



**The Biodiversity Planning Process:  
How to prepare and update a National Biodiversity  
Strategy and Action Plan**

**Module B-2**

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## Introduction

### What you will learn in this module

This module will provide an overview of how to organise the process for developing and implementing the first version of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP). It will show how implementation of the NBSAP has to be an adaptive and cyclical process that leads to periodic review and revision. It will suggest that those responsible for the NBSAP will need to assess how to carry out these tasks in light of the specific conditions in their country and the resources available.

### Guiding principles

Biodiversity planning is a long-term, cyclical and adaptive process that involves consultation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and revision. The national biodiversity strategy and action plan is the vehicle for developing and implementing this planning process.

The NBSAP must address the three objectives of the Convention:

- Conservation of biodiversity
- Sustainable use of the components of biodiversity
- Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits deriving from the utilization of genetic resources.

The NBSAP is:

1. A **strategy** – i.e. a strategic instrument for achieving concrete outcomes and not a scientific study, review or publication that sits on a shelf. Its role is to drive public policy and generate the activities and changes that it identifies as needed in order to meet the objectives of the CBD at national level;
2. **National** – it needs to be understood, adopted, and implemented by all national actors who have a stake in or whose activities directly or indirectly have an impact on biodiversity. In other words, the NBSAP presupposes mainstreaming, without which it cannot succeed in achieving its objectives; and
3. A set of **action plans** to implement the different elements of the strategy.

Although the NBSAP process may be led (and may need to be driven) by the ministry or agency responsible for environmental or natural resource management, it is nevertheless highly unlikely that this will be able to meet even the conservation aims of the NBSAP on its own, far less the sustainable use and benefit sharing objectives. Conservation involves much more than protected area management and implementation of

conservation actions; it necessarily requires mainstreaming. To an even greater degree, achieving sustainable use objectives will require mainstreaming<sup>1</sup>.

Establishing the policy framework and specific measures to ensure sustainable use involves re-thinking and changing behaviour in key economic sectors and in social behaviour. To have any chance of succeeding, this needs joint ownership of the NBSAP by those stakeholders involved. Given the breadth of the issues it addresses and the range of potential stakeholders, the NBSAP will only succeed if it is an open, participative and transparent process. This may require changes in existing views, habits and relationships on the part of participants in the process<sup>2</sup>.

Whatever recommendations or guidelines may be consulted (including these modules), the key element of a successful NBSAP will be adaptability and creativity. The particular situation, resources and characteristics of each country will vary and the NBSAP managers will need to objectively assess these, identify objectives and how best to achieve these in light of the country's specific conditions and resources. It will require imagination, possibly new types of activities and, in some cases, breaking with past practice and the possible anxieties this can entail.

### **What does the NBSAP consist of?**

The NBSAP is often thought of as a single document or instrument. Most countries have already either finished preparation of their NBSAP or are on the way to doing so. In many cases the visible 'product' of the NBSAP is a document.

Producing a document may be a useful way of consolidating and disseminating the principles and priorities that constitute the national biodiversity strategy and the details of the action plans to implement the strategy. However the real 'products' of the NBSAP are the principles, priorities, policies, instruments and programmes that it identifies as the way to achieve the three objectives of the Convention in the country. If preferred, these can be made available electronically on a NBSAP website.

#### **Box 1 Electronic dissemination of the NBSAP**

Over forty countries have made their NBSAP available electronically. Although in some cases, this may consist of posting a single NBSAP document on a national website, in other cases the electronic NBSAP consists of different elements, forming the basis of the national clearing-house mechanism that countries are expected to establish. This has the advantage that new aspects can be introduced or existing information updated without the need to redraft and republish the entire NBSAP.

The NBSAP section on the CBD website provides examples of how different countries have responded to the question of whether to prepare a single NBSAP document or create a NBSAP website: see <http://www.biodiv.org/reports/list.aspx?type=nbsap>.

