

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME Error! Bookmark not defined.

GUIDE FOR THE PREPARATION OF ACTION PLANS
within the framework of the
CONVENTION ON BIODIVERSITY

(31/8/98 - 7/9/98)

Prepared by:
Juan Javier García Fernández

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 General framework for planning in the field of biodiversity
- 1.2 The six stages of the planning cycle

2. Biodiversity planning as a process

- 2.1 The planning exercise as a catalyst for action
 - 2.1.1 Planning cycles and sectoral plans
 - 2.1.2 Planning cycles and sub-national levels
- 2.2 The planning exercise as a process of social participation
- 2.3 Two basic premises for the planning process

3. Action plans

- 3.1 Strategy and action plan: terminological definitions
- 3.2 Strategy and action plan: definitions of methodology
- 3.3 Working in regional workshops
 - 3.3.1 Tasks expected to be accomplished during regional workshops
 - 3.3.2 Deciding on the duration of regional workshops
 - 3.3.3 Topics for consideration and composition of groups in regional workshops
- 3.4. Working in the national integration workshop
 - 3.4.1 Designing the plan of action
- 3.5 Refining the action plan after the national workshop

4. Adoption phase

5. Elaborating a national action plan with real commitments for action

- 5.1 Coordinating agency and sectoral plans
- 5.2 Complementary plans at the regional, provincial and local levels

6. Summary of phases in the elaboration of a plan of action.

Executive Summary

This report complements the UNDP/BPSP technical reports “A Guide for Countries Preparing National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans” (Hagen, 1999) that focuses on the initial design phase of national biodiversity strategies, and the “Guide to Developing a Biodiversity Strategy from a Sustainable Development Perspective” (Prescott et al., 2000) that emphasizes cross sectoral integration in the planning process. This study addresses the elaboration phase of National Action Plan preparation and draws on experience from the process as carried out in Argentina. In particular, this report includes:

- lessons learned about action plans and related planning cycles;
- measures relating to the formal adoption and implementation of strategies and action plans on biodiversity at the national level;
- recommendations for subsequent biodiversity planning cycles.
- Options and techniques for the design of sectoral action plans, as well as plans at the various administrative levels (national, provincial and local).
- Methodologies of participation.
- Guidelines for the elaboration of thematic action plans in the different areas of the Biodiversity Convention.

These topics are dealt with successively in the report. An introductory section reviews the general aspects of the planning process covered in Article 6 of the Convention on Biodiversity. Overall, the report assumes that the level at which planning will take place is essentially the national level. The mention of subnational (regional and local) action plans is confined to discussion of the fourth point enumerated above and to those situations in which the intention is to emphasise the differences between the different institutional planning levels.

1. Introduction

1.1 General framework for planning in the area of biodiversity

The planning processes in the area of biodiversity which a large number of countries are pursuing are provided for in Article 6 of the Biodiversity Convention, paragraph (a) of which calls for the development of strategies, plans or national programmes or for the adaptation of existing programmes. Paragraph (b) calls for the incorporation of the conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use into other plans, programmes and sectoral or intersectoral policies that are relevant for this purpose.

Successive Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the Biodiversity Convention have instructed the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to provide financial support for countries in implementation of Article 6, through what it referred to as "facilitating activities". The GEF, for its part, together with its three implementing agencies, established certain general criteria for these facilitating activities, in particular with regard to the amounts of funding, timetables and general phases of the planning process.

Consequently, one of the first considerations should be that this study should examine certain approaches to the planning process on biodiversity at the national level, taking into consideration the limitations of time and financial resources which characterise GEF support for this type of activity.

Seen in perspective, biodiversity planning within the framework of the Biodiversity Convention has two aims:

- (i) The first is one of substance. To ensure that all countries in the world increase their capacity to conserve biodiversity, use it in a sustainable way and distribute equitably the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. The initiation, expansion or redesign of their strategies, plans and programmes are essential for this purpose.
- (ii) The second is a response to current circumstances, but is of equal importance. The Biodiversity Convention assumes a flow of new and additional funding from the developed to the developing countries so that there could be collaboration between the two groups in the effective implementation of the Convention.

To this end, it is necessary for each country to identify its own priorities, within the framework of a general national strategy. At the same time, it is important for each country to be able to identify which of the required initiatives are already being undertaken, which ones can be further expanded with domestic resources and which ones need external support from the Biodiversity Convention funding mechanism.

Finally, it should be pointed out that both the text of the Convention and the resolutions of the COPs and the operational guidelines of the GEF stress the need to ensure that planning processes are consistent with the circumstances and capacities of each country, while seeking a high degree of participation from both the public and the private sector, and especially from those sectors or groups of persons who are users of biodiversity or who stand to be affected by the implementation of the Convention.

1.2 The six stages of the planning cycle

Every planning process has six inter-related stages:

1. Analysing the current situation (diagnostic survey)
2. Defining where one wishes to go from the current situation (building a vision)
3. Identifying which paths are the ones that will permit us to achieve that objective (which we refer to as designing strategies or defining strategic guidelines)
4. Identifying a set of actions that would facilitate the application of these strategic guidelines in practice, pointing out the institutional, financial and related resources (devising a plan of action)
5. Implementing the plan of action (implementation phase)
6. Evaluating the achievements (monitoring and evaluation phase).

Items 5 and 6 are not part of the capacity-building activities funded by the GEF but certain provisions for these phases must necessarily be incorporated into the plan of action.

In this section we refer mainly to the fourth stage, even though some considerations are mentioned on the general planning cycle which permit a better understanding of the role of each stage and its possible modalities of implementation over time.

2. Planning of biodiversity as a process

A description follows of some important aspects of planning cycles, which may be worth considering by the national coordination teams. It would be advisable for this to be considered at least in part from the very beginning of the planning exercise and reviewed periodically in order to be able to adapt the action taken to past experience.

2.1 The planning exercise as a catalyst for action

Countries which are parties to the Convention may submit a request for support in planning strategies and plans of action. This request, if granted, gives rise to a project financed by GEF and executed through one of its implementation agencies. What is being begun here is a project which has a given duration (normally between 10 and 18 months) which makes it possible to carry out a participatory planning exercise in the country concerned in accordance with Article 6 of the Convention. While this is very clear, it is interesting to view the project and the exercise to be carried out as part of a much broader process.

This facilitating activity should not be seen as a single, isolated undertaking. It should incorporate many things which the country has been carrying out previously and can and should act as a catalyst for many other activities in the future.

All planning covers a given period of time and is followed by a phase that consists primarily of implementation. Planning also presupposes the existence of cycles, so that the phases of implementation are monitored and evaluated, and then followed by further consideration which leads to the initiation of another cycle of planning-action.

