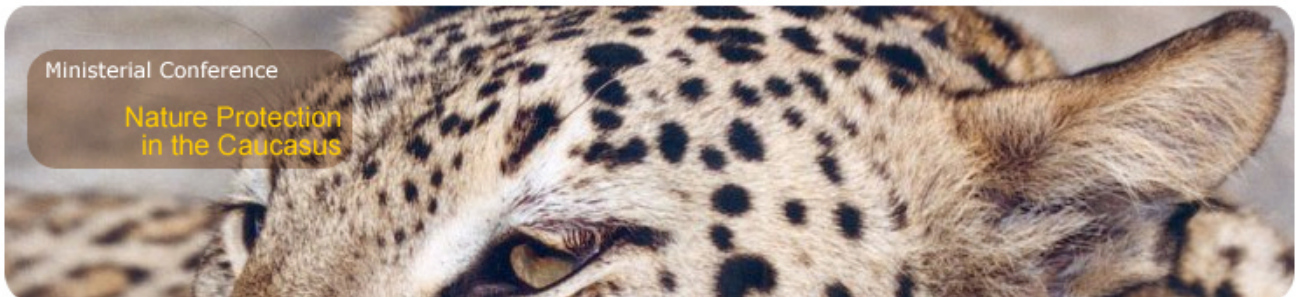


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Convention on Biological Diversity: Implications for the Caucasus

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Convention on Biological Diversity: Implications for the Caucasus

Hamdallah Zedan

It is now widely recognized that people are having a major and growing impact on the Earth's physical and biological systems (land, atmosphere and oceans), the long-term consequences of which are feared by many but are in fact not at all well understood. These systems are extremely complex and inter-related to the point that a change in even one component of any of the systems affects the other components and even the entire planet. Despite their in-built resilience, these systems are now approaching the point where they may not be able to meet human demands for adequate food, clean water, energy supplies, medicines and a healthy environment. As a result, the world is experiencing a number of global environmental changes: depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer, climate change, loss of biological diversity, land degradation and desertification, pollution of fresh and marine waters and accumulation of persistent organic pollutants. These changes are intensifying and are beginning to have a serious impact on the development goals and needs of a growing human population.

Of those changes, the loss of biodiversity is both the most dramatic and the least appreciated. It is generally accepted that the current loss of ecosystems, species and gene pools is faster than any time since the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. What is not generally recognized is how much is at stake.

It is the combination of life forms and their interactions with one another and with the physical environment that has made Earth a habitable place for humans and provides a large number of goods and services that sustain our lives. Ecosystems directly or indirectly provide the basic materials necessary for life (e.g., food, water), offer protection from natural disasters and disease (e.g., regulating climate, floods and pests), and underpin important aspects of human culture (e.g., spiritual needs, knowledge systems and traditional use of natural resources). Ecosystem services also maintain the essential life processes of the planet, such as primary production and nutrient recycling. These supporting services are provided at all levels –local, regional and global –and every one makes crucial contributions to human well-being. Biodiversity is essential for the ecosystem functioning and hence for ensuring the sustained provision of ecosystem's goods and services.

The economic value of these goods and services is enormous. It has been estimated that 40% of the world economy is derived directly from biodiversity. The aggregated annual value of ecosystem services worldwide is estimated to be between US\$ 18 trillion to US\$ 61 trillion, which is similar to figures resulting from all goods and services that are produced by people.

In the future, more of these goods and services will be needed. There are currently well over six billion people on the planet, and the human population is expected to reach 7.5 billion by the year 2020 and nine billion by mid-century. Each person has the right to expect adequate food, clean water, safe shelter and energy, the provision of each of which has profound ecological implications.

These minimum needs multiplied by a growing world population translate to increasing demands on the planet's productive capacity. This minimum demand is massively amplified however, by the wasteful consumption of resources over and above the level needed to meet basic human needs. This growing demand for luxury products among a relatively small segment of the world population is leading to a greater loss of biodiversity, with dire consequences for all. As biodiversity is lost, the provision of ecosystem goods and services may also be undermined, with a negative effect on human well-being. Recently, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment concluded that—of the ecosystem services it assessed, and that make a direct contribution to human well-being—15 of 24 were in decline.

