOs/ Range Officers/ Officers of Other Departments may design project proposals related to biodiversity inventory/conservation and submit it to the Board for consideration. She also suggested that it is extremely essential to rope-in the Academicians and other Experts who have been working in the field related to inventory of wildlife and/or conservation of a particular kind of biological resource.

Shri D P Bankhwal , IFS CCF (IT) suggested that Champion Drivers (Knowledgeable Persons) at various level in different sectors need to be identified for long term management of biodiversity.

He further stressed on a need for audit of biological resources and to identify and notify institutions for this purpose.

He emphasized on the need for integration of PBRs with the Working Plans.

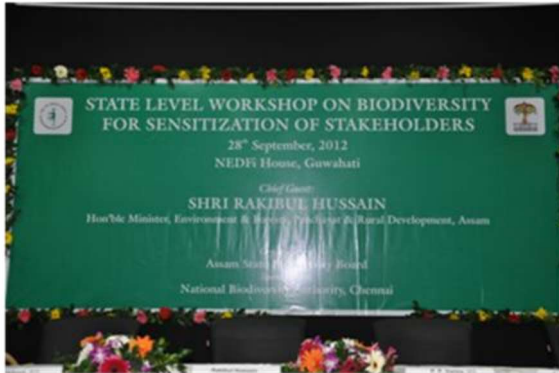
Recommendations adopted are listed below:

1. A workshop is required to be organised purely on legal issues, inviting law experts from NBA and other organisation to discuss following issues:
 - a. Working out an amendment for empowering BMCs/ Board to take steps against destruction of biodiversity and prevent unsustainable utilization of biological resources.
 - b. In view of growing criticism of the Act by various research organizations for difficulties faced by them in accessing biological resources for research purposes, reviewing the existing provisions and come out with a clear stand on allowing such proposals. If required, necessary amendment may be suggested to remove any contradictions and ambiguity.
 - c. Analyse as to whether 'informed consent' of BMCs would be necessary for development projects that involves land and biological resources of the BMC ?
2. There is a need to generate awareness amongst people, Government Departments and other Stakeholders towards the opportunities that the Biodiversity Act/ Rules offer for conservation of biodiversity and for empowerment of people to benefit from sustainable use of this biodiversity. For this purpose, organise workshops at District/ Sub- district level.
3. The Board shall make efforts to pool-in existing information generated by various Universities and Research Institutes on the biological diversity of Assam for merging it with State Digital Data.
4. The Board may create a database of young scientists and researchers who have been working with various Universities/ Institutes and making contributions towards conservation of biodiversity and related aspects.
5. The Board through its website may invite contributions from individuals/institutions through a policy of 'Acknowledgement and Reward' so as to avoid duplication of efforts and promote interest among different stakeholders for working towards biodiversity conservation in the State.
6. There is an urgent need to come out with a model PBR and share the same with others so as to help them in preparing their own biodiversity registers.

7. Many progressive farmers have in their own way conserved wild varieties of various agricultural crops such as paddy and fruit crops. There is no recognition and reward of their efforts so far. Such efforts need encouragement and support as they compliment the mandate of the Board. Many such sites deserve to be declared as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.
8. The Board shall take up identification and declaration of Biodiversity Heritage Sites. For this exercise a multi-disciplinary participatory approach would need to be evolved.
9. There are many species of plants and animals which do not figure in any Schedule of the Wildlife Protection Act, but these species are getting rare and endangered. The Board may initiate steps to come out with a list of such endangered species of Assam from biological diversity point of view.
10. There is a need to link Peoples' Biodiversity Registers with Working Plans/ Protected Area Management Plans/ Micro Plans. If required, the Working Plan Code may be suitably modified.

Some Photographs of the Workshop

PLATE I



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- a) Backdrop of the workshop
- b) Registration by participants
- c) Felicitation of the Chief Guest and other Delegates on the Dais
- d) Welcome address by Dr. Ranjana Gupta, IFS, CCF-Wetlands.

Some Photographs of the Workshop

PLATE II



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- a) Release of Assam State Biodiversity Board's Information Brochure both in Assamese and English by Chief Guest Shri Rakibul Hussain, Hon'ble Minister, Environment & Forest, Panchayat & RD, Govt. of Assam.
- b) Release of Brochure.
- c) Official Inauguration of the Board's Website by the Chief Guest.
- d) Address by Chief Guest at the function.

Some Photographs of the Workshop

PLATE III



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- a) Address by Chairman-ASBB, Shri P.P. Varma, IAS, Addl. Chief Secretary to Govt. of Assam.
- b) Address by Member Secretary-ASBB, Shri A. K. Johari, IFS, CCF (Biodiversity & Climate Change)
- c) Address by Shri O.P Pandey, Addl. PCCF (Projects) at the Special Technical Session about Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation.
- d) Interaction with Forest Officers at the Technical Sessions.

Some Photographs of the Workshop

PLATE IV



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- a) **Dr. Deepa Dutta, Executive Director of IRDIS introducing her Organization and their works in the special Technical Session.**
- b) **Concluding Session: Chairperson & Panel Members**
- c) **Delegates and Participants from other Institutes and NGOs at the Workshop.**
- d) **Forest Officers and other Participants at the workshop**