It is also assumed that a proper planning exercise can be carried out even though little information is available about biodiversity in a given country. In the course of this process, the activities which are carried out ideally lead to an increase in knowledge about the subject. Thus, each planning cycle will be carried out on the basis of greater information.

2.1.1 Planning cycles and sectoral plans

Although good practice suggests that all the sectors involved should be invited to analyse the problems associated with biodiversity in the light of their own sectoral agendas, time and resource constraints may make it impossible to draw-up or to agree upon detailed sectoral plans during the first national planning cycle.

The processes to be started-up with the facilitating activities have to include the establishment of machinery and commitments to intensify the search for sectoral agreements, taking into account the time frames of each sector.

2.1.2 Planning cycles and subnational levels

Similarly, in a national planning exercise which in many countries, moreover, can be the first exercise of this type, it is impossible to exhaust all the subnational agendas (provincial, municipal or local).

The regional or provincial levels will be consulted during the national planning exercise for the purpose of detecting and receiving special elements which can be perceived only at those levels. But some concerns that are of importance to a specific locality may be reduced to a few lines at the national level. Actions designed at the national level may also be very general as far as local needs are concerned.

Consequently, the strengthening of planning exercises at the subnational level must be a key element in the broader process that follows, once the exercise (project) funded in this phase is completed. The first national planning exercise must be modest and must recognise its limitations in this area.

BOX 1**The different levels in planning cycles**

In conclusion to the foregoing discussion, it is useful to underline the desirability of having:

- Successive planning cycles at the national level based on the model described in Miller and Lanou, 1995.

But, since not everything can be planned at this level, planning in greater detail may be continued at other levels.

- Planning cycles at the subnational level (regional, provincial and/or local).

Some countries that are organised along federal lines will need to develop complementary strategies and action plans at the provincial or State level, in accordance with their basic legislative framework.

For their part, strategies and plans of action at the municipal or local levels facilitate more effective detection and solution of problems as well as a direct dialogue with each one of the actors, which is not the case with strategies and action plans on a larger scale.

- Planning cycles at the sectoral level (fisheries, tourism, protected areas, conservation and use of forests, genetic resources, etc.)

Similarly, each sector can be encouraged to undertake specific exercises in which the type of actions that are necessary can be more clearly displayed. On the other hand, it is likely that at the time of the first planning cycle at the national level some sectors might be better placed than others to elaborate strategies and actions.

It is more important to develop the habit of planning where this habit does not exist, or to incorporate the issue of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into other sectoral plans than to force things by attempting to elaborate a detailed plan when the actors involved are not yet sufficiently prepared for their implementation.

2.2 Planning exercises as a process of social participation

Empowerment activities can play an important role in expanding social participation and in creating institutional awareness of the theme. But this role must be played on an ongoing basis as part of the multiple tasks of the team leader of the exercise.

When the project is begun, the coordinating team will be comprised of persons of different biodiversity-related professions who belong to public or private institutions. Generally speaking, a sort of steering committee will be established on which organisations with direct responsibility for the management of biological resources, protected areas, agricultural policies, etc., will be represented.

Whatever the composition of this team in each particular case, there will always be a group of persons and institutions involved in the project who will be more active and committed to the exercise and who will have their own mechanism for participatory and trans-sectoral planning.

It is very likely that a large number of relevant institutions invited by the initial group might not have much information on the concept itself of biodiversity or on the scope of the Biodiversity Convention. This lack of awareness may be greater with regard to the "new" fields covered by the Convention, such as access to genetic resources, related technologies, incentives, systems of intellectual property, protection of traditional know-how and practices, etc.

As a consequence of this lack of awareness, institutions may assign a low priority to participation in the deliberative bodies responsible for projects or delegate their formal representation to persons far removed from decision-making. A paradox may arise in which the sectors identified by the coordinating team as essential for planning may not understand why they are being invited or what is their relationship to the subject under study.

It is therefore necessary to allocate sufficient time throughout the exercise to special activities which help to create institutional awareness and which, as a result, manage to involve those institutions that have other main objectives.

It should be clearly stated that reference is not being made here to activities to create awareness among the public in general, among grassroots communities or among citizens in the broad sense. This is another type of action, which it is very important to undertake, not during the planning process but during the phase subsequent to the implementation of strategies and plans. During the first planning exercise, time and funding with which to undertake public awareness activities are in short supply.

Attention should be focused on specific actions aimed at interest groups or different institutions whose participation in the planning process subsequently permits them to take part in the implementation of the activities.

BOX 2

Examples of institutions that may be invited to participate in the biodiversity planning process

The list that follows does not exhaust the broad range of institutions which may participate in the process. It is a sample list, since none of the institutions has as its main mission the conservation or sustainable use of biodiversity, but all of them take decisions which may affect such diversity negatively or positively:

- Public institutions that promote investment in the tourism sector;
- Institutions with experience in the field of assistance to indigenous communities;
- River basin authorities;
- Training Institutions for public sector managers;
- Authorities that establish policies in the field of science;
- Institutions that provide credits or subsidies for afforestation projects;
- Corporations or projects for the promotion of regional development;
- Energy regulatory authorities;
- Highway Department authorities.

The institutions mentioned here are mainly public institutions, but all of them have their private sector or civil society counterparts and the same arguments would therefore still apply.

A part of the success of the empowering activities depends on increasing the number of institutions of all types and levels which seek information, participate in the planning process and then collaborate in the implementation of some of the exercises being undertaken.

2.3 Two basic premises for the planning process

The countries that initiate these planning processes are very different from each other: Large countries and small island States; countries which enjoy periods of stability and countries that are experiencing prolonged crises; countries with a tradition and experience in planning and others that lack them; countries with abundant information on biodiversity and others with extensive areas that have been hardly explored. The differences are many. However, in all cases, planning can take place with the general rules being adjusted to each particular case.

The experience gained thus far in this area is not great, but permits us to suggest general guidelines, provided that these are understood to be flexible. Even in countries that are more developed, trans-sectoral and participatory planning is relatively new and must overcome numerous obstacles. Consequently, in order for each national exercise to develop naturally, it will be necessary to accept two basic premises:

3. Action plans

Ideally, an action plan should indicate not only which actions are necessary to be taken within a given period of time but who should do what and with what resources.

It is therefore much simpler for a single institution to draw up a plan of action (this may be a company, a public agency or a non-governmental body) than it is for a large number of public and private institutions.

But because of the wide variety of factors and social actors on which the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity depends, it is necessary for agreements in this field to be concluded between many different institutions. This is the principal difficulty faced by the groups in each country which are responsible for these planning processes. But at the same time it is the main attraction of the challenge.

