

**First National Report on the Implementation of
Article 6
of the Convention on Biological Diversity**

SRI LANKA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In terms of species, genes and ecosystems, Sri Lanka has a very high biodiversity and is one of the 18 hot spots in the world. The wet zone rainforests have nearly all of the country's woody endemic plants and about 75 per cent of the endemic animals. Sri Lanka derives nearly 20 per cent of its gross domestic product from agriculture and fisheries. Since over 75 per cent of the population is rural and agrarian, biodiversity assumes significant economic and consumptive importance in Sri Lanka. The genetic diversity of agricultural crops is quite remarkable, with 3,000 accessions of rice being recorded. The biodiversity of coastal and marine ecosystems provide over 65 per cent of the animal protein requirement of the country.

Sri Lanka ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity in March 1994. The commitment of the government of Sri Lanka to the conservation of biodiversity is demonstrated by a number of conservation-related activities undertaken by the government, including the imposition of a complete moratorium on timber felling in all wet zone forests, placing 13 forests in the wet zone under total protection and undertaking a national conservation review.

Sri Lankan culture is ingrained with tradition on protection and conservation of animals and plants. The earliest recorded sanctuary was established around 3rd century B.C. Protection of nature is enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka and national policies have a clear focus on nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

The preparation of the National Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan (BCAP) demonstrates the government's commitment towards conservation of biodiversity. The BCAP preparatory process was intensely participatory, involving consultations and meetings with a large body of stakeholders of biodiversity, including state agencies, over 100 NGOs and others. The draft BCAP was then reviewed at several workshops with heads of state departments, particularly those with a mandate for implementation of the BCAP, NGOs, CBOs, researchers and university personnel.

Sri Lanka is an island with a land area of 6,570,134 ha and a coastline of 1,600 km. The island consists of a broad coastal plain and a central mountainous area rising to elevations of 2,500 m. This altitudinal change has caused thermal zones and the variation in rainfall and altitude has resulted in a wide variety of terrestrial ecosystems. Additionally, there is yet another multitude of ecosystems in the coastal and marine areas.

The population of Sri Lanka is 18.9 million, with a density of 292 persons per km². The population growth rate is 1.1 per cent/year; adult literacy rate is 89 per cent and average life expectancy at birth is 72 years (males) and 76 years (females). The country enjoys a relatively high Human Development Index.

Sri Lanka has the highest biodiversity per unit area of land among Asian countries in terms of flowering plants and all vertebrate groups except birds. The vegetation of Sri Lanka supports over 3,350 species of flowering plants and 314 species of ferns and fern allies. There is also considerable invertebrate faunal diversity. The vertebrate fauna include 51 species of teleost fishes, 39 species of amphibians, over 125 species of reptilia, over 390 species of birds, 96 species of mammals including 38 species of marine mammals. The provisional list of 'threatened' faunal species of Sri Lanka includes over 550 species, of which over 50 per cent are endemic.

The crop genetic diversity in the country is also high, especially for *Oryza sativa*. Many of the indigenous varieties of rice are tolerant to pests, adverse climate and soil conditions. In addition to the diversity seen in coarse grains, legumes, vegetables, roots and tubers and spice crops, there are over 170 species of ornamental plants. Among domesticated animals of economic value are some indigenous species of buffalo, cattle, fowl and fish.

The major threat to biodiversity in Sri Lanka is the ever-increasing demand for land for human habitation and related developmental activities. Poor land use planning, indiscriminate exploitation of biological resources, weak enforcement of legislation and the absence of an integrated conservation management approach are other threats to biodiversity.

The implementation of the BCAP will be the responsibility of the Ministry in charge of the subject of environment (which is the focal point for the Convention on Biological Diversity). It will have a special Secretariat to deal with matters relating to the implementation of the BCAP. This Secretariat will be assisted by a National Steering Committee and Task Forces which will provide technical back-stopping and policy advice to the Ministry.

The BCAP has given due consideration to the principles that should govern biodiversity conservation management. It has enunciated the overall national goal of BCAP as the conservation of biological diversity of Sri Lanka while fostering its sustainable use for the benefit of the present and future generations. The BCAP's broad objectives include building capacity for gaining a better understanding of indigenous biodiversity, identification of adverse impacts on biodiversity, developing programmes to enhance the public awareness on biodiversity and encourage public participation in biodiversity conservation programmes.

The BCAP reviews the sectoral and cross-sectoral areas in relation to biodiversity. In regard to forest habitats, it highlights the current initiatives towards conservation of biodiversity, and, in particular, the strategies outlined in the *Forestry Sector Master Plan*. Of particular importance are the biosphere reserves established under the International Biosphere Programme, declaring the Sinharaja forest as a World heritage, and the preparation of management plans for wet zone forests. In the area of coastal and marine habitats, the BCAP highlights findings of the *Report on Resource Management Strategy for Sri Lanka's Coastal Region*, and the problems associated with coral mining. In respect of the agricultural sector, the BCAP notes the initiatives in the *Agricultural Sector Development Plan* for according highest priority to conservation and enrichment of natural resources.

In its review of cross-sectoral areas, the BCAP examines Research and Development, and Education and Training. In regard to the former, lack of clear evidence on a focus on research and development by various research institutions on issues relevant to CBD has been

emphasized. In regard to Education and Training, it reviews the current initiatives and programmes of both the state and the NGO sectors.

The BCAP also examines the respective roles of the government, NGOs, communities and the private sector in the implementation of the BCAP.

Since ratifying the Convention in 1994, the steps taken by the government to fulfill its obligations to CBD are discussed in the national report. Notable amongst the accomplishments are the establishment of the National Experts Group on Biodiversity to advise the Ministry on matters relating to the implementation of the BCAP and the technical reviews it has initiated.

The BCAP identifies sector-wise areas for action, together with the institutions for undertaking such activities. The recommendations include sets of activities for the forest sector, wetlands, coastal and marine systems, agricultural systems, bioregions, *ex situ* conservation, research, education and awareness, information management, legal measures, institutional support and the valuation of biodiversity. The BCAP sets out priority activities to be undertaken and completed during the two-year inception phase for the implementation of the BCAP and also during the five-year and ten-year periods after the inception period. It denotes sufficiently clear sign posts for scheduling activities.

In order to implement the BCAP, the institutional and organizational requirements are also set out in broad terms. It highlights the need for capacity-building in the relevant agencies, international co-operation in biodiversity-related research, improving the research capabilities of universities and research agencies, and the knowledge of law enforcement and preventive officers to control unauthorized transactions in biodiversity.

The BCAP emphasizes the need for providing a special budget line for the Ministry to enable it to undertake biodiversity-related activities, as well as the need for adequate safeguards to ensure equitable sharing of benefits in internationally collaborated research in biodiversity.

The national report sets out the levels of monitoring of evaluation it envisages, and provides details of the institutional network that has been already established. It also notes the important role expected from the provincial administration relating to monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity-related activities, particularly in the bioregions.

The national report also provides insights into the special programmes and studies that have been undertaken by the Ministry since ratification of the CBD in order to share experiences with others. The studies include review of policy and legislation relating to access to genetic resources, intellectual property rights and research collaboration; issues relating to biosafety and the broad parameters of formulating national guidelines on biosafety; export of endemic fresh water fish; status of *ex situ* conservation in Sri Lanka; movement of genetic material to and from Sri Lanka. A brief review of the biodiversity skills enhancement of stakeholders is also included.