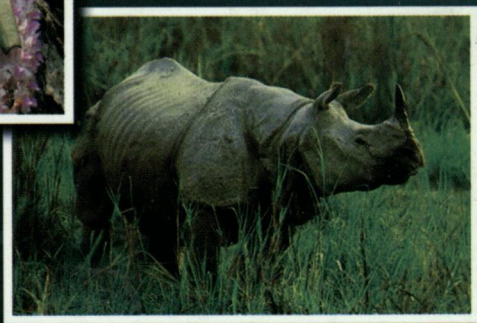


BIODIVERSITY OF ASSAM



Status Strategy & Action Plan for Conservation

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BIODIVERSITY OF ASSAM

**Status Strategy and Action Plan
for Conservation**



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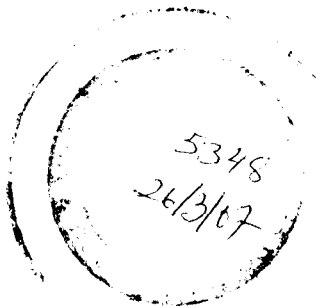
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Biodiversity has currently emerged as an issue of global concern. The world bodies concerning environment have now come forward in an organised way to address the issues relating to biodiversity as there has been increasing threat and pressure on the biosphere. The global evolutionary processes have produced an amazing range of flora and fauna including microorganisms, which are intrinsically related with myriad survival and livelihood needs of human society. The alarming rise of human population particularly during the last 200 years on the one hand and the rapid advancement of science and technology on the other, have presently placed the man-environment relationship in such a state that many of the problems causing concern have already gone beyond human control. Recognizing this fact the advanced nations and subsequently the less advanced nations too, have expressed serious concern on the matter and started adopting planned measures towards mitigating the problems. The resolutions adopted in the earth summit of 1992 and subsequent international commissions bear testimony of such concern and global co-operation.

In India also, there has been a growing concern among the people on the environmental problems and issues including biodiversity during the recent years. The rapid loss of biological resources experienced in different parts of the country resulting from overuse and misuse in some cases, has prompted the people and the government machineries to do something positive for their conservation and sustainability. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) is, in fact, an integrated massive effort in this direction.

The term biodiversity is often defined as the total variety and variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes they inhabit. It also includes the diversity of forms right from the molecular level through individual organisms, populations, communities, ecosystems, landscapes and biosphere.

It encompasses viruses, bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms as well as plants and animals, which exist on the earth. Human beings are an integral part of it. Thus, biodiversity is the sum total of the species of animals, plants and microorganisms occurring in a given habitat.

In India, although there have been large number of studies on biodiversity and related issues, these are not organised enough to help formulation of a national plan to arrive at a common national goal. Achieving a common national goal of sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity is really a difficult task. It is more so in a vast country like India where the dimension of both biological and cultural diversity is extremely wide. A national plan for the development of such a very diverse and sensitive field has to do justice to the physical and cultural realities prevalent in every nook and corner of the country. The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

Global Environment Facility (GEF) have, therefore, come together to create a scientifically organized framework of the status, prospects and problems of biodiversity in the country so as to arrive at a common national policy applicable to all parts of the country giving due recognition to the regional realities. The vastness of the country both in terms of natural and cultural diversity has, however, directed to classify it into states and sub-states coinciding the political boundaries so that a real picture of biodiversity emerges in due course. In Assam, depending upon the physical and cultural variations two areas have been identified for the purpose. The districts of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys and NC hills district (22 districts in total) have been considered as the state unit and the Karbi Anglong district as the sub-state unit (Fig-1). It would, however, have been more appropriate if both the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills could be put together as a sub-state unit. It is not that the sub-state unit (Karbi Anglong) is completely distinct from other parts of Assam, rather there are enough spatial interlinkages as all the areas in the state belong to either the Brahmaputra or the Barak basin.

On the background stated above and the scope, objectives and methodology mentioned below, this study attempts to provide a detailed picture of the status of almost all forms of biodiversity, threats and pressures on it, initiatives taken so far for sustainable use and conservation and finally a scheme of strategy and action plan for sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity. Further, it tries to create an environment involving all the people and the administrative machinery, which will encourage all concerned to contribute positively to the mission of biodiversity conservation in the state.