From the different meetings held to exchange experiences among the teams responsible for the coordination of empowerment activities, it emerges that a number of conceptual and methodological difficulties are inherent in the elaboration of action plans and an attempt will be made to review these in the chapters that follow.

BOX 3

Ten questions on action plans which may arise during the implementation of empowerment activities in the field of biodiversity.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. How is a strategy different from an action plan? | 6. Should only new activities be included? |
| 2. Can both things be done at the same time? | 7. At what stage of the exercise should priorities be established? Who should be responsible for establishing these priorities? |
| 3. Should the same actors participate in both exercises? | 8. Who assigns responsibility for each activity? |
| 4. Into what sections can an action plan be structured? | 9. Is it necessary to budget for all activities? With what degree of detail? |
| 5. What degree of detail should a national action plan have? | 10. How can the implementation of the action plan be coordinated? |

3.1 Strategy and action plan: terminological definitions

In different contexts and schools of planning, very varied terms have been used while the same term has been given different meanings and has come to represent different concepts. It is therefore necessary to avoid lengthy disquisitions during the short period of the planning exercises. There will always be persons who participate in the exercise and who have experience as planners and therefore their own interpretation of the terms strategy and action plan.

It is therefore necessary for each national coordinating team to determine as early as possible which terms it will employ and to distribute to each actor or sector invited a simple definition of what is understood or meant by national strategy and action plan. This will avoid irritating delays and sterile discussions.

It is clear that the objective of a national strategy is to identify overall objectives and to indicate the principal directions to be followed over a relatively long time horizon. In the special context of the Biodiversity Convention, it is assumed that this task will involve a very high number of institutional actors who will have to agree on these broad directions. In a national strategy there will be many definitions, although these will not be very specific.

The National Action Plan should be seen as a means of implementing the broad policy guidelines established in the national strategy. It should therefore be more specific in nature. One practical way of viewing it is that each major guideline of the national strategy should be capable of being reflected in the action plan in more specific activities.

However, in the example given in Box 4, while the column on the right is more specific than the one on the left, it does not constitute the ideal of a plan of action, since it contains no indication of those who are responsible, time frames, what resources are necessary and who will provide them.

Our intention for the moment is merely to point out that the degree of detail and specificity of the action plan is greater than in the strategy and that its logical construction requires that each line of the strategy should have its correlation in some activity or activities of the plan. The aspects that concern the degree of detail of the planning exercise are dealt with later in this paper.

BOX 1 DETAILS OF STRATEGY	POSSIBLY GREATER DETAILS IN ACTION PLAN
<p>1. Strengthen national system of protected marine and coastal areas, incorporating types of environments not yet represented in the system.</p>	<p>1.1 Conduct a rapid survey to identify areas that are of special interest with a view to their incorporation into the national system of conservation units.</p> <p>1.2 Develop models of agreements between the Federal Government and coastal States with a view to creating protected marine and/or coastal areas.</p>
<p>2. Promote the voluntary creation of private protected areas in eco-regions that are of special interest.</p>	<p>2.1 Undertake a campaign to create greater awareness among and motivate rural landowners in eco-regions that are of special interest.</p> <p>2.2 Develop practical criteria for evaluating private landholdings in the eco-regions in question based on their potential for conserving those components of biodiversity that are of special interest at the national level.</p> <p>2.3 Elaborate and adopt norms for the reduction of x per cent of the land tax on those properties that enter into conservation commitments by signing agreements with the implementing agency.</p>
<p>3. Strengthening the capacity of indigenous communities to contribute to the definition of a regime of access to genetic resources.</p>	<p>3.1 Establish a training programme for community leaders on the scope of regimes granting access to genetic resources.</p>
<p>4. Prevent the introduction of exotic species into freshwater aquaculture environments.</p>	<p>4.1 Establish environmental impact assessment norms for exotic species aquaculture projects.</p> <p>4.2 Undertake an awareness-building and educational campaign on the subject with rural extension agencies.</p> <p>4.3 Develop pilot aquaculture experiments with potentially valuable native species.</p>
<p>5. Periodically evaluate the rate of deforestation in the different forested eco-regions in the country.</p>	<p>5.1 Establish a programme for inventorizing native forest resources.</p> <p>5.2 Convene a meeting of national technical experts to establish methodologies for the evaluation of the evolution of native forest growth.</p> <p>5.3 Conduct satellite-based evaluations of samples of forested areas every three years based on the methodologies chosen.</p>

3.2 Strategy and plan of action: methodological clarifications

The following section looks at two practical problems of the methodology of empowering activities in the field of biodiversity: allocation of time and the method of consultation for the action plan. As a general rule, biodiversity planning exercises within the framework of empowerment activities supported by the GEF require a series of common steps:

1. Constitution of a coordinating group;
2. Establishment of a programme of work and a timetable in a small preliminary workshop;
3. Compilation and analysis of available data;
4. Interviews and individual consultations at the national and subnational level;
5. Elaboration of core workshop documents;
6. Organisation of workshops by region, state or province;
7. Analysis of products, elaboration of draft integration documents;
8. Final national integration workshop;
9. Elaboration of final documents by a steering committee.

Based on these steps, which are common to the majority of projects, the cycle assumes the simultaneous treatment of the strategy and plan of action. Empowerment activities are undertaken with moderate funding and with very tight deadlines. In other words, there is no opportunity for an initial round of workshops to design the national strategy and a second to elaborate in greater detail a plan of action on the strategy that has been agreed.

This situation therefore makes it necessary to extract the largest number of elements, contributions and ideas during the regional and national workshops on final integration to develop not only the strategy but also the plan of action.

But the ideal conditions for the elaboration of the strategy and plan of action are quite different. Box 5 contains a schematic summary of these differences. A major methodological problem faced by the coordination teams is how to find the appropriate modalities and sufficient time so that, upon completion of the exercise, the elements exist to elaborate both types of products.

BOX 5		
Principal differences between strategies and action plans		
	STRATEGY	ACTION PLAN
Objective	To reach agreement among various actors on main policy orientations	Specify actions, time frames, parties responsible, and budgets
Who should participate	Broad invitation to different	Ideally, the actors who are capable of

	social sectors and to all regions of the country.	assuming responsibility for concrete aspects of the plan
Working method	Principally fieldwork: interviews, consultations, workshops	Principally by committee: specialised working groups.

3.3 Working in regional workshops

Ideally, regional workshops receive assistance from persons with very different backgrounds. This diversity is very useful for enriching the general approach at the strategic level. But it can also make it more difficult to obtain more specific material for the plan of action.

