



Sectoral and Cross-Sectoral Integration of Biodiversity in Guyana

1. Introduction

Guyana reported¹ that Guyana is committed to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the conservation and sustainable use of its biodiversity. Guyana also recognises the value of biodiversity not only for economic development but also for protection and enhancement of the well-being of Guyanese. On this basis, Guyana's commitment to Article 6 and in particular 6 (b) of the UNCBD has been demonstrated over the years through a number of measures to promote the integration of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as far as possible, into the sectors and society at large in order to reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity.

Key steps taken since becoming a signatory to the Convention include: (i) enactment of the Environmental Protection Act 1996 that mandates the EPA to coordinate, among others, a programme for conservation of biological diversity and its sustainable use and to coordinate and establish national parks, protected area systems and wildlife protection and management programme; (ii) the legislative requirement for environmental impact assessments and authorization of any developmental project that may have significant impacts on the environment and may affect biodiversity (iii) a process of sectoral and cross-sectoral consultations and public participation for the development of national documents, reports etc. related to biodiversity use, conservation and management; and, (iv) preparation of a national policy position on biodiversity conservation through the development of a National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Guyana's Biological Diversity and preparation of NBAP I. The National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Guyana's Biological Diversity (1997) recognized the important role of biodiversity to Guyana and its valuable components for social, economic and cultural purposes, among others. This Strategy sets out the basis for mainstreaming biodiversity into the sectors. It notes that while the EPA has a pivotal role in the implementation of the Strategy, the established framework for successful implementation lies in a cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach to the management and conservation of biodiversity. The NBAP I further stressed the importance of sector collaboration and participation for successful implementation and attainment of its conservation objectives and proposes mechanisms for such collaborations.

¹ Guyana (2010). Fourth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Environmental Protection Agency, 2010, 93 pp.

Processes taken to integrate biodiversity into the sectors

Guyana lacks a formalized system or process to strategically integrate biodiversity into sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies and eventually the work-plans of sector institutions. Nevertheless, over the years biodiversity issues have been considered in development planning across the sectors, in particular, forestry and mining. This level of mainstreaming, however limited, occurs on a case by case basis and, in particular at the level of developmental project planning and collaboration.

Guyana's informal approach to biodiversity consideration occurs on two (2) fronts: through national and sector level coordination with stakeholders and at the project planning level. National level, policy planning occurs mainly through the Natural Resource and Environment Advisory Committee (NREAC). This statutory body comprises Directors of natural resource agencies (including forestry, mining, energy and land use) and the EPA. This committee examines environmental and natural resource policies prior to submission to the Cabinet for approval and has the overall role of coordinating the work of the United Nations Conventions. The National Biodiversity Committee, a sector level statutory body, addresses issues specific to biodiversity, especially resource use conflicts before matters are presented to NREAC for actions. This committee was reconstituted in February 2008 to strengthen sector level collaboration on natural resource management and to ensure stronger biodiversity policy integration. The NBC comprises representatives from key sector agencies, NGOs and the University of Guyana (UG). Therefore, issues associated with biodiversity are tabled at this level in the wider context of biodiversity planning to reduce the associated threats on biodiversity. The environmental impact assessment process is the only mechanism that facilitates, to some extent, biodiversity integration into the sectors within the environmental management context. By law the EIA process supports extensive public participation at the stage of project screening and scoping to identify potential impacts and at the stage of presenting the findings from the study at public hearings. The Environmental Protection Act 1996 and its Environmental Management Regulations 2000 stipulate the legislative requirement for environmental authorisation for any new development activity that may have significant impacts on the environment and, as a consequence, may affect biodiversity. The sectors regulated are mining, forestry, agriculture, infrastructure, energy, tourism and fisheries. EPA in 2000 prepared Guidelines for the preparation of EIAs. These guidelines are generic, as well as, sector specific, in particular, targeting mining and forestry sectors given their resource extractive nature. In 2002 the EPA prepared a list of processes and activities that may have significant impact on the environment and require environmental authorization. The Act, Regulations and the EIA guidelines stipulate the requirement for all EIAs to identify, describe and evaluate the direct and indirect effects of the project activities/processes on the environment, inclusive of biodiversity assessment at the species, habitat, ecosystem and landscape levels.

Applications for environmental authorizations have increased over the years and this trend is consistent for this reporting period (2006 – 2008). In 2006 the EPA received 100 new applications and in 2008 received 162, with the forestry and mining sectors recording the largest numbers. The total number of projects requiring EIAs has increased for the period 2006 to 2008 (2, 3, and 4 respectively), however, the numbers have fluctuated in the previous years with 2003 and 2005 recording the highest (8 and 7

respectively). Consistent with earlier years, most of the EIAs were required for the mining and forestry sectors. Therefore against the foregoing, the following statements can be discerned:

- Stronger collaboration among the sector agencies, in particular the forestry and mining sectors, have resulted in forestry permits and mining licenses being contingent on receiving environmental authorizations;
- Increased regulation of development activities based on increased awareness among sector agencies on environmental issues, inclusive of threats to biodiversity;
- Increased awareness on environmental issues, in general, and threats to biodiversity in particular, by the general public; and
- The public awareness campaigns conducted during the preparation of the NBAP and the implementation of Programme Area 5 have led to increased levels of awareness of threats and impacts on biodiversity and thus the institutionalization of mechanisms to manage natural resources. A number of policy actions have been taken within the sectors and together these aim to reduce impacts/threats on specific resources and contribute towards biodiversity conservation. These measures are: National Forest Policy and Forest Plan; National Land Use Policy and Regional Land Use Plans (Region 6 and 9), Corridor Land Use Plan (Linden Lethem Road Corridor and Linden Soesdyke Road Corridor); National Mangrove Management Action Plan; National Coastal Zone Management Plan; Fisheries Act; Fisheries Management and Development Plan; Amerindian Act 2006; and Mining and Environment Regulations among others. In particular, the Amerindian Act 2006 and the Revised Forest Bill 2008 have integrated biodiversity in their sector legislation. The Amerindian Act 2006 provides the requirement for titled communities to designate conservation areas/protected areas and the Forest Bill 2008 has a specific section highlighting conservation, current conservation areas and stipulates that in collaboration with the EPA, land can be identified for conservation for a maximum of 25 years.

While the EIA process is a means used to consider biodiversity issues in environmental planning within the sectors and the eventual management of such issues, implementing this process is not completely removed of challenges, especially, the aspect related to biodiversity assessment. A review conducted by UNDP in 2001 on the “Integration of Biodiversity into National Environmental Assessment Procedures” found that some EIAs provide a brief overview of biodiversity issues and these are mainly site specific covering only terrestrial habitat, species and communities. The report further stated that “in the few cases where aquatic biodiversity has been given some scant consideration, only fish fauna and a few emergent aquatic macrophytes have been considered. Soil biodiversity has not been considered in any of the EIAs reviewed. Likewise, there is no mention of algae, fungi (including lichens) and epiphytic bryophytes, although epiphytic vascular plants such as bromeliads and a few orchids have been mentioned on two occasions” (UNDP 2001). These findings remain mostly imminent and demonstrate a more fundamental issue for the holistic assessment of impacts on biodiversity. This fundamental issue is the limited number and sometimes absence of adequate biologists from key sub-disciplines on the EIA

teams. Where specialists are included on the teams, their experiences are limited to either flora or faunal disciplines and in cases where both specialists are included their specializations are limited to mainly terrestrial species.

Against the preceding, unless biodiversity is integrated into the work plans and programmes of sector agencies, institutions will continue to consider biodiversity management as an adjunct activity. On this basis the EPA is in the process of preparing a project proposal for funding through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) focusing on mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into forestry and mining practices under the broad objective of strengthening biodiversity management in Guyana. A number of sector agencies, NGO's and private sector entities will be targeted, inclusive of the GFC, GGMC, Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, the Forestry Training Centre Inc., Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association, the Forest Producers Association, MoAA, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Private Sector Commission, Guyana School of Agriculture, University of Guyana, Amerindian NGOs and Iwokrama among others. The main objective of the project is "to assist in creating the necessary conditions, capacity and skilled labour pool for biodiversity to be effectively managed, including through mainstreaming biodiversity conditions into the forestry and mining sectors".