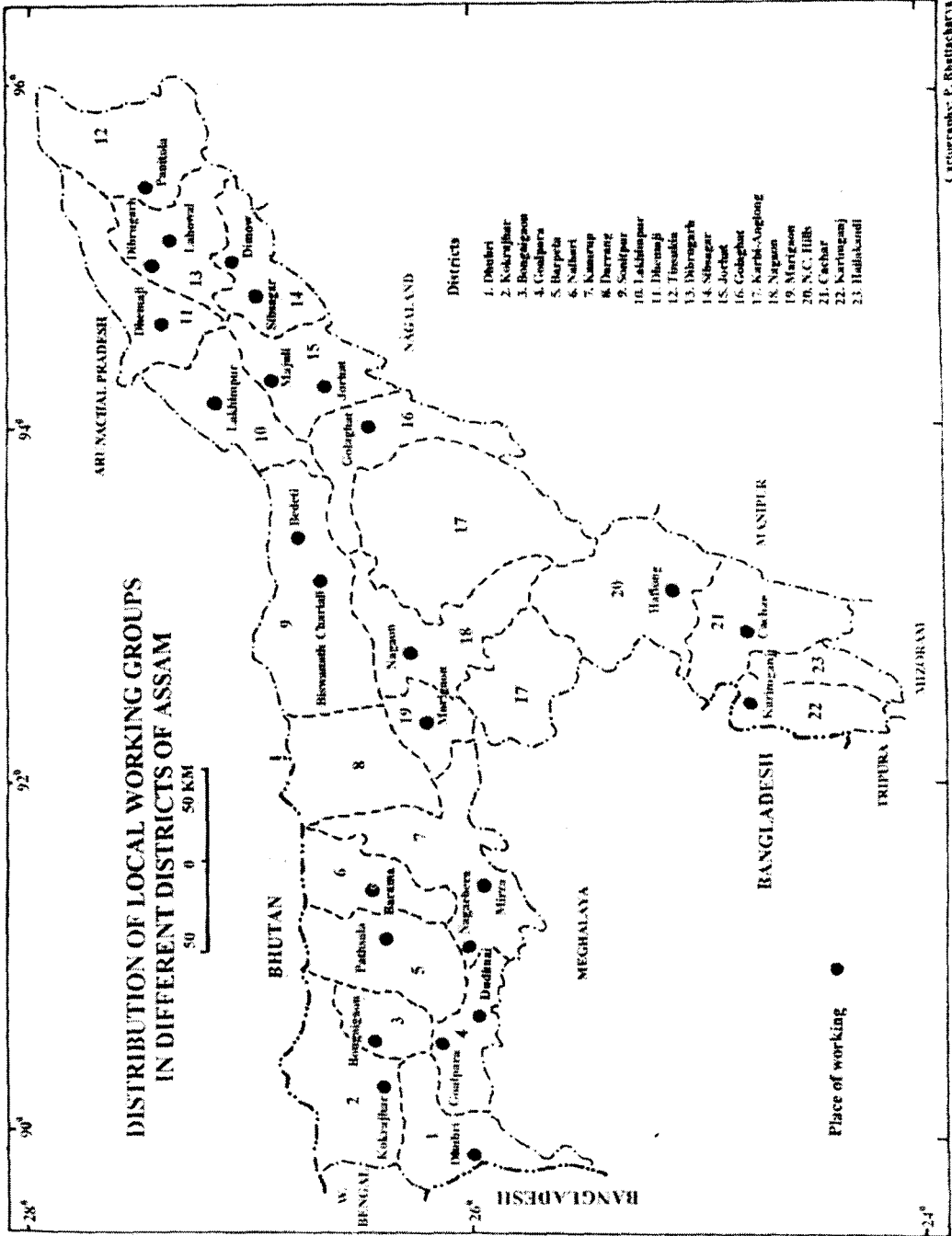
1.2 Scope

Biodiversity in its holistic sense encompasses all levels of biological diversity, ecological and evolutionary processes including natural ecosystems, wild species and varieties, agricultural ecosystems, domesticated species and varieties. It has several other facets when concerned with sustainable use and conservation of biological resources. Even, its ethical, cultural, economic and scientific dimensions are also no less significant particularly while preparing plans for biodiversity conservation. The present work considers biodiversity in its holistic sense and tries to incorporate almost all the themes, issues and problems concerning biodiversity of the state and to identify ways and means for its conservation and sustainable use. However, some of the important aspects like evolution and historical change of different kinds of uses of biological resources and changing human perception of biodiversity could not be dealt with adequately mainly because of time constraint. The scope of the work, however, remains open to accommodate future works concerning the biodiversity of Assam as has been indicated in the strategy and action plan formulated in Chapter 7.