On the other hand, regional workshops have to deal mainly with the immediate problems of the region. This is both natural and desirable. But the formulation of actions may take place at a much more "micro" level than would otherwise be the case for a national action plan. Many of the elements of action that could emerge from the workshops would be more appropriate for the elaboration of regional, provincial or local plans.

The planning of workshops must anticipate these possible situations and devise ways of satisfying the development of this process and of consolidating all the information generated and all the work done, but must also permit the channelling of the various elements to different ends and with a certain flexibility.

It is also true that what is referred to as "regions" in different national planning exercises can be in practice areas of very different sizes, population and complexity. In small island States, each "region" may be a small under-populated island, while in large continental countries, it may be an area of hundreds of thousands of square kilometres, with several million inhabitants and containing large cities.

It is much more likely in consequence that participants might make their contributions at a much greater level of detail in the first case than in the second. In the latter situations, it is much simpler for the workshop to focus on the major national problems and the main concerns of the particular region in question.

3.3.1 Tasks expected to be accomplished during regional workshops

The results that may be expected from regional workshops are ideally four types, namely, those related to the:

- diagnostic survey;
- major priority themes of the region;
- strategy;
- action plan.

Let us examine these four areas in greater detail:

(i) Diagnostic elements

Carrying out a diagnostic survey is a major undertaking which requires information and analysis. It would not be practical for the workshop to devote all its time to this task. Two approaches may be adopted in these workshops, both aimed at achieving results that are acceptable within a limited period of time.

==> *Validate a diagnostic survey already outlined by the working group during surveys, interviews and prior consultations.*

The previous diagnostic survey in this case must be brief, must be written in simple language and must highlight data from the most up to date information and readily available data. In this case, it should be distributed to participants beforehand or, where this is not possible, a few hours should be set aside for participants to read the information prior to the commencement of their deliberations.

The presentation of the diagnostic survey by the person who elaborated it is not advisable, since that person (very likely a consultant from the region) would be highly exposed and may be tempted into a defence of "his" survey.

==> *Identify the main problems using the techniques of note cards and subsequent group discussions.*

This option consumes a great deal of time, but is very useful in cases where a preliminary diagnostic survey has not been prepared. It may be useful in such cases to invite the participants to identify also the strengths that are available. This point is of great importance for participants to be aware from the outset that the workshop is not a complaints session but a positive exercise that seeks to serve as a catalyst for possible changes.

(ii) Identifying issues of greatest concern

This point may be discussed in the workshop with a view to determining which aspects of all those related to the implementation of the Biodiversity Convention are those on which the workshop wishes to place the greatest emphasis. It also serves to structure the thematic work of the subsequent phases of the workshop.

The major themes of the Biodiversity Convention are numerous. Arbitrary efforts to systematise them may lead to the identification of more than 20 principal themes. Each one of them may require extended workshop discussion (Box 6). Strict combining of some of these issues may reduce their number, but even so there would be no fewer than 8 or 10 very broad topics.

Should all the topics be dealt with in all cases? Of course there should be no obligation to do so. A prior survey will help to identify the topics of greatest concern. But it is reasonable to permit the workshop itself to review the totality of issues on which guidelines are being sought during the overall national process. And it is the workshop that should decide on which aspects it would concentrate, bearing in mind the restrictions of time available for its deliberations.

BOX 6		
Major thematic areas of the Biodiversity Convention		
1. Institutional reforms.	10. Environmental restoration.	16. Access to genetic resources.
2. Legal reforms.	11. Threatened species (identification, recovery).	17. Traditional know-how.
3. Economic aspects and incentives.	12. Exotic species (prevention, control).	18. Intellectual property rights.
4. Awareness-building.	13. Agro-biodiversity.	19. Monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity.
5. Human resources training.	14. Ex situ conservation.	20. Funding strategies.
6. Scientific research.	15. Sustainable use (general or separate treatment: fishery, fauna, forests, wetlands, pasture land, arid zones, etc.)	21. International aspects.
7. Environmental impact assessment.		
8. Protected areas.		
9. Bio-regional or land-use planning.		

This definition of the principal themes must be done in plenary sessions in the early meetings of each workshop. Prior consultation of the participants about their main interests can save time in the workshop itself. But even so, the results of this prior consultation must be presented to the plenary session and confirmed or modified in that forum.

(iii) Definition of strategies.

In the phase of the definition of strategies, the task is facilitated by working in smaller groups. This will depend on the number of participants, their prior familiarity with the subjects to be dealt with and the number of subjects which the workshop wishes to examine in detail.

In local workshops, where regions are small in terms of population and area, it may be the case that most participants are representatives of grassroots social organisations (peasants, farmers, fishermen, etc.). In these situations, it may be useful to work with a limited agenda but examining in greater detail the few topics selected. One or two working groups may be enough.

Where the regions in question are larger and the composition of the workshop is consequently more diverse, it may be preferable to examine nearly all the topics related to the Biodiversity Convention. In such cases, 4 or 5 working groups may be constituted with each of them dealing with two or three main topics. It is logical that this modality may require more careful organisation, the establishment of more intensive working agendas and sticking very closely to them. Unless this is done, it would be impossible to examine all the proposed topics with any degree of rigour.

This stage of the workshops is crucial. It is here that the results of all the efforts of the earlier stages of the project may be seen. Exactly how useful were the earlier contacts, the interviews, the local motivational workshops if any, the materials disseminated, etc, for making participants aware of the objective being sought.

While the workshop is regional, it contributes elements that help to define the broad outlines of national policy. A strong effort at synthesis is required. The sense of the workshop on each subject discussed must be expressed in a few short sentences. But these few general statements must be clear and substantive. They will constitute the visible expression of the desire and necessity for making changes. They are basically statements of the general thrust of activities.

What then is the best way of presenting this part of the task to participants? It may be convenient and easier to suggest that the entire deliberation on a topic may be expressed in a few brief sentences. It may be useful to set a tentative limit. A maximum number of sentences for each topic. Each of these brief sentences may be entitled: "strategic guidelines", "strategy statement" or "strategic orientation". Taken together, these orientations, guidelines or statements will constitute the strategy to be developed.

It will be useful to keep in mind certain characteristics of this part of the exercise and to communicate them beforehand to the participants.

1. Develop the ability to summarise. Express ideas in few words. Group ideas under a few general headings.
2. Review ideas, bearing in mind that they are being brought from a region into a national strategy.
3. There will be other similar exercises in other regions from which may emerge different ideas on what should be done and how. Consequently, some ideas from the regional workshop may

ultimately not be reflected in the national strategy.

4. A national integration event will be organised to which delegates from the regional exercise will be invited who may seek agreements with their peers from other regions. It should be possible to develop a broader consensus in those forums.
5. While a regional (or state-wide, or provincial as the case may be) strategy is not being prepared, it is interesting to try to lay the basis for the national strategy to be complemented at a future date by its regional (or state-wide, or provincial) chapter.