The main direct drivers of biodiversity loss all stem from human activities. According to a number of recent analyses, including the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the main direct drivers of biodiversity loss are: i) habitat conversion – primarily from expansion of agricultural production. ii) Climate change – stemming from a variety of sources including the use of fossil fuels, habitat conversion and nitrogen fixation. iii) Invasive species – as a result of growing international commerce and trade, an increasing number of species are becoming introduced to environments and disturbing ecosystems. iv) Pollution – particularly the increased use of fertilizers which lead to increases in atmospheric and biologically available nitrogen. This has not only the impact on climate, but can also lead to eutrophication in certain aquatic eco-systems. v) Over-exploitation of species – leading to their extinction. In recent years, this has been most evident in the case of marine fisheries.

These direct causes result from other indirect drivers from a variety of directions and sources. The five main indirect drivers are: i) demographic (population growth), ii) economic, iii) socio-political (decentralized and democratic-adaptive management), iv) cultural and religious (perceptions and values), v) scientific and technological (can improve efficiency but also increase exploitation of natural resources).

Sustaining that biodiversity, in the face of considerable threats from human activities, constitutes one of the greatest challenges of the modern era. The importance of this challenge was universally acknowledged at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Convention on Biological Diversity arose from this summit and entered into force in 1993. There are now 188 Parties to this international legally binding treaty, reflecting a virtually universal participation.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a landmark in international environmental and sustainable development law. It represents the first time that biodiversity has been comprehensively addressed in an international treaty. The Convention was adopted as a result of a growing recognition that isolated actions targeting individual species or ecosystems were insufficient to stem the increasing loss of the natural resource base that underpins all human societies and whose maintenance is essential for sustainable development. The Convention was -and still is- an ambitious undertaking. Its scope is broad, and its commitments so general that much work has been needed by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to translate them into practical actions. The Convention is, however, clear on one thing: that, if biodiversity loss is to be averted, action is needed at the national, regional and international levels and that this action must be facilitated through cooperation among countries and the transfer of necessary financial and technological resources to enable countries to meet their commitments.

The Convention establishes an interconnected series of obligations on countries to conserve biological diversity, to use its components in a sustainable way and to share the benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources. The Convention constitutes a framework for action that takes place mainly at the national level. It places few precise binding obligations upon Parties, but rather provides goals and guidelines, and these are further elaborated by decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP).

Articles 8 and 9 contain a comprehensive list of categories of measures to be undertaken for the conservation of biological diversity. Article 10 provides that, to ensure sustainable use of biodiversity, Parties will need to integrate biodiversity into national decision-making, avoid or minimize adverse impacts on biodiversity, encourage/support remedial action in degraded areas and involve the private sector in developing methods for sustainable use. Articles 15 to 19 contain categories of measures that need to be undertaken by both countries that provide genetic resources and countries that acquire genetic resources to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise.

In contrast to some other international or regional biodiversity conservation agreements, the Convention does not contain an internationally agreed list of species or habitat to be subject to special measures of protection. Instead, it requires in Article 7, Parties to identify for themselves components of biodiversity important for conservation and sustainable use, monitor these particularly those requiring urgent conservation measures and those offering the greatest potential for sustainable use, and to identify processes or activities likely to have significant adverse effects on biodiversity (Article 7). However, the Convention indicates, in Annex 1, the types of species and ecosystems that might be considered by countries for particular attention and to guide them in the identification and monitoring of biodiversity.

In addition to its substantive provisions, the Convention establishes institutional arrangements which provide a mechanism for the further development of , and for monitoring the implementation of the Convention.

The approach adopted by the COP in implementing the Convention has been setting out broad global commitments by governments to guide action at the national level. Since its entry into force, they i) developed a series of thematic work programs on major ecosystem types. Each program of work establishes a vision for and basic principles to guide, future work; set out key issues for consideration; identifies global goals, objectives and activities, determines potential outputs and suggests a timetable and means for achieving these outputs; ii) addressed key cross-cutting issues of relevance to all thematic areas; some resulted in the development of cross-cutting programs of work such as Article 8(j) or directly support the work under thematic programs such as the work on indicators and incentives while others include guidelines which assist Parties in the implementation of relevant articles of the convention and the cross-cutting programs of work; or the development of discrete products such as the negotiation of the biosafety protocol.

The advice given by the COP is the principal avenue for advancing implementation through its translation into actions and legislative frameworks at the national level. The cornerstone of national action to implement the Convention has been the development and adoption of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) and mainstreaming biodiversity into all sectors as stipulated in Article 6. A national strategy will reflect how the country intends to fulfill its obligations under, and achieve the objectives of, the Convention in the light of specific national circumstances, and the related action plans will constitute the sequence of steps to be taken to meet these goals. It is a dynamic process encompassing assessment of biodiversity, defining options and their choice, target setting, policy formulation followed by implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the results of implemented policies, regular reassessments and adjustment of policies, as required. Without this complete cycle, it is not possible to determine if policies are having their intended effects or make informed adjustments. This is ultimately where the policies of the Parties will succeed or fail as a result of actions taken within national policies and legislative frameworks.

In 2002, ten years after the entry into force of the Convention, the Parties to the Convention acknowledged the continued threat to biodiversity from human activities. They reaffirmed that biodiversity is the living foundation for sustainable development, that the rate of loss is still accelerating, that threats must be addressed, and that the Convention remains a key tool for sustainable development.

For these reasons, the Conference of the Parties adopted a Strategic Plan, in which Parties committed themselves to a more effective and coherent implementation of the three objectives of the Convention in order to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and for the greater benefit of all life on earth. This target was subsequently endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

In addition, the Conference of the Parties, responding to an invitation contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, initiated in 2005 a process to elaborate and negotiate the nature, scope and elements of an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing.

However, drawing on the first Global Biodiversity Outlook (2001) and national reports as the main source of information on implementation, it is not possible to assess implementation, identify progress made, constraints encountered, and emerging issues and identify priorities for future action. In other words, almost after 13 years of entry into force of the CBD, it is not possible to construct more than a partial picture of overall implementation. It is obvious that effective implementation of the Convention is hampered both by lack of coherent information on the effectiveness of measures already undertaken and the difficulty in presenting information on the state of biodiversity in a form understandable by and relevant to policy makers. This has been recognized by the countries in their calls for the development of a set of biodiversity indicators and in the efforts they have made in this area. However, complex scientific and political questions come into play in this key area.

In order to achieve the Strategic Plan, and its 2010 biodiversity target, they decided to focus on implementation and required a framework to facilitate an assessment of progress made—a framework within which national and regional targets could be set, and indicators of progress identified. The resulting framework is structured around seven focal areas, which together represent both responses to the drivers of biodiversity loss, and the means to achieve the three objectives of the Convention. The focal areas are:

- i) Reducing the rate of loss of the components of biodiversity, including biomes, habitats and ecosystems; species and populations; and genetic diversity;
- ii) Promoting sustainable use of biodiversity;
- iii) Addressing the major threats to biodiversity, including those arising from invasive alien species, climate change, pollution, and habitat change;
- iv) Maintaining ecosystem integrity, and the provision of goods and services provided by biodiversity in ecosystems, in support of human well-being;
- v) Protecting traditional knowledge, innovations and practices;
- vi) Ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources; and;

vii) Mobilizing financial and technical resources, especially for developing countries, in particular, least developed countries and small island developing states among them, and countries with economies in transition, for implementing the Convention and the Strategic Plan.

Given the broad scope of the Convention and the nature of issues addressed in its programs of work mean that its effective implementation requires cooperation and coordination between Parties and with a wide range of other conventions, institutions and processes. Such cooperation has two main aspects:

- i) the need to ensure that development and delivery of policies and programs by different instruments is mutually reinforcing; and
- ii) ensure that positions and activities taken by national governments are coordinated at national, regional and international level for consistency in decision making.

The scope of the Convention means that biodiversity policies should form part of mainstream politics and should be incorporated into all political sectors and levels of governments, especially into economic decision making. Achieving this will imply shifting the focus from biodiversity protection to sustainable resource management.

For the effective implementation of the Convention, a pragmatic approach is required at the national and regional levels and should take into consideration:

- i) the complex distribution of natural communities and their habitat;
- ii) the uneven distribution of species;
- iii) the uneven distribution of threats (land-use change, climatic changes, invasive species etc...);
- iv) the distribution of species and communities rarely coincide with political boundaries;
- v) national economies are organized in sectors;
- vi) conservation vis-à-vis use;
- vii) the role of indigenous and local communities;
- viii) whether conservation areas are redundant or complimentary across political boundaries;
- ix) impacts of threats and their change where some places may become more threatened while others may recover;
- ix) continuous improvement of biodiversity knowledge;
- x) increased communication between scientific community and policy makers;
- xi) knowledge deals with spatial scales, time frames and organizational levels and the main findings are not easily transferable from one scale or level to another;
- xii) scarcity of resources and need for funding coordination;
- xiii) need to build on existing programs and initiatives; and
- xiv) need to avoid duplication of efforts and to share knowledge.

All these factors and given the broad scope of the Convention dictate the need to target our actions at national and regional levels to stem the loss of biodiversity and the need for the development of regional biodiversity strategies as ideal approach for effective protection of a full range of representative areas, conservation of distinct biodiversity components and ensuring the persistence of populations and ecological processes particularly those that require large areas or are most sensitive to human activities.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) urged countries to give priority to the integration of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as benefit sharing, into relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programs and policies, in accordance with Article 6, and to identify priority actions in national biodiversity strategies and action plans and other relevant national strategies. It requested the Parties to integrate elements of all the thematic programs of work into their national strategies and sectoral plans. The Convention provides for Parties to present reports to the COP on measures taken to implement the provisions of the CBD and their effectiveness in meeting its objectives (Article 26).

The Conference of the Parties also attaches great importance to regional cooperation and has stressed the need for cross-border collaboration and coordination of national strategies and the importance of regional and international cooperation for the implementation of the Convention. It encouraged countries to develop regional, sub regional or bioregional mechanisms and networks to support the implementation of the Convention, including as appropriate through the development of regional or sub regional biodiversity strategies and action plans, the identification of common constraints and impediments to implementation; and the promotion of joint measures for addressing them. It called upon donors and institutions to support the implementation of these strategies and action plans, in particular priority actions, and to target such priority actions in an effective and coordinated manner within the framework of the Strategic Plan of the Convention. The COP also urged countries to develop closer collaboration for the conservation and sustainable use of trans-boundary ecosystems and populations of species and to establish regional cooperation in the fields of indicators, monitoring and assessments.

A number of initiatives have been taken in this direction such as the definition of eco-regions as a tool for biodiversity conservation planning and action at regional and global scales whereby targets are established for action-oriented outcomes. The map of eco-regions developed by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is now the most widely used system for bioregional classification. It is introduced to highlight those areas of the world that are most distinctive or have high representation value and are therefore worthy of greater attention as they contain assemblage of natural communities and species with boundaries that approach the original extent of natural communities prior to major land-use change. It compliments the

global priority setting analysis such as the WWF 200 and the hotspots of Conservation International.

The Caucasus has been identified by the WWF international as one of the 238 Eco-regions globally outstanding in its biodiversity and by Conservation International as one of the globally existing most diverse and endangered biodiversity hotspots. It is located at biological cross-roads where species from central and northern Europe, central Asia and the middle east mix with endemics found nowhere else with over 6500 plant species of which 1600 are endemic, 153 mammals with one fifth of them endemic to the region, 400 species of bird of which 4 are endemic and 77 reptile species of which 22 are endemic; more than 200 species of fish inhabit the Caucasus rivers and seas one third of which are not found elsewhere and the coasts of the Black and Caspian seas are the sites for millions of migratory species. The region is also a significant center of cultural diversity and is characterized by a diversity of climate zones. However, the political and social changes in the region will have far reaching consequences for the way in which biodiversity is managed. They are intensifying forest clearing for fuel wood, illegal logging and hunting, plant collecting, overgrazing, water pollution and infrastructure development which threaten the unique biodiversity of the region.

By becoming Parties to the Convention, the Governments of the Caucasian region have committed themselves to the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. They committed themselves to the implementation of the agreed programs of work, achieving the 2010 target, monitoring and regular assessment of implementation and reporting to the Conference of the Parties. At the same time conservation budgets and capacity to implement their mandates and to enforce legislation and international obligations are insufficient. It is therefore crucial to identify regional conservational priorities to meet their obligations under the CBD and other related agreements through the development of a regional approach including institutional frameworks for monitoring and better understanding the enabling conditions required for selecting and implementing responses.

An unprecedented effort is necessary to achieve, by 2010, significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at global, regional and national levels. This is unlikely to be achieved globally as most of the direct drivers of biodiversity loss are projected to increase. However, with appropriate responses it is possible to achieve this target for certain components of biodiversity or for certain indicators and/or in certain regions. The development of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan, the establishment of a Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Caucasus present a unique tool for the governments of the region to conserve the rich biodiversity of the region and progress towards the achievement of the Convention's Strategic Plan including its 2010 target and to fulfill their obligations under the CBD and

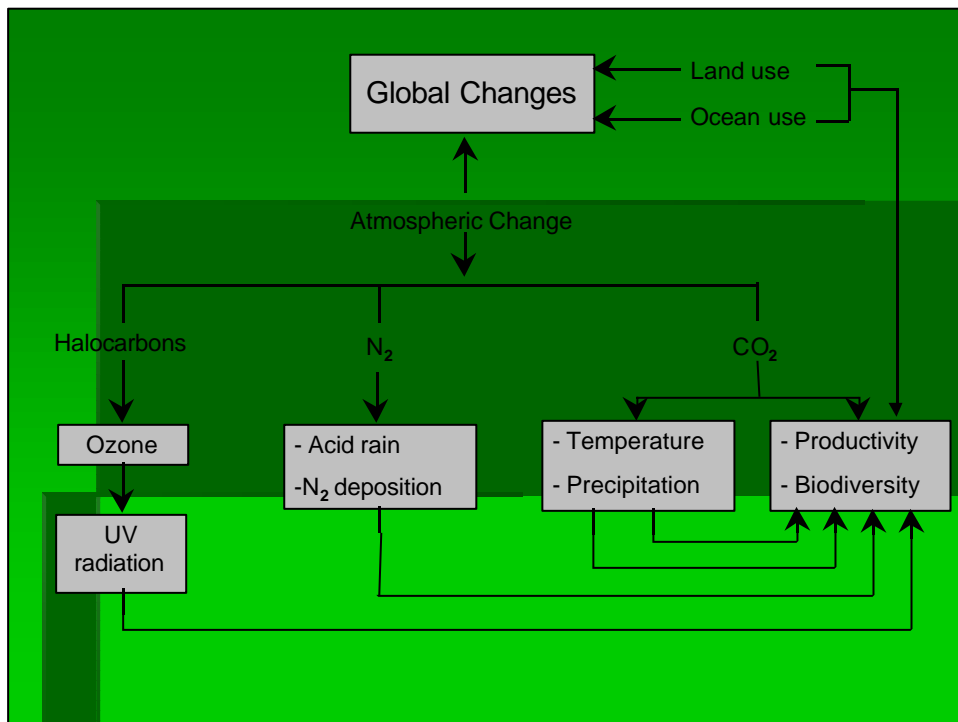
other related regional and global agreements in a coordinated way while promoting regional cooperation, harmonizing of legislation and coordinating research and monitoring.

After sound biological and socio-economic assessments, major threats and root causes: priority biomes and focal species were identified and a vision and long-term, medium-term and immediate goals were outlined for conservation, management and restoration of biodiversity of the region through the implementation of concrete activities using a variety of mechanisms including the creation of networks of protected areas and linking corridors, developing institutional frameworks and capacity building.. With its ecosystem-based approach, four biomes (forest, fresh water, coastal and marine, an mountain) which contain most of the region's biodiversity and are subject to greatest threats were selected as priority areas. Within these biomes, 26 focal species and 56 priority conservation areas were identified to help focus implementation efforts and 60 corridors were delineated to ensure connectivity of conservation areas for migratory species. In this regard, the Caucasus Protected Area Fund constitutes a significant contribution to the goal of ensuring financial sustainability of protected areas and national and regional systems of protected areas of the Conventions program of work on the protected areas.

Finally, this initiative demonstrates how regional cooperation can play a significant role in helping countries to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity.

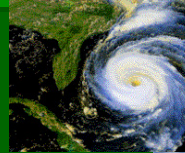
Convention on Biological Diversity: Implications for the Caucasus

Berlin 9-11 March 2006



Global Environmental Changes

- Climate change
- Loss of biological diversity
- Land degradation and desertification
- Deforestation and forest degradation
- Depletion of stratospheric ozone
- Pollution of fresh and marine waters
- Accumulation of persistent organic pollutants



Biodiversity Contribution to World Economy

- 40% of the world economy is derived directly from biodiversity.
- Aggregated annual value of ecosystem services worldwide: US\$ 18 trillion to US\$ 61 trillion (similar to figures resulting from all goods and services produced by people).

Direct Causes/Drivers of Change (Human Induced Actions)

- Land-use changes (degradation and fragmentation of ecosystems)
- Introductions/removal of species (e.g. invasive alien species)
- External inputs (e.g. fertilizer use, pest control, pollution, irrigation)
- Harvest and resource consumption (over exploitation, unsustainable production and consumption)
- Technology adaptation
- Climate change (additional stress)
- Natural causes (e.g. floods, droughts, volcanoes, evolution)

Indirect Drivers of Biodiversity Loss

- Economic (e.g. globalization, trade, market and policy frameworks)
- Demographic (e.g. population growth and density)
- Socio-political (e.g. governance, institutional and legal frameworks)
- Cultural and religious (e.g. choices about what and how much to consume)
- Science and technology

Objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

- Conservation of biological diversity
- Sustainable use of its components
- Fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources



The Convention is a tool for sustainable development

Measures for Biodiversity Conservation

Articles 8 and 9 contain a comprehensive list of categories of measures to be undertaken for the conservation of biological diversity.

Measures for Sustainable Use of Biodiversity

Article 10 provides that, to ensure sustainable use of biodiversity, Parties will need to integrate biodiversity into national decision-making, avoid or minimize adverse impacts on biodiversity, encourage/support remedial action in degraded areas and involve the private sector in developing methods for sustainable use.

Measures for Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits

Articles 15 to 19 contain categories of measures that need to be undertaken by both countries that provide genetic resources and countries that acquire genetic resources to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise.

Priority Setting (Identification & Monitoring)

Article 7 requires Parties to identify for themselves components of biodiversity important for conservation and sustainable use, monitor these particularly those requiring urgent conservation measures and those offering the greatest potential for sustainable use, and to identify processes or activities likely to have significant adverse effects on biodiversity

Annex 1 indicates the types of species and ecosystems that might be considered by countries for particular attention and to guide them in the identification and monitoring of biodiversity.

Thematic Programmes of Work



VISION



BASIC PRINCIPLES



PRIORITIES AND TARGETS



GUIDANCE ON NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION



Marine and Coastal biodiversity



Inland waters biodiversity



Agricultural biodiversity



Dry and sub-humid lands biodiversity



Forest biodiversity



Mountain biodiversity

Cross-cutting Work Programmes



Guidelines and Guiding Principles

- Guidance for global, national and regional action
- Guidelines include:
 - The Principles and Guidelines of the Ecosystem Approach
 - Bonn Guidelines on Access and Benefit-Sharing
 - Guiding Principles for the prevention, introduction and mitigation of impact of alien species
 - Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into environmental impact assessment legislation and/or processes and in strategic environmental assessment
 - Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for Sustainable Use of Biodiversity
 - The Akwe: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
 - Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development

Supporting Mechanisms

- Clearing-house Mechanism (CHM)
- Biosafety Clearing-house (BCH)
- Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA)
- Financial mechanism

National Implementation

1. National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs):

- assessment of biodiversity,
- defining options and their choice,
- target setting,
- policy formulation,
- policy implementation,
- monitoring and evaluation of the results of implemented policies,
- regular reassessments and adjustment of policies, as required.

2. Integration of biodiversity in relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programs and policies

CBD Strategic Plan and WSSD Plan of Implementation

- The key instrument for conservation, sustainable use, access and benefit-sharing
- Commitment to achieve the 2010 on biodiversity as a contribution to poverty alleviation, MDGs and the broader sustainable development agenda
- International regime on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing (nature, scope and elements)
- Establishment of ecological networks and corridors

Framework for assessing Progress towards the 2010 target

Framework Evaluation of progress to 2010 target (VII/30)	PROTECT THE	1	21 Targets	Indicators
	COMPONENTS	2		
	OF BIODIVERSITY	3		
	SUSTAINABLE USE	4		
	ADDRESS THREATS	5		
	TO BIODIVERSITY	6		
	ECOSYSTEM SERVICES	7		
	TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE	8		
	ACCESS BENEFIT-SHARING	9		
	G: RESOURCES	10		
		11		

Prerequisites for effective implementation

- the need for pragmatic approaches,
- the need for regional / sub-regional cooperation
- coordination between Parties and institutions,
- closer collaboration for the conservation and sustainable use of trans-boundary ecosystems and populations of species
- the need for regular monitoring, regular assessment and reporting
- ensure that development and delivery of policies and programs by different instruments is mutually reinforcing;
- ensure that positions and activities taken by national governments are coordinated at national, regional and international level for consistency in decision making.
- biodiversity policies should form part of mainstream politics and should be incorporated into all political sectors and levels of governments, especially into economic decisions .

Pragmatic Approach Consideration

Pragmatic approach is required at the national and regional levels and should take into consideration:

- the complex distribution of natural communities and their habitat;
- the uneven distribution of species;
- the uneven distribution of threats (land-use change, climatic changes, invasive species etc...);
- the distribution of species and communities rarely coincide with political boundaries;
- national economies are organized in sectors;
- conservation vis-à-vis use;
- the role of indigenous and local communities;

Pragmatic Approach Considerations (contd.)

- whether conservation areas are redundant or complimentary across political boundaries;
- impacts of threats and their change where some places may become more threatened while others may recover;
- continuous improvement of biodiversity knowledge;
- increased communication between scientific community and policy makers;
- knowledge deals with spatial scales, time frames and organizational levels and the main findings are not easily transferable from one scale or level to another;
- scarcity of resources and need for funding coordination;
- need to build on existing programs and initiatives; and
- need to avoid duplication of efforts and to share knowledge.

The Caucasus Unique Biodiversity

- species from central and northern Europe, central Asia and the middle east mix with endemics found no where else.
- one of the 238 WWF eco-regions globally outstanding in its biodiversity.
- one of the Conservation International 34 globally existing most diverse and endangered biodiversity hotspots.
- over 6500 plant species of which 1600 are endemic.
- 153 mammals with one fifth of them endemic to the region.
- 400 species of bird of which 4 are endemic.
- 77 reptile species of which 22 are endemic.
- more than 200 species of fish in rivers and seas one third of which are not found elsewhere .
- the coasts of the Black and Caspian seas are the sites for millions of migratory species.
- the region is a significant center of cultural diversity and is characterized by a diversity of climate zones.

The Caucasus: Regional Cooperation

- The Eco-regional Conservation Plan
- The Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
- The Caucasus Protected Area Fund