<sup>1</sup> Module 3 addresses mainstreaming in detail

<sup>2</sup> Module 5 covers stakeholder participation

The elements of a NBSAP can include:

- Ways to carry out and update assessments of the status and trends of national biodiversity;
- Agreed procedures for identifying the priority issues for the NBSAP, the subsequent identification of gaps and emerging issues, and the incorporation of these into the periodic revisions of the NBSAP;
- Agreed procedures for establishing and monitoring measurable national goals and targets;
- Legislative measures such as: a legal instrument establishing national biodiversity policy; measures to introduce or strengthen environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment procedures; rules on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing;
- NBSAP management and oversight arrangements – for example, a national multi-stakeholder biodiversity council to oversee implementation of national biodiversity policy, national implementation of the Convention, and harmonisation with implementation of other multilateral environmental agreements;
- Sets of action plans;
- Funding strategies for raising resources domestically and internationally;
- National framework of action for communication, education and public awareness activities on biodiversity;
- Public policy development in those areas relevant to biodiversity and national capacity to achieve the objectives of the Convention, for example:
  - a. National science and technology policy;
  - b. Spatial planning instruments and infrastructural investments;
  - c. National energy policy
  - d. Agricultural development and the management of major biomes (i.e. action to implement the CBD thematic programmes of work)
  - e. Communication, education and public awareness;
  - f. Public administration, at national and sub-national levels;
  - g. Intellectual property systems
  - h. Poverty alleviation and income redistribution policies;
  - i. Trade policy;
  - j. Fiscal and credit policies.

The NBSAP is thus an envelope containing the measures, mechanisms and procedures that are required to meet the country's biodiversity objectives. These may be brought together into a single document if this is felt to be useful. However it is essential to avoid the trap of seeing the publication of the NBSAP as a substitute for action.

Some countries have mistakenly taken the “action plan” part of the NBSAP to be the list of projects they would like to undertake. However, the action plan is intended to identify those issues that the country needs to undertake at the policy level. These can include: new or amended legislation; administrative regulations and procedures; reform or strengthening of institutions; mandates to be given to governmental, scientific or civil society bodies to carry out specific activities. It should also include translating these policy measures into a set of programmes, detailing both the costs and the benefits of each.

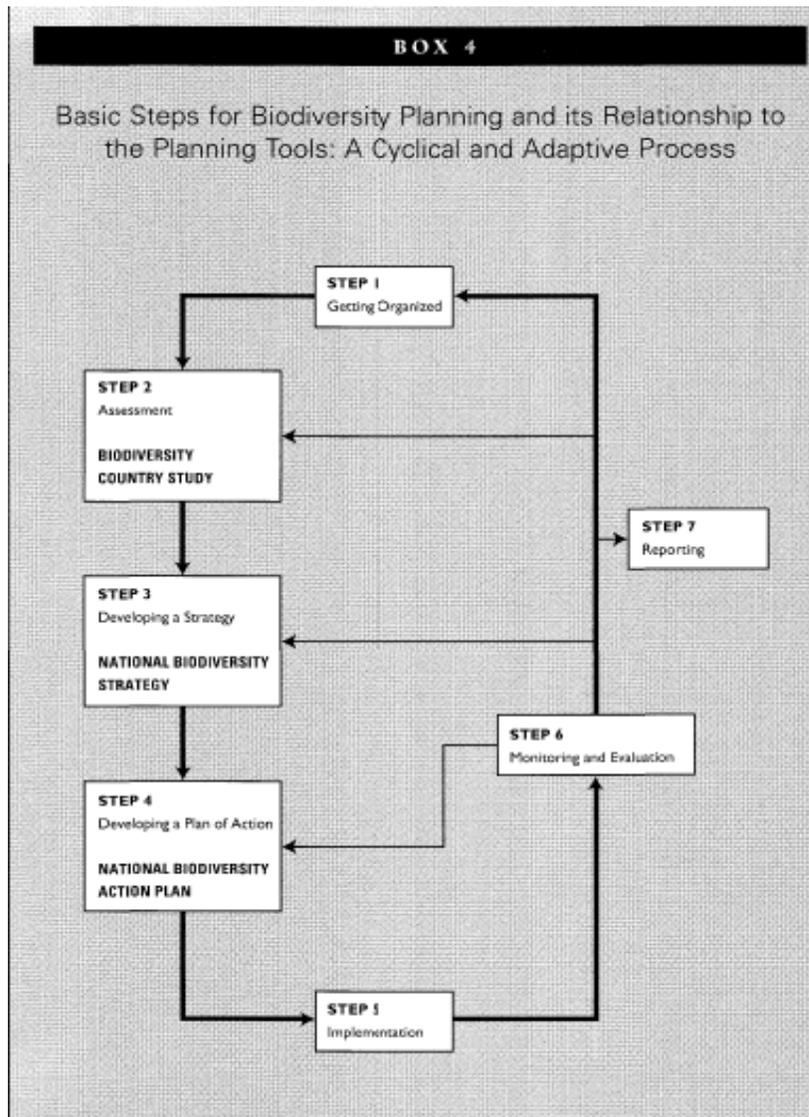
**Box 1**  
**Example: structure of a NBSAP**

Brazil came to the conclusion that its NBSAP would consist of a legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and for access to genetic resources and benefit sharing; plans and programmes for increasing knowledge of biodiversity; actions for conservation and sustainable use; and mechanisms to regulate access to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge and benefit sharing. These elements were not brought together in a single NBSAP document, but are published electronically as a NBSAP website as part of the national biodiversity clearing-house mechanism.