(iv) Elaboration of the action plan

It has already been stated above that the elaboration of an action plan is a task performed mainly in committees made up of persons with experience in planning and that those who participate in this elaboration must have positions of responsibility in the institutions that implement the plan (or persons formally delegated by them), whether public or private.

Neither the time available nor the method of work will permit these workshops to develop action plans that are refined, budgeted, with responsibilities assigned and deadlines set. What then is the role of the workshops in the elaboration of the action plan. Its main role is to provide guidelines for the later technical work, reflecting the opinion and main agreements reached in these deliberations.

If the general arrangements for the holding of the workshop are adequate, once the major strategic orientations for each theme are defined, the working groups may be invited, within a relatively short period of time, to give greater attention to the question of how to implement these major policy directions. What steps can be taken to begin to implement these general policy orientations?

This part of the exercise may tend towards becoming "wish lists" of little practical value or, on the contrary, may be characterised by high doses of realism. This is the second area in which the prior motivational work will be reflected as well as the quality of the participating institutions themselves.

An action plan should not be composed exclusively of new actions resulting from the current exercise, but should take into account the following:

- Everything that is already being done in the desired area (programmes, plans, projects), in which human and financial resources are already being invested. These actions and investments constitute the "base line" or the "point of reference" of the action plan. They are the actions already in progress prior to the implementation of the plan.
- The programmes, plans and projects which are still not being executed but which have already been designed and their initiation negotiated. This second block also forms part of the point of reference or base line.
- The programmes, plans and projects which are already being implemented, but to which certain elements or activities may be added to improve them in the desired sense. By way of example, mention may be made of a programme for the education of indigenous communities, which incorporates new elements, a project for agricultural development that incorporates new aspects or objectives relating to the fulfilment of the Biodiversity Convention, scientific research programmes run by the State or universities which incorporate new priorities related to the Biodiversity Convention, traditional development or tourism promotion programmes which expand their support for nature-based tourism, etc.

In this part of the workshop certain norms of procedure that contribute to the achievement of a better result may also be used:

1. Ideally, each agreed strategic orientation should require at least one concrete activity for its implementation. Normally, more will be required.
2. At the same time, however, a limit should be set to the number of actions. This may force the workshop to select only that which is essential.
3. If the number of actions identified is very high, in a final brief survey, the group may be invited to indicate, for example two to four key activities that must be undertaken, on whose success the implementation of the strategic guidelines will depend. In practice, the priority activities may be defined in this way.
4. Undertake a realistic exercise. Remind each group of the background conditions and the point of departure (see 2.3 above).
5. Recall that the action plan is national in character and similar to strategic guidelines.

6. State honestly in the workshop that the action plan will not be elaborated there but that elements are being identified for subsequent elaboration. These elements, together with the suggestions of other similar meetings will be analysed in the national integration workshop. At a later stage, a technical team will give it more precise form.

Box 7(a) suggests a possible way of organising the group's work on each subject that has been selected in a regional workshop, particularly with regard to the identification of elements for the strategy and plan of action. The objective behind this approach is to attempt in this unique consultative forum to obtain the largest number of elements for the following stages of the exercise. In order for this schema to function in the short period of a workshop, it is necessary for each group to work not only with identification cards containing general information and to have a discussion of their contents, but also to assign a certain amount of time for the drafting of the statement using clear language. This task may require extra working time by some of the more qualified or more active members of the group.

BOX 7a

Organisational framework of the discussions in regional workshops.

This framework may be successfully used when there has already been intensive preparation so that participants are already adequately familiarised with the workshop's objectives and with the scope of the Biodiversity Convention.

1. SELECTION OF ISSUES ⁽¹⁾

2. IDENTIFICATION OF OBJECTIVES

(no more than three principal objectives for each issue)

3. IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS OR GUIDELINES

(no more than three for each objective)

4. IDENTIFICATION OF ACTIVITIES ⁽²⁾

(no more than three for each strategic orientation)

Notes:

- ⁽¹⁾ The issues on which the discussions will focus will be determined for each workshop based on the latter's own perceptions and the results of the diagnostic surveys carried out (e.g. protected areas, sustainable management of forests, agro-biodiversity, genetic resources, etc.).
- ⁽²⁾ Under this framework, there will a possible maximum of 21 activities for each principal theme. In any case, if the workshop is properly planned, the groups should be able to seek a synthesis and to identify those elements that are essential. If the activities proposed are too numerous, it may be suggested at a later stage that the five or six essential elements of each principal issue should be identified.

This modality must be understood as a proposal of a general nature which requires that each particular situation be reviewed. It has already been mentioned that various factors, including the number of participants, their previous experience in the field of planning, their familiarity with the Biodiversity Convention agenda, and the quality of the earlier motivational work, may suggest the appropriateness of using other simpler methodologies.

The distinction between strategic guidelines and activities is not always very clear. If the concept of guidelines is very general, activities, while more specific, may also appear to be general (see examples in Box4). As already mentioned (see 3.1 above) lengthy discussions on the interpretation of these terms must be avoided in the workshops. One way of avoiding this confusion is to request participants to identify general objectives and suggest what can be done to achieve them. There will therefore be no need to determine whether a suggestion is strategic in nature or whether it concerns a concrete activity. In this case, a smaller group may be assigned the task of drafting a more structured document. But this will make the work of each group much easier. Box 7(b) contains the steps of this simple mechanism.

BOX 7b

Simplified alternative framework for discussions in the regional workshops.

This simplified framework may be very useful in regional or local workshops where grassroots social actors predominate, mainly users of biodiversity (such as fishermen, farmers, cattle farmers) and local authorities not familiar with the mechanism of the workshop or with the scope of the Biodiversity Convention.

1. SELECTION OF THE PRINCIPAL ISSUES OF REGIONAL OR LOCAL INTEREST ⁽¹⁾

2. IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

(For each issue selected)

3. IDENTIFICATION OF GUIDELINES FOR ACTION ⁽²⁾

What can be done to overcome these problems or to take advantage of these opportunities? (Without distinguishing between strategies and concrete activities)

Notes:

- ⁽¹⁾ Under this approach, the issues must be few and clear, based on the participants' own perceptions and priorities. The coordinating team shall be required, however, to make a short presentation of all the issues covered by the Biodiversity Convention, even though it may examine only a small number of them.
- ⁽²⁾ Under this approach, there is an attempt to take advantage of the time available to participants to identify possible courses of action and to discuss their advantages and disadvantages in greater depth. A later task of the coordinating team with the possible assistance of certain representatives selected by the workshop will be to organise this support in a manner compatible with the general planning of the exercise.

