

Creating a Framework for Implementing Universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -- The Model of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020

Context

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will establish a set of universal goals and targets that will be implemented by all countries. The SDGs will not only create an integrated vision for the future, but will also need to address how the agreed framework will be implemented.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity as a useful model

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 is a recent approach, agreed to widely by governments, affirmed in the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, and recognized by the UN General Assembly, that connects biodiversity and ecosystem services with human well-being and development. It includes a set of universal goals and targets, tailored to national circumstances, with provisions for technical and scientific support and resource mobilization. As such it may be a useful model to inform the SDG discussions.

I. THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR BIODIVERSITY 2011-2020.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 was adopted in 2010 at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). There are currently 194 parties to the CBD. The Strategic Plan includes a long-term vision, five goals, twenty targets (Aichi Biodiversity Targets) and a series of tools and mechanism for implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation.

The Strategic Plan provides an example for integrating the three pillars of sustainable development – society, economy and environment. It came into being due to the realization of countries that in order to successfully achieve the three objectives of the CBD, the inter-linkages with development and environmental, social and economic issues had to be addressed. The very vision of the Strategic Plan speaks to this integration:

Vision of Strategic Plan for Biodiversity

"By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people."

The Strategic Plan includes five goals that recognize the connection between human activities and well-being and biodiversity. They include: a focus on mainstreaming biodiversity into other sectors, enhancing the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services, and providing for a participatory process of implementation.

The characteristics and various components of the Strategic Plan also provide some parallels that may be of relevance in the SDGs setting. The Strategic Plan:

1. Sets forth universal commitments for all Parties;
2. Provides a flexible framework so that countries can adapt the global commitments to fit their national situation and priorities;

3. Is primarily implemented at the national level, and contains practical means for implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation, and support mechanisms.

1. Universal

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 establishes a set of agreed global goals. Moreover, it provides the overarching framework on biodiversity, not only for the biodiversity-related conventions, but for the entire United Nations system. It was reaffirmed by leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, and recognized by the UN General Assembly. It has also been recognized as the overarching framework for the other biodiversity-related conventions and for major international organizations.

2. Flexible framework focused on national priorities

The Strategic Plan is focused on national priorities, and the main mechanism for implementation is at the national level.

“National biodiversity strategies and action plans are key instruments for translating the Strategic Plan to national circumstances... and for integrating biodiversity across all sectors of government and society.”

The Strategic Plan recognizes that each country has particular needs and situations. In some cases, targets may have already been met, or may not be relevant to a particular country. Countries can be more or less ambitious relative to the agreed global targets, according to national conditions.

“Parties are invited to set their own targets within this flexible framework, taking into account national needs and priorities, while also bearing in mind national contributions to the achievement of the global targets. Not all countries necessarily need to develop a national target for each and every global target. For some countries, the global threshold set through certain targets may already have been achieved. Others targets may not be relevant in the country context.”

This approach allows countries to define their own priorities and approach to implementation of the Strategic Plan. The national commitments are formalized in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, which are required to be formally adopted as policy instruments. These in turn provide for monitoring and reporting mechanisms and other aspects relevant to operationalizing the plans as relevant for each country.

3. Practical means for implementation, monitoring and accountability

The Strategic Plan includes a range of actions on implementation. It includes provisions on partnerships, technical and scientific support, and support mechanisms for research, monitoring and assessment.

The Parties adopted a Strategy for Resource Mobilization, which includes not only conventional means of support but also identifying and accessing a range of innovative domestic and international financial resources. It includes the development of concrete initiatives, targets and indicators, and processes for developing innovative mechanisms and for achieving the effective implementation of Article 20, paragraphs 2 and 4, of the Convention, in order to provide adequate, predictable and timely new and additional financial resources, in support of the implementation of this Strategic Plan. Parties also agreed to report regularly on resource mobilization, both from international and domestic sources.

The Parties also called on the Secretariat to strengthen a clearing-house mechanism for knowledge-sharing and technology transfer. The Secretariat is also in the process of developing a proposal for a more effective approach to technical and scientific cooperation.

While flexible in nature, the Strategic Plan calls on Parties to monitor and report on their progress through mandatory national reports submitted to the Secretariat. These reports are shared publicly. In order to review overall progress, a separate initiative was agreed to develop a common set of biodiversity indicators to be used to assess the status and trends of biodiversity, drivers of biodiversity loss, benefits to society, and policy response, through the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership.

The Parties also agreed on a number of steps for keeping implementation of the Strategic Plan on track. A “mid-term” review of progress will take place at the twelfth meeting of Parties in October, 2014, and Parties will likely agree on a set of next steps to ensure that implementation stays on course.

Finally, the Parties have stressed the need for partnerships in implementing the Strategic Plan. The Secretariat has formalized relationships with many key partners, including other UN agencies, scientific institutes, and other entities, to take ownership of the Strategic Plan and work towards its implementation. The major biodiversity-related conventions have agreed to cooperate, and aligned their own work programs with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.

II. RELEVANCE TO THE SDGS PROCESS.

The elaboration of SDGs in the UN General Assembly has many parallels to the experience of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. The SDGs are to be universal, yet must take into account different national situations. They are to be long-term, yet need specific milestones and indicators to measure progress. Implementation should be driven by country-based priorities, but will require partnerships and creative means for financing, both from domestic and foreign sources. As the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the SDGs continue to be developed, hopefully the model of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity may be of some utility in designing the ultimate structure and elements that will be adopted by the UN General Assembly.