## The seven step process to developing implementing and updating the NBSAP

Many of the countries who have developed NBSAPs over the past ten years have followed the seven-step biodiversity planning process suggested in the national biodiversity planning guidelines prepared by the World Resources Institute (WRI), IUCN and UNEP and recommended to Parties by the Conference of the Parties in 1995.

These guidelines argue that biodiversity planning is a cyclical and adaptive process and illustrates this by showing the seven steps in the form of a flow chart:



Source: WRI 1995 *National Biodiversity Planning: Guidelines Based on Early Experiences around the World*

The benefits of this way of conceiving the NBSAP process are that:

- It clearly distinguishes the different stages of the NBSAP and organizes these into a logical sequence
- By insisting on biodiversity planning as a cyclical and adaptive process, it builds in feedback mechanisms and presupposes revision and updating.

Many, perhaps most, of the users of this module will be from countries that have already been through this process and are approaching the need to revise and update the first iteration of their NBSAP. This chart shows that the process for undertaking the revision is the same as the initial NBSAP development process. However, in the light of the experience of the first phase of implementation this process of revision is likely to be deeper and more comprehensive. The gaps will have been identified, there should now be multi-stakeholder NBSAP community fully engaged, mainstreaming biodiversity planning throughout government and economic sectors should have begun to take hold, the future scientific agenda should be clearer and those stakeholder categories that still have not been brought into the process should now have been identified.

## **1: Getting Organized**

The initial process of developing the NBSAP should be driven by the body responsible for national implementation of the CBD. This is often, though not necessarily, the environment ministry or agency. However no single body will have the information and experience to develop the NBSAP on its own. This has to be a ‘bottom up’ and not a ‘top down’ process. Module 5 goes into detail about how to establish a participatory framework for developing the NBSAP.

Most countries will have been through this initial process. The important thing to remember when planning for the revision of the NBSAP is that those responsible should re-visit this first step in the seven step process. They should take the opportunity of the NBSAP review process to ask themselves once again “who are the stakeholders? Who needs to be brought into the review process who is not already participating in implementation of the NBSAP?”

Remember that asking this question is also a participative process. All participants should be asked to identify ‘missing’ stakeholders who should be invited to participate.

## **2. Assessment**

The assessment stage of developing the NBSAP is designed to ‘take stock’ of what is already known about the status and trends of the nation's biodiversity and biological resources; its framework of relevant laws, policies and organizations; and existing programmes, budgets and human capacity. The initial assessment should not involve conducting new research into the status and trends of national biodiversity, but should concentrate on bringing together existing information.

With this it will be possible to prepare a preliminary statement of goals and objectives, identify gaps, do a preliminary review of ways to close gaps, and make a rough estimate of costs and benefits and unmet needs.

To the extent possible at this stage, the assessment should contribute to demonstrating the value of biological diversity and biological resources. Human dependence on biological diversity and biological resources for its long-term well-being is still not fully appreciated in decision making. When these resources are not properly measured and valued, biodiversity conservation may be viewed inaccurately as a cost to society rather than an investment in its development. If it can be shown that these benefits exceed the costs of conserving the resources, then a powerful incentive for investing in biological diversity will be established.

Elements of this stocktaking phase can include:

- gathering and analyzing data;
- identifying gaps and potential conflicts;
- reviewing the array of possible conservation measures;
- collection of data on the status and distribution of biological resources;
- identifying threats;
- assessing current capacities;
- collecting socioeconomic data useful in evaluating benefits of conserving and sustainably using biodiversity; and
- estimating the current expenditures on biodiversity related activities.

It should address not just the need to inventory and monitor the country's biological resources, but also the need to estimate the economic benefits accruing from the biodiversity-related activities.

The consolidation of this stocktaking exercise then forms the basis for the identification of goals and objectives, gaps and the way to address these that will be considered in the next stage of NBSAP development.