BOX 7c

Time allocation table in a three day (light) workshop.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3

Morning	Accreditation, Lunch	Beginning of work in groups - 4 hours	Work in Groups II - 2 hours Plenary discussion - 2 hours. Closure
Afternoon	Inauguration and general presentation - 4 hours	Work in groups II - 4 hours	

It must be borne in mind that when techniques are used to enliven workshops which permit all participants to express themselves, irrespective of their level of education, discussion groups advance more slowly through the agenda and stages of their work.

The possibility of conducting longer workshops is not always advisable. There are two variables which fluctuate a great deal depending on the duration of the workshop: the quality of the product and the quality of the participants. In workshops of very long duration it is hardly likely that high-level participants will take part (from public entities, enterprises, NGOs or even from the academic sector). In shorter workshops, as a practical matter there might not be enough time for proper deliberations.

Each coordinating team must try to find the adequate compromise between these factors, taking into account the availability of financing.

3.3.3 Subjects of analysis and composition of groups in regional workshops

It has already been seen that there are many major issues under the broad heading of the Biodiversity Convention and that these may be grouped into at least 8 or 10. However, it was also mentioned that not all the topics will be of equal interest in all workshops. It is not advisable to force workshops to address topics which are not clearly seen by the participants as being important.

In most cases, the workshops have between 20 and 40 participants. This is so both for reasons of funding and because of the way the plenary sessions are organised.

Assuming this level of participation, into how many groups can the workshop be divided? Of what size? This will be in relation to the number of topics to be dealt with in total in the workshop and the way in which the work is organised. Using the modality described in Box 7a, working groups of between 7 and 10 persons can function relatively well. Groups that are larger may require much more time in each round of analysis and progress will therefore be slow.

With the method of work described in Box 7b, the groups may be larger. In certain special cases, this second modality may be used in common by all participants.

As always, the coordinating team must try to come up with a specific solution that would permit it to maximise its objectives. The creation of a larger number of groups makes it possible to consider more topics but reduces the internal diversity of each group. Fewer different approaches will be used. With a smaller number of groups (3 or

4) no more than 10 or 12 principal issues can be discussed, but this will permit a greater variety of opinions to be heard.

The same is true for the establishment of the groups. Some coordination teams would prefer to group persons depending on their areas of greatest knowledge. In other words, create "specialised" groups. But, how can this objective be achieved if each group is required to deal with two or three different topics? One alternative may be for each group to deal with two or three topics that are fairly interconnected.

Other teams will prefer each group to be as diverse as possible so that more general situations will be discussed, thereby facilitating the search for basic agreements.

On the negative side, it may be that some persons (for example from the academic sector) might find the final product lacking in specificity and believe that much more could have been said. But in this phase of the exercise, a high profile role by the experts can obscure the opinions of user groups or representatives of local authorities.

3.4 Working in the National Integration Workshop

The National Integration Workshop provided for in the empowerment activities of all countries is not in methodological terms the same as regional (provincial, state, local) workshops. Before the national integration workshop begins a quantity of work that is substantively different will have already been done and varied views and contributions would already have been collected at the various levels. In cases in which, in addition to the regional process of consultations, another sectoral process is undertaken, the conditions under which the national workshop is begun are better still.

The coordinating team will have elaborated a draft national strategy document that combines the aforementioned elements, although with emphasis on those aspects that require more precise definition in the National Workshop. There will always be controversial subjects, on which opinions from the different previous exercises will be divergent. These divergences should be pointed out and the National Workshop invited to resolve them.

Whatever the methodology followed in the regional consultations (using the model indicated in Box 7a, 7b, or other), the coordination team must be in a position to present a draft national strategy and the elements suggested for the action plan.

The National Workshop will also adopt the working group approach to its work. It is very likely that the number of participants in this forum would be more than that initially forecast. This will be the case, in particular, if there is success in awakening the interest of users and of other areas of Government unconnected with the focal point of implementation of the Biodiversity Convention.

Here again there are specific choices which the coordinating team makes. It can adopt a more rigorous approach and limit the number of participants to not more than 40 persons or, on the contrary, it may encourage the participation of a larger number of sectors and thus easily ensure that this number is doubled.

As a general rule, there should be equitable representation of the different political units in the country (whether states, provinces, autonomous regions or territories) especially in countries with a federal structure.

It is important that the different interest groups should also be balanced in the National Workshop (academics, NGOs, indigenous or local communities, private sector, national government, local government representatives, etc.)

It is not necessary for the National Workshop to resume the task of reviewing the diagnostic study if this has been carried out correctly in each region. Similarly, the review of key issues will not be necessary either. The regional workshops have done this work. But the National Government and the coordinating team may wish additional topics to be dealt with and propose them for discussion. Aspects of institutional organisation and international relations, for example, will be examined mainly at this level.

If the country is pursuing this empowering activity it is because it has subscribed to the Biodiversity Convention and has thus committed itself to proceed with the implementation of the entire Convention, in accordance with its possibilities, of course, and having regard to its particular circumstances. It may be useful, therefore, for those items to be proposed for treatment which have not been of interest at the regional level.

The main task of the national workshop will therefore be to review the elements of the national strategy from an overall perspective and then to advance as far as possible in the design of the plan of action. If the draft document has respected the basic contents of the previous forums, then more specific working groups can be constituted at this level, while efforts continue to achieve a balance in the composition of each group.

3.4.1 Advancing in the design of the plan of action

With regard to the plan of action, the level of definition of the national workshop will be greater than that achieved in the previous workshops. Proper organisation of all the previous information will be essential so that during the national workshop further progress can be made towards processing it.

Generally speaking, the national workshop will bring together delegates from each previous exercise, in addition to other national representatives who may join in the planning process fully at this stage. The very composition of the workshop in itself assumes that it is possible to examine the various topics in greater detail. Not only will what has already been said in the different forums be harmonised, but a more precise form will be given to the product.

The degree of definition of the plan of action which can be achieved in the national workshop will depend firstly on the decision-making capacity of the representatives of the various institutions present. In all cases, there will be some persons who will make valuable contributions, proposing solutions with very attractive approaches, but who do not have responsibility for the implementation of the activities proposed. Other participants will be less creative but may assume specific commitments. It would be useful to have the two types in the national workshop.

However, it should be expected that, given the characteristics of the national workshop, it may not be the most appropriate place for institutions to adopt specific commitments. This is true, in particular, of public institutions which also have the capacity to decide on the main definitions.

While it is known that a large number of decisions very relevant to biodiversity are taken by private sector decision-makers, both from enterprises and from communities and individuals, there is no doubt that the State retains a principal role in this regard. The State can promote decentralisation, transferring decisions to provincial, state, municipal and local levels, in both the public and private sectors. It may also create conditions that act as incentives for private decision-makers to modify certain practices or conduct.

Without clear definitions on the part of the public sector, the adoption of a relevant plan of action within the framework of the Biodiversity Convention is not conceivable. If the elaboration, adoption and implementation of strategies and plans are part of a process, emphasis must be placed in all cases on the strengthening of this process rather than on the specific outcome, which is a completed plan of action.

In this sense, the national integration workshop can play a vital role in strengthening the process for the future, because it is essentially a politically and institutionally relevant forum rather than a technical one. Consequently, the elements that can be extracted for the plan of action are mainly political in nature and take the form of institutional commitments. It should be stressed that these commitments can be extended to the private sector, at least to the entrepreneurial sector, by encouraging it to adopt voluntary codes of conduct.

Each national coordinating team should be very sensitive and determine beforehand the definitions to be agreed upon during this phase of the exercise. The conditions may be optimal for extracting a broad range of commitments during the workshop itself. It may also be the case, however, that a greater maturation period is necessary. In this latter case, the focus of the national workshop will be on reaching agreement on the national strategy and on highlighting the isolated commitments to activities that have been given and indicating that this is the way to proceed.

3.5 Adjusting the plan of action following the national workshop

The national workshop marks the end of the collective consultation sessions and, consequently, the receipt of significant contributions for the definition of the national strategy. But the most likely situation is that there will still be various tasks remaining for the elaboration of the national plan of action.

The first task of the planning committee is to refine the final draft of the national strategy. The task will be carried out by the technical coordinating committee with follow up by the national authorities, especially the body that acts as the national focal point in the field of biodiversity.

The refinement of the plan of action can continue depending on the various circumstances. One way of approaching the task is to implement the final recommendations of the national workshop and try to prioritise tasks, calculate budgetary needs in general terms and spell out the principal responsibilities of each national organ, the various subnational authorities and private institutions. This is an arduous task, but can be carried out with competent personnel. With this approach, however, there is no guarantee of subsequent follow-up, since each implementing body is not assigned a specific task. The main task falls to the technical teams, without any assurance of political and institutional support from any other source than the body responsible for managing the exercise. The plan of action that results may be implemented in a very erratic form.

The problem with this mechanism is that there is no formal assumption of commitment to action by each actor. It has been mentioned that it is hardly likely that all relevant agencies would be represented by high-level decision-makers in the national workshop, an absence which can be even more glaring in the case of the productive sectors.

Elaborating a plan of action in this area requires a very large number of bodies at different levels to incorporate into their programmes, plans and/or policies new activities which, in many cases (but not in all) require the allocation of specific budget heads.

In very special cases, it may be that institutional interest in the project, in the national biodiversity strategy and programme of action or in biodiversity in general may be found at a very high level of decision-making (Presidency of the Nation, Office of the Prime Minister, or other level). In most cases, it is very likely that this special condition might not exist, in which case it would be necessary to examine the phase of adoption of the national biodiversity strategy and programme of action and its relationship to the development of an operational plan of action.

A second approach would be to draft a plan of action of a more general nature which does not specify budgets and responsibilities in an obligatory manner and therefore permits greater flexibility. The refinement of the plan requires further elaboration at a later stage which consumes a great deal of negotiating time.

In this second approach, while the plan of action which completes the project is more vague in nature, the adoption phase may be approached with a greater likelihood of success in its institutional and political aspects. In this way, subsequent to its adoption, and depending on the success of this crucial phase, the task of designing a detailed and concrete plan of action must be taken up again.

4. Adoption phase

During the elaboration of the project and while activities to promote participation and consultations from the grassroots to the higher levels are being undertaken, it is necessary to devote some attention to a discussion of the process of adoption.

Depending on the institutional structure of each country, some mechanisms will be better than others. The best mechanisms in each case will be those that have the greatest impact on the various institutional levels which must then consider how they can collaborate in the implementation phase.

In some countries formal adoption by the legislative branch will be recommended. This will be advisable in cases where such adoption has a financial impact in budgetary terms and budget heads are allocated for its implementation. In other cases, formal adoption by the head of the executive branch, whether this is the President or the Prime Minister, would be of decisive importance.

Whichever the appropriate instance, it should be borne in mind that the phase of adoption is not important because of the final act in itself. It is decisive if this formal act is accompanied by high-level instructions (from the executive or legislative branch, according to the particular case) to sectoral bodies to promote the implementation of specific measures. In some countries decrees have been issued instructing all ministries and agencies of similar rank to examine ways in which they could collaborate in the elaboration of the national biodiversity strategy and report within a given period (of a few months) on the measures to be adopted.

It should be clear that what is being adopted is the national strategy, which will not be detailed, but will merely offer general guidelines. In those cases in which the joint adoption of the national biodiversity strategy and the plan of action is promoted, it is likely that the plan would be of a general nature without any mention of fixed budgets or obligations, except the specific commitments undertaken by each body within the framework of the national workshop.

Lastly, it should be added that this type of mechanism is usually more effective in countries with centralised organisational structures, since the decisions of the central Government are implemented throughout the national territory.

In those countries with a federal structure (with provinces, states or autonomous regions), the instructions of the central Government are only binding on bodies for which it is directly responsible. It is necessary in these cases

to identify appropriate institutional modalities to complement the efforts of the Federal Government and those of other relevant subnational authorities.

In the latter cases, the instructions of the Federal Government must be carried out by the central agencies. The federated entities may be invited to develop measures, programmes or plans, but these are not binding agreements. In these situations, it is of particular importance to involve other administrative levels from the beginning in the planning process, making use of existing channels or forums with a view to coordinating policies between the federal and other levels.

5. Designing a national plan of action with real commitments to action

Designing a national plan of action normally remains outside the time frame of empowerment activities and should not be a cause of concern. The focus of these activities is to develop national planning capacity and to promote processes that are sustainable over time. Some of these objectives are facilitated by the elaboration of the initial guidelines for action in a highly participatory manner which seeks to increase the number of institutions involved in this enterprise (especially in those countries where this has not been done or where, after it has been done, effective implementation has not taken place).

The best plan of action is that which can be implemented in practice. Consequently, national coordinating teams will take the utmost care to study "institutional moments" as the planning process advances. If the conditions are ripe for the elaboration of a realistic plan of action which can be implemented simultaneously with the national integration workshop or if the conditions emerge from the workshop that permit the drafting of a plan of action that is acceptable to the principal institutional actors then the process should not await better conditions and advantage should be taken of the existing conditions.

In cases where this is not possible, it may be useful to proceed to the phase of formal adoption of the national biodiversity strategy and of a more general plan of action, which must later be taken up again on this specific point.

5.1 Coordinating bodies and sectoral plans

An early problem which may arise is that there may be transitory members of the coordinating teams whose responsibility ends with the completion of the period of the facilitating activity funded by the GEF, and other permanent members who are officials of the various Government agencies. It is therefore preferable for the instrument of adoption itself to indicate which body (agency, commission, special management unit) will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of activities among the various organs, as well as how to conduct the monitoring of this implementation.

This same entity should be responsible for the follow-up of formal relations with the private sector, provincial or local governments, NGOs, representatives of indigenous communities, universities and other actors which took part in the exercise and would wish to collaborate in its implementation to the extent of their capacities and involvement in particular issues.

Its functions will not be limited to this follow-up activity, but it should also be the body responsible for promoting the design of the different components of the national plan of action. Once the general framework has been adopted and the competent organs instructed on the need to collaborate in implementation activities, then the appropriate bodies should be identified for each sectoral plan or for each project.

There are no set rules about the number of sectoral plans which should be prepared in each country. Depending on the state of biodiversity and the threats and opportunities identified, priorities will have been established for each activity. Work will have to begin on these priorities in order for the plan to have a significant impact.

Some of these priorities may be: marine fisheries, forestry conservation, strengthening of the system of protected areas, recovery of threatened species, control or eradication of high-impact exotic species, protection of agro-biodiversity, surveying and inventorizing of biological resources, research into forestry genetic resources, bio-regional planning in critical areas, promotion of sustainable tourism, restoration of degraded environments, etc. Any possible list will not cover all the many areas of priority action which may be identified in the different countries.

There will always be priority activities that will not fit particularly well into a sectoral plan of action, since they may be general in scope, such as possible programmes of communication, environmental education, legal reforms, the establishment or improvement of environmental impact assessment regimes, human resources training programmes in areas where skills are in short supply, and the establishment or development of information systems, among others. These activities may be carried out through specific programmes or projects which need to be designed and which, while they will form part of the national plan of action, do not constitute typical sectoral plans.

5.2 Complementary plans at the regional, provincial or local levels

Some final considerations are necessary to reflect on the function of and need to develop action plans that are complementary to the national plan of action, at the level of the regions, provinces or states, depending on the institutional structure of each country and, in all cases, at the local or municipal levels.

In countries with a federal organisational structure, it should not be expected that all the federated units would begin the elaboration of biodiversity planning processes at the same time and with the same degree of enthusiasm and commitment. This may be the case if the national State creates the conditions for promoting these activities by providing technical and financial assistance where this is requested. This may prove to be very burdensome for the majority of countries. It may be possible, however, to prioritise this type of activity in the national plan and to have recourse to certain external sources of funding for implementation, although it is not clear how this type of funding proposal will be received.

What cannot be overlooked is that in countries with these characteristics, the capacity of the national government to take concrete action on the ground may be limited in comparison with countries which have more centralised structures. Planning at the state or provincial level may then become a necessary and in some cases an unavoidable step.

It is necessary to point out that the more local input there is in the processes of participatory planning the greater will be their capacity to have an impact in the desired sense. Greater involvement of local actors is key to modifying behaviour patterns, provided that there are reasonable and concrete alternatives which can be implemented.

Some countries have chosen the approach of vigorously promoting action plans at the provincial and local levels, with interesting results. These are mainly highly developed countries which therefore have greater financial capacity. However, the initiative deserves to be given consideration in all countries based on their own perspective and real possibilities.

6. Summary of stages in the process of defining a plan of action

Mention has been made in numerous sections of this document of the outstanding role to be played by promoting sectoral and regional participation in the process of elaboration of a national biodiversity strategy and a programme of action on biodiversity. Mention was also made of the differences between the conditions that exist for agreement on a general strategy and for the design of a plan of action that would facilitate its practical implementation (Box 5).

A brief summary is now presented here of the different successive phases that will lead to the elaboration of a plan of action which has the following desired characteristics:

- it should be based on broad institutional consensus;
- it should be realistic, based on the real capacity of likely executing agencies;
- it should recognise the "grassroots" level of the actions being undertaken;
- it should identify "additional" or "incremental" activities to be executed;
- it should identify which of these activities require assistance from the financial mechanism provided for in the Biodiversity Convention;
- unfunded mandates should be avoided.

Phase 1: Regional surveys

Survey information in documents and through interviews.
 Prepare diagnostic surveys based on pre-existing information.
 Identify activities, plans, programmes and projects that are underway.

Phase 2: Regional workshops

Seek agreement on the principal strategic orientations for each subject studied.
 Identify activities to implement these orientations in practice.
 Indicate what is covered by the activities that are already underway.
 Identify those activities that are the most urgent or important.

Phase 3: Preparation of drafts of national biodiversity strategies and action plans

Analyse all the information obtained from the regional workshops.
Organise the information along the principal thematic lines.
Prepare a first draft of the strategy and plan of action by theme.
Carry out sectoral consultations (especially with national actors who did not participate in the earlier forums).
Refine the drafts.

Phase 4: National Integration Workshop

Complete the analysis and drafting of the strategic orientations.
Analyse the activities that have been suggested and add others.
Review the identification of activities already underway.
Complete the identification of activities that are of greatest urgency or importance.
Explore possible institutional commitments to action.

Phase 5: Drafting of final documents for the exercise

Draft final version of the national strategy.
Work in committees to refine the structure of the plan of action.
Seek commitments from the public and private sectors.
Draft national plan of action.

The following stages will be undertaken upon the formal completion of the project for the development of GEF-funded activities.

Phase 6: Formal adoption and undertaking of commitments to action

Approval of the national strategy and plan of action by the implementing agency (focal point of the Biodiversity Convention in the country).
Approval by a high-level Government agency (executive or legislative branch, as appropriate in each country).
Instructions to the high-level government agency, ministries and other offices to implement the commitments for action by the public sector.
Invite federated states, provinces or autonomous regions to develop processes that complement the efforts being made at the national level (for countries with a federative institutional organisation).
Preparation of a portfolio of projects for implementation.
Budgeting of these projects or other commitments to take action.
Identification of those projects that can be financed with domestic funds and those that can be funded only from external funds.

Identification of projects to be presented to the transitional financial mechanism of the Biodiversity Convention (GEF).

Phase 7: Extension to sectoral and regional levels.

Establishment of mechanisms to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the national biodiversity strategy and the programme of action.

Establishment of a timetable for the elaboration of sectoral action plans.

Identification of appropriate groups to spearhead the process of elaboration of each sectoral plan of action.

Support for the elaboration of regional, provincial or local action plans, based on the interest and commitment demonstrated by the respective authorities.