

## **Enabling policy and institutional factors:**

**Madhav Gadgil<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction to theme 6: enabling factors**

The starting point for any discussion of the appropriate enabling policy and institutional factors to support participatory monitoring of biodiversity has to be an assessment of what we expect to achieve from such an endeavour. In the context of present day India, where a number of us have been experimenting with possibilities of participatory monitoring of biodiversity, the objectives have included:

1. Motivate local people to revive and build upon their traditions of conservation and prudent use. [Many traditions, e.g. protection of *Ficus* trees or of heronaries, or sustainable management of woodlands such as village forests in Uttarakhand continue to be relevant; but many others have been eroded. Involving people in participatory monitoring of biodiversity and documenting such traditions could be one entry point to motivating them to revive these traditions.]
2. Build a positive relationship between local communities and state authority, in the context of management of natural resources as well as promotion of development projects, with the latter in a supportive and facilitating role. [State authorities tend to be overbearing, and often destructive of biodiversity through their corrupt practices. On the other hand, local communities are likely to be more interested in sustainable use of local biodiversity resources. Involving people in participatory monitoring of biodiversity could help empower them and establish more positive forms of interactions between local communities and state authorities.]
3. Elaborate a system of positive incentives for local communities to conserve and sustainably use local biodiversity resources. [Local communities may need to be paid service charges to motivate them to act as stewards of local biodiversity. The appropriate forms and amounts of such service charges could best be worked out as a component of participatory monitoring of biodiversity.]
4. Put in place a system of adaptive management taking advantage of the ability of local communities to monitor on-going changes in a cost-effective fashion. [The current authoritarian and inflexible systems of biodiversity resource management such as Forest Working Plans need to be replaced by more flexible systems of prescriptions updated through feedback from an ongoing process of monitoring.]
5. Strengthen democratic forces. [Involving people in participatory monitoring of biodiversity would be one among many ways of putting in place a more efficient, transparent and participatory system of governance.]
6. Enrich our understanding of ecological processes by devising ways of incorporating locality and time specific knowledge of history, current status and drivers of change held by non-scientists into the formal system of scientific knowledge. [Formal scientific institutions have necessarily limited capabilities of first hand observations; their information base could be greatly enriched by drawing on folk knowledge. But the folk knowledge needs to be carefully scrutinised, its strengths and weaknesses understood, and new, fair and effective mechanisms developed of drawing on it.]
7. Enhance the quality of education. [Today the education is largely alienated from contact with the living world; involving students and teachers, working along with local people in participatory monitoring of biodiversity can greatly enrich the educational experience.]
8. Conserve for posterity orally held knowledge of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. [Involving people in a broad based exercise, including participatory monitoring of biodiversity, along with recording of folk knowledge of conservation and sustainable use, may be an effective way to give such folk knowledge the recognition it deserves and to assure its longer term future.]

In this context, it is clear that the key enabling policy and institutional factors would relate to:

- (1) Willingness of the state authorities, as well as the scientific establishment to share authority, to empower the local communities;

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<sup>1</sup> Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, India, [madhav@ces.iisc.ernet.in](mailto:madhav@ces.iisc.ernet.in)

- (2) Willingness of the scientific establishment to acknowledge the existence of a considerable body of locality specific information, especially on historical processes and forces driving ecological change, to respect this knowledge and to make efforts to scientifically validate folk knowledge;
- (3) Willingness of the educational establishment to broaden the educational experience.