The first iteration of the strategy will probably involve carrying out scientific assessment of the status and trends of aspects of national biodiversity, identified in the gap analysis. When the time comes to revise the NBSAP countries are likely to have a better knowledge of their national biodiversity. They are also likely to have a better understanding of what they don't know about national biodiversity and this more precise identification of gaps will feed into the assessment to be carried out during the first, and each subsequent, NBSAP review.

### **3. Developing a Strategy**

If those responsible for the initial NBSAP have successfully followed steps 1 and 2, they should now have a broad range of participants engaged in the process and a reliable picture of what is already known about the status and trends of national biodiversity, the

threats it faces and the origins of these threats, the national legal and administrative framework, and existing institutional and human capacities.

One part of the picture gained from this stocktaking exercise will therefore be an initial idea of the gaps that exist in scientific knowledge, legal and policy frameworks, and capacity needs. The task for the strategy development stage is to:

- Determine goals and operational objectives;
- analyze and select specific measures that will close the gaps identified in the assessment;
- further consult and modify until consensus is reached on acceptable targets and mechanisms;
- identify stakeholders and how and where they can become engaged;
- draft a statement of the strategy, consisting of the actions and investments called for to meet the goals and objectives;
- consult closely with other conservation and development plans and sectors, including conducting a national dialogue with all interested stakeholders.

This should lead to agreement on what constitute the principles, priorities, policies, instruments and programmes that will make up the first iteration of the NBSAP. Reaching agreement on the first three of these constitutes the strategy development task:

- The statement of **principles** could include elements such as: the importance of biodiversity; the benefits it provides to the security and well-being of the population; the role it currently plays in the national economy and the role it could play in meeting national development objectives; the need for all stakeholders to become engaged; the principle that mainstreaming will be the key to its successful implementation; the importance of education and outreach. It will be up to each country to decide what the appropriate set of principles underling the NBSAP should be, in light of its particular circumstances, biodiversity and issues identified.
- The **priorities** to be identified will be that set of most pressing issues that can feasibly be addressed in the first NBSAP period. These are difficult decisions to take, especially if a number of critical issues have been identified in the assessment. It is however essential to be realistic and retain focus, even if this means putting off some serious issues to a second phase. It is better to identify the real key issues and concentrate on making progress on these, than to spread efforts and resources too thinly with the risk of being ineffective on all fronts.
- The **policies** to be identified will be those that can be expected to successfully address the priorities in the most participative and cost-effective way. It is important at this stage to assess how the NBSAP and related national policies – such as a national sustainable development policy, national policy for meeting the Millennium Development Goals, or policies contained in national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) – can be made mutually supportive.

**An example of how the assessment and strategy development stages of a NBSAP were carried out.**

This diagram from Brazil's NBSAP website shows the sequence of steps followed:

**Assessment:**

- biodiversity reviews by biome;
- reviews of the legal framework, institutional capacity, CBD provisions;
- sectoral and state level consultations.

**Strategy development:**

- synthesis of stocktaking;
- first draft of the strategy;
- regional meetings;
- meetings of the National Biodiversity Commission;
- second draft;
- national workshop;
- final version of the strategy, subsequently approved by Parliament and enacted into law.



The components of the strategy (i.e. the **priorities**) were identified as being:

- knowledge of biodiversity
- conservation of biodiversity
- sustainable use of the components of biodiversity
- monitoring, assessment, prevention and mitigation of impacts on biodiversity
- access to genetic resources and to associated traditional knowledge and benefit sharing
- education, public awareness, information and dissemination on biodiversity
- legal and institutional strengthening for biodiversity management

Source: [www.mma.gov.br/index.php?ido=conteudo.monta&idEstrutura=37&idConteudo=2044](http://www.mma.gov.br/index.php?ido=conteudo.monta&idEstrutura=37&idConteudo=2044)

The first implementation phase of the NBSAP will reveal how effective the initial identification of principles, priorities and policies was. During this period a number of things will have changed:

- more reliable information on and a better understanding of national biodiversity will have been gained;
- knowledge of which approaches and policies are most effective will have been acquired;
- success in addressing the first set of priorities will enable new priorities to be identified;
- the policy context may have changed as progress is made in the implementation of the NBSAP and other related national policies;
- more capacity and resources may be available.

These are examples of issues that will have been identified as a result of the monitoring and evaluation activities that will form part of the implementation process. The periodic review of the NBSAP will take these findings into account and repeat the participative process of reviewing the NBSAP principles, priorities and policies in order to revalidate these because the evaluation of implementation has shown they are still appropriate and effective, or to incorporate the changes that have been identified.

