

The importance of the international dimension of the Convention on Biological Diversity for national planning

M. VERNOOIJ

Abstract

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is one of the most mature and modern international legal instruments if one looks at national policy planning in the field of sustainable development. The legal instrument itself provides both the rationale for and the framework of biodiversity policy. There is however no blueprint for the process of biodiversity planning. Looking at the experiences gained so far by many countries, it can be concluded that it is essential to find the appropriate balance between a participatory planning process and the need for clear co-ordination by a national focal point. The challenge is to mobilise commitment and actions of all relevant stakeholders, working together through a partnership approach.

Samenvatting

Het Verdrag inzake biologische diversiteit is één van de meest geavanceerde internationale verdragen op het gebied van duurzame ontwikkeling. Het omvat alle relevante aspecten die nodig zijn voor een modern beleidsplan. Er is echter geen blauwdruk voorhande hoe het proces van planning vorm te geven. Op basis van een analyse van de politieke betekenis van het Verdrag en kijkend naar de eerste algemene lessen die naar boven komen op basis van de rapportage over de planning in ruim honderd landen, kan worden geconstateerd dat: 1) de juiste balans moet worden gevonden tussen een interactief en open planingsproces en de noodzaak van een centrale visie en adequate coördinatie, 2) de uitdaging gericht moet zijn op het mobiliseren van een draagvlak om te komen tot praktische maatregelen gericht op de doelstellingen voor biodiversiteit en 3) het noodzakelijk is om hieraan inhoud en vorm te geven op basis van een partnerschap-benadering.

The CBD as a policy framework

The Convention on Biological Diversity contains the appropriate structure and all relevant elements for the national policy process (Table 1).

The starting point for the development or readjustment of national policies, strategies and programmes is article 6 of the CBD: "Each Contracting Party shall, in accordance with its particular conditions and capabilities: (a) Develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, *inter alia*, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the Contracting Party concerned; and (b) Integrate, as far as possible

and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies".

The implementation of this article has been considered at several meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD. At COP-2 in Indonesia in 1995 it was agreed upon that the first national reports under the CBD should be focusing on the implementation of article 6. This was reiterated at COP-3 in Argentina in 1996. COP-3 also added a crucial interpretation to the article, namely that the national strategies should not only focus on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, but also explicitly on the third objective, reflecting the need for equity. The relevant part of Decision III/9 reads as follows: "The Conference of the Parties urges Parties to include in their national plans or strategies and legislation measures: (a) The conservation of biological diversity both *in-situ* and *ex-situ*; (b) The integration of biological diversity objectives in relevant sectoral policies in order to achieve conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity; and (c) The equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources."

By now, over a hundred national reports have been submitted. These national reports together contain an enormous amount of valuable information on all aspects of the biodiversity challenge and on the way the national policy process has been developed. It can be included that almost all Parties have developed or are developing a national biodiversity strategy. The European Community -as regional organisation also Party to the CBD- has developed a Community Biodiversity Strategy, which is now being worked out in sectoral action plans, among others for agriculture and international co-operation.

The political message from the CBD

In addition to the valuable guidance the text of the CBD gives directly to the national policy process, there are also lessons to be learned for the development of the national biodiversity process by stepping back a bit and

Table 1 – Relevant elements for the national policy process, contained in the text of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Subject	Where in the Convention on Biological Diversity
Rational and underlying principles	Preamble addresses biological, social and economic aspects, contains the precautionary principle, highlights functionalities of biodiversity, addresses geographical and intergenerational equity, refers to the gender issue and to the role of science and technology.
Definitions	Art. 2 describes the terms. Though perhaps some terms are slightly ill-defined, the article is a major break through at the global level, with a strong harmonising effect, while leaving enough flexibility to elaborate these definitions for specific purposes.
Objectives	Art. 1 harmonises the aims of conservation, sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits resulting from the use of biodiversity.
Policy strategy	Art. 6 calls for a process of developing or readjusting national policy plans, strategies and programmes, with a specific reference to integration of biodiversity in sectoral or cross-sectoral policies; Art. 10 sets out the provisions for sustainable use.
Instruments	Art. 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 contain a complete set of all relevant instruments needed in the field of biodiversity.
Research, information & technology	Art. 12, 16-19 and 25 highlight the special role and responsibilities of science, information management and technology.
Financing	Art. 8(m), 9(e), 20 and 21 specify the need for proper resourcing.
Identification & monitoring	Art. 7 calls upon clear schemes and activities to assess the results of the policy strategies, instruments and finances on biodiversity.
Public involvement	Art. 8(j) and 13 address the need for public awareness and participation.

assessing the Convention in more political terms. Of course, there is no overall conclusion of such an assessment, since it will depend strongly on one's own political and moral values. However, some conclusions seem to be pertinent.

Firstly, the objective and scope of the Convention are broad, in fact covering all expressions of life on earth (ecosystems, species, genes). The CBD takes into account the intrinsic value of biodiversity and refers to all its functional aspects as well (production, life-support, socio-ecological services). In addition, there is a clear dimension of international co-operation (north-south, east-west and regional). This broad scope of the Convention implies that almost all members of society have an interest in the objectives for biodiversity. There is something in the CBD for everyone.

Secondly, the need for interrelationship between objectives, policies and strategies for implementing the objectives is a red line throughout the whole Convention. In addition, there is the fact that the CBD was signed at the UNCED Conference (Rio de Janeiro, 1992). UNCED triggered a coherent process leading towards sustainable development, as reflected in Agenda 21, and being supervised by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Simply providing a space to every relevant stakeholder in the national planning process will not be sufficient for

achieving the CBD objectives. It is also not suitable for reaching the overarching aim of sustainable development. Stakeholders should be given the opportunity to reflect upon their role and responsibilities in the whole biodiversity process. The focus should be on the need for them to get into dialogue and co-operation with other stakeholders. One could compare this with the difference between the habitat and the niche of a certain species in an ecosystem: the habitat expresses the static conditions, whereas the niche defines the position of the species in the dynamic ecosystem as a whole. For a proper biodiversity planning process, stakeholders will have to find their niche.

The development of the international biodiversity agenda

The ratification of the CBD and subsequent COPs (number 5 in May 2000 in Kenya) has given an enormous push to the international dialogue on biodiversity. By now, almost all relevant issues have been discussed in the framework of the CBD and work programmes have become operational. There is an ever increasing co-operation with other biodiversity related agreements and institutions as well, for example on inland waters with the Ramsar Convention, on agrobiodiversity with FAO and

National policies

- development and implementation of national strategies
- national legislation
- capacity building
- national reporting

Ecosystem themes**Aquatic**

- marine and coastal biodiversity
- inland waters

Terrestrial

- forests
- agrobiodiversity
- drylands
- mountains

Cross-sectoral themes

- operationalizing the ecosystem approach
- conservation and sustainable use of species, including the role of taxonomy and guidelines for alien species
- access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing
- technology transfer, biotechnology and biosafety
- indigenous knowledge and the role of local communities
- landscape protection

Instruments

- indicators, assessment and monitoring
- economic incentives, including financing
- environmental impact assessment
- liability
- education and public awareness

International co-operation

- information exchange and the Clearing-House Mechanism
- co-operation between international agreements and organisations
- mainstreaming biodiversity in these organisations
- development co-operation and co-operation with countries with economies in transition
- financial resources and mechanisms, including the Global Environment Facility

on taxonomy with the international scientific taxonomic community.

The broad and dynamic international biodiversity agenda of the CBD and related international processes (Table 2) can be very useful for structuring the national policy process as well. In doing so, the interlinkages between national and international issues will become much easier and more effective on both sides.

How to make use of all this in national planning?

In contrast to the guidance from the Convention on the structure and layout of national biodiversity policy as such, there is hardly any general wisdom at hand on the most suitable national process for implementing the CBD. Tailor-made solutions are needed. The range of diversity among countries and regions is enormous, because of variation in the nature and amount of biodiversity, geographical differences, different levels of policies and programmes relevant to biodiversity that are already in place, the available capacity, etc.

On the basis of the conclusions above and taking into account the preliminary lessons learnt on biodiversity planning as emerging from the first round of reporting under the CBD, one could conclude the following: (1) In developing and implementing policy an appropriate balance has to be found between:

- a *participatory process*, allowing all relevant stakeholders serious influence to the final outcome, thereby also coming to a clear understanding of each others role, contribution and responsibilities;
- a *co-ordinated mechanism* to keep the whole framework and co-operation arrangements together, by providing the underlying principles, facilitating the exchange of information, and co-ordination of the process of formulation, adoption and implementation of the biodiversity policy.

(2) The biodiversity issue has to be handled in both a sectoral and a cross-sectoral manner. It should involve sectors like nature conservation, the primary production functions -agriculture, forestry and fisheries-, other economic sectors having a strong impact on biodiversity, social sectors, science, research and education, international co-operation including development co-operation, etc.

Only passing on the text of the Convention on Biological Diversity to others will lead to confusion and lack of action. The challenge is to explain what the biodiversity vision is all about, to suggest possible options for everyone's role in achieving the biodiversity aims, to appeal to stakeholders own responsibilities in taking action and to encourage all to work close together in a spirit of partnership. This process is triggered in most countries through a national implementation measure in the form of a national focal point and core group of governmental and non-governmental key players, worked out in different kinds of institutional arrangements, according to the national situation. Any

such a central mechanism to the CBD that it will have to:

- co-ordinate the information flows;
- provide visionary guidance on what the underlying biodiversity values and objectives are;
- to trigger others to take up their responsibilities and start actions. As such it is also clear that the CBD by its own nature cannot be properly implemented in a fully centralised, top-down approach.

The CBD planning and implementation process is all about triggering others to go on and increase their commitment to preserving and using biodiversity in a sustainable manner. There is more commitment in society for doing so than ever before. The challenge is to mobilise this commitment.

Marcel VERNOOIJ
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature
Management and Fisheries
P.O. Box 20401
2500 EK THE HAGUE
THE NETHERLANDS