1.3 Objectives

The main objectives of the work are –

- i. to determine the present status of biodiversity in the state with the participation of the people, government, experts and NGOs;
- ii. to identify the threats and pressures on biodiversity in different spatial and social contexts of the state and their proximate and root causes;



Cartography: P. Bhattacharya

Fig. 1

- iii. to evolve workable strategies for sustainable use and conservation of biological resources and formulate actions accordingly involving people, government machinery and NGOs;
- iv. to highlight the role of the people, NGOs and the government on biodiversity use and conservation and the initiatives taken by them in this regard;
- v. to analyse the gaps in information, institutional and legal structure relating to biodiversity and to suggest measures to bridge the identified gaps;
- vi. to promote peoples' awareness and active participation in understanding various aspects of biodiversity ensuring its sustainable use and conservation; and
- vii. to create a conducive environment in which the people belonging to different economic classes and communities can share their ideas, views and actions in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, especially to safeguard its already threatened components.

1.4 Methodology

As the biodiversity strategy and action plan encompasses all the geographical units, ecosystems, population groups and the economy and culture of the state, a wide range of information and data pertaining to biodiversity and related issues have been collected, and also generated wherever possible. This is really a Herculean task; the accomplishment of which requires utmost sincerity and seriousness. Therefore, since the beginning of the project efforts were made to evolve a well thought-out multi-staged methodology as stated below.

Stage 1 : The first stage includes constitution of different committees and organizational networking. The State Steering Committee has been constituted with as many as 41 members drawn from the Government of Assam and its various departments; academic institutions, NGOs and individual experts in order to guide and monitor the whole course of the work. A core committee consisting of experts from various relevant fields has also been formed to carry on the work in right direction within the time stipulated. Moreover, a full time Joint Coordinator and a research fellow have been engaged to coordinate and streamline the network of activities carried out in different parts of the state.

In view of the wide diversity of nature and culture in the state and to do necessary justice in representing the reality, a local level network covering all the districts (excluding Karbi Anglong) has been formed under the existing organizational set up of the Assam Science Society, the nodal agency for the project (Fig 1). This network, which is expected to function even after the given tenure of NBSAP is over, is christened as Assam Science Society Biodiversity Network (ASSBN). This network not only includes the members of the society, but also local NGOs and individual experts. As many as 18 local working groups (LWG) thus constituted have been entrusted with collection of relevant information from secondary sources and through primary survey wherever required. The LWGs accordingly prepared reports of their own area (district or any major area thereof) on the basis of data and information collected during the period from March to July, 2001. Parallely a mobile team consisting of a few

members from the core committee travelled from one area to the other within the state to co-ordinate the activities of the local working groups on the one hand and to record the outcomes of the public hearings (*raij mel*) organized in different parts of the state on the other. In order to streamline the works of the LWGs particularly in respect of collecting information and prioritization of the conservation measures, an exhaustive data format has been prepared keeping in view all relevant aspects of biodiversity.

Stage 2 : It includes collection of information from secondary sources such as government departments, directorates, research institutes, universities and NGOs primarily by the core committee members. This is closely followed by the activities like :

- i. acquisition of the reports prepared by the LWGs and the inputs provided by individual experts primarily on the status of flora and fauna and associated problems.
- ii. compilation and editing of the secondary data and information, reports of the LWGs and the inputs of the NGOs and individual experts;
- iii. holding of workshops, meetings to discuss the outputs of the LWGs and the secondary information collected;
- iv. reviewing and upgrading of the status of biodiversity reported by the LWGs and the core committee members.

Stage 3 : This stage includes the steps for drafting the report and giving it a final shape. The steps are :

- i. organisation of a two-day workshop inviting the core committee members, selected members from the LWGs, experts and few members from NGOs to prepare the format of the report, especially the section on strategy and action plan;
- ii. preparation of the draft report by the core committee members;
- iii. presentation of the draft in the NBSAP regional meeting covering the north-eastern states held at Guwahati during 18-19 December, 2001 for review;
- iv. modification/alteration of the draft on the basis of the deliberations in the regional meeting for presentation before the State Steering Committee held on January 11th, 2002 for finalization and approval;
- v. production of the final report.