#### **4. Developing a Plan of Action**

The principles, priorities and policies need to be turned into specific sets of activities to be carried out within the first implementation period. This involves identifying the **instruments** for implementing the NBSAP by deciding what is required in terms of, amongst other things:

- New or amended legislation;
- Administrative regulations and procedures;
- Establishment, reform or strengthening of institutions;
- Mandates to be given to governmental, scientific or civil society bodies for execution of specific activities.

Translating this into a set of **programmes** will involve determining:

- Who does what – which organizations (public or private) will be charged with implementing which activities arising out of the strategy;
- Where - in what biomes, regions, or other national geographical category will the priority NBSAP activities take place;
- When – what are the time phases for activities in the first phase, how long is each activity expected to take, how much is each expected to have achieved by the time of the next revision of the NBSAP and what are the critical milestones that need to be identified in order to ensure that the lessons of implementation are available for the next revision process;

- How – by what means and with what resources (people, institutions, facilities, and funds) will these activities be carried out.

The consolidation of instruments and programmes will result in an agreed, costed and time-bound plan of action for achieving the identified NBSAP goals. At each revision of the NBSAP the previous plan of action will be evaluated and a revised plan of action agreed for the forthcoming phase of implementation.

## **5. Implementation**

NBSAP implementation involves carrying out the agreed plan of action in the way envisaged within the allocated time frame. Implementation will occur on several fronts simultaneously, for example:

- Preparing, negotiating and adopting legislative and administrative measures;
- Carrying out the scientific and research activities in the plan of action;
- Undertaking specific projects in particular biomes and/or with particular economic sectors or stakeholder categories;
- Carrying out education and public awareness activities.

During implementation the number of stakeholders, including categories not so far identified or engaged, is likely to grow. This must be encouraged and every effort made to bring them into the NBSAP process, elicit their views and understand their relationship with biodiversity, such that they become fully engaged and incorporated into the next NBSAP revision process.

The implementation of a comprehensive and effective plan of action will inevitably create opportunities for integrate other sectors into the biodiversity planning process – i.e. for mainstreaming. A crucial task of the NBSAP managers and implementers is to proactively pursue such opportunities and bring into the process those governmental, private sector and civil society bodies that operate in economic or policy sectors that have an impact on biodiversity.

One key to successful implementation will be to establish an effective NBSAP management unit that will have at all times a reliable and comprehensive overview of how implementation is proceeding, what issues are arising, what adjustments can be made in the course of implementation and what needs to be fed into the next review. However the need for the NBSAP managers to maintain such an overview does not mean that they should centralize or seek to control implementation activities. The NBSAP is a partnership in which partners should be granted the autonomy to carry out activities in the way they feel best reflects their preferences and expertise. Implementation is an iterative and cyclical process in which successive plans of actions will be jointly agreed on the basis of the experience of implementation and the conclusions of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms built into the process.

## **6. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The NBSAP managers will need to be able to measure the effectiveness of activities carried out under the plan of action and to systematize and validate the assessment of outcomes so that they will have a reliable basis on which to conduct the process for reviewing and updating the NBSAP. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and procedures need to be built into the plan of action from the start of the implementation phase.

Project planning often involves the preparation of a logical framework consisting of objectives, indicators, means of verification and assumptions and risks. Preparing such frameworks for each set of activities will enable those involved to assess outcomes and identify lessons to be learned.

For other elements of the plan of action – for example, developing a legal and administrative framework, carrying out scientific research or building capacity – such logical frameworks may not always be feasible or appropriate. It will therefore be important to identify appropriate baseline data and indicators of progress in order to be able to evaluate the outcomes of activities carried out and their effectiveness in meeting their objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation is therefore key to making NBSAP implementation as effective as possible, by identifying lessons and providing a reliable basis for updating the NBSAP. It is a central part of the process and should not be seen as secondary or an unnecessary imposition.

## **7. Reporting**

Parties to the CBD are required to present to the COP periodic reports on measures they have taken to implement the Convention and the effectiveness of these measures<sup>3</sup>. The reporting format is decided by the COP and is specifically designed to provoke countries into reviewing the action they have taken to implement specific recommendations of the COP contained in its decisions, the CBD programmes of work and the NBSAP.

Many countries have found that the experience of preparing their second and third national reports identified gaps in the NBSAP and issues which required special attention. In addition to generating the national report to the COP required under the provisions of the Convention, this process also provided the basis for a proposed revision of the NBSAP.

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<sup>3</sup> Article 26 of the CBD. Module [8] addresses the process of national reporting.

**Box 2**

**An example of how the process of preparing the National Report led to the revision of the NBSAP**

The process of preparing Brazil's Third National Report to the CBD in early 2005 identified existing gaps in implementation of the National Biodiversity Policy and led to preparation of a document containing a draft revision of the National Biodiversity Policy. This was distributed to stakeholders and opened for public consultation via the national clearing-house mechanism. Stakeholders were requested to identify omissions, additional gaps, priority actions to cover the gaps and indicators for monitoring. 780 proposals were received and were consolidated into a single document that formed the basis for a national workshop in August 2005 involving 130 participants from NGOs, the private sector, research institutions, state and federal governments and members of the National Biodiversity Commission. This workshop identified 494 proposed activities for the revised biodiversity strategy and action plan. At the end of a six-month period of consolidation and review, in February 2006 the "Guidelines and Priorities of the Plan of Implementation of the National Biodiversity Policy", a revised and updated strategy comprising 142 activities, was approved.

In addition to the national report to the CBD, countries may be obliged to prepare other reports on biodiversity policy or implementation of the CBD – for example, to Parliament or to national audit offices. The preparation of any report will constitute an opportunity to identify gaps, opportunities and weaknesses and provide the basis for revising the NBSAP.

The process of preparing the national report to the CBD (and any other report on biodiversity planning and its effectiveness) should be a fully participative national process, involving all the stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the NBSAP<sup>4</sup>.

The Conference of the Parties has decided that national reports should be submitted at four-yearly intervals. Given this link between preparation of the national report and identification of the need to revise the NBSAP, it will be logical and cost-effective for countries to operate a similar four-year cycle for updating the NBSAP.

Placing the National Reports in the official CBD website is done for the benefit of many actors. For example NBSAP country managers are encouraged to regularly examine reports from other countries especially those with similar biodiversity challenges as them. This encourages South-South information exchange and learning. Good practices and ideas from other countries may greatly assist others who may be doing their planning slightly later.

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<sup>4</sup> See Module [8]

## Updating the NBSAP

This module has explained why the development and implementation of the NBSAP has to be an iterative and cyclical process. In the early stages the status and trends of national biodiversity will not be fully known, not all threats will have been identified and assessed, understanding of the goods and services provided by biodiversity and the economic and societal values of these will not be widespread, and many sectors will not fully comprehend the connections between their activities and policies and the status of biodiversity.

As implementation proceeds, more reliable scientific data will be obtained, the outcomes of different policy options and types of activities will become apparent, the range of stakeholders will expand, and progress towards mainstreaming will be made. These developments will provide opportunities for expanding and perfecting policies and actions, rethinking policies and engaging more stakeholders, and identifying gaps and needs. Progress will be made in some issues, which will allow other priority issues to be addressed. The broader socioeconomic and political contexts may change.

The NBSAP will be in a state of constant flux, changing in response both to its own internal dynamics and to the external context. Faced with this, it must be periodically reviewed and updated in order to remain an effective and strategic instrument for achieving concrete outcomes, by driving public policy and generating the activities and changes that will achieve the objectives of the CBD at national level.

As noted before, many readers will be from countries that have by now developed a first NBSAP and learned from the experience of the first phase of implementation. The hurdle they now face is to update the NBSAP to take into account this experience. The module has tried to illustrate the argument that the updating process will follow the same sequence of steps as the initial development of the NBSAP, although with a greater capacity to identify the key issues and revised priorities and with the fuller participation of an expanded range of stakeholders.

### Box 4 Useful guidelines and resources

WRI *National Biodiversity Planning: Guidelines Based on Early Experiences around the World* (1995): <http://pubs.wri.org/nationalbiodiversityplanning-pub-2667.html>

UNEP *Guidelines for Country Studies on Biological Diversity* (1993):  
<http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meetings/sbstta/sbstta-01/information/sbstta-01-inf-03-en.pdf>

The website of the Biodiversity Planning Support Programme contains much useful material, including biodiversity planning guidelines and models: <http://www.undp.org/bpsp>

The CBD website provides access to NBSAPs: <http://www.cbd.int/reports/list.aspx?type=nbsap>

## **List of Acronyms**

BPSP	Biodiversity Planning and Support Programme
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties (to the CBD)
IUCN	World Conservation Union
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme