

INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE SUMMARY: PUBLIC SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into decision making at national, state and local levels

11 December 2019 | Hotel Fidalgo, Panaji



INTERACT-Bio
Integrated action on biodiversity



1. Framing the context

To bring about local engagement within the project's satellite cities and involve local actors in decision-making and mainstreaming biodiversity, dialogues on identifying ecosystem service opportunities were held in Panaji and Gangtok. The dialogues aimed at connecting the civil society and private sector actors with public authorities on issues of biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services within their respective cities.

The assessment and appreciation of the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity within and around city-regions allows for the formulation and implementation of sustainable strategies, which offset investments in conventional infrastructure that has high carbon lock-in and leverages ecosystem services in a sustainable and inclusive manner to make Indian cities safe and resilient. Decisions and actions that affect biodiversity are often taken at the local level, and hence corresponding strategies and action plans need to be developed and implemented at the relevant sub-national level.

In this context, the first of the dialogues was held in Hotel Fidalgo in Panaji city on the 11th of December 2018. Local residents, representatives of community-based organizations (CBOs), local businesses and NGOs that are affected by or hold interest in the Panaji's ecosystem services are important stakeholders. Their perspectives, knowledge and experience need to be recorded for more inclusive and holistic development. Thus this dialogue was held with these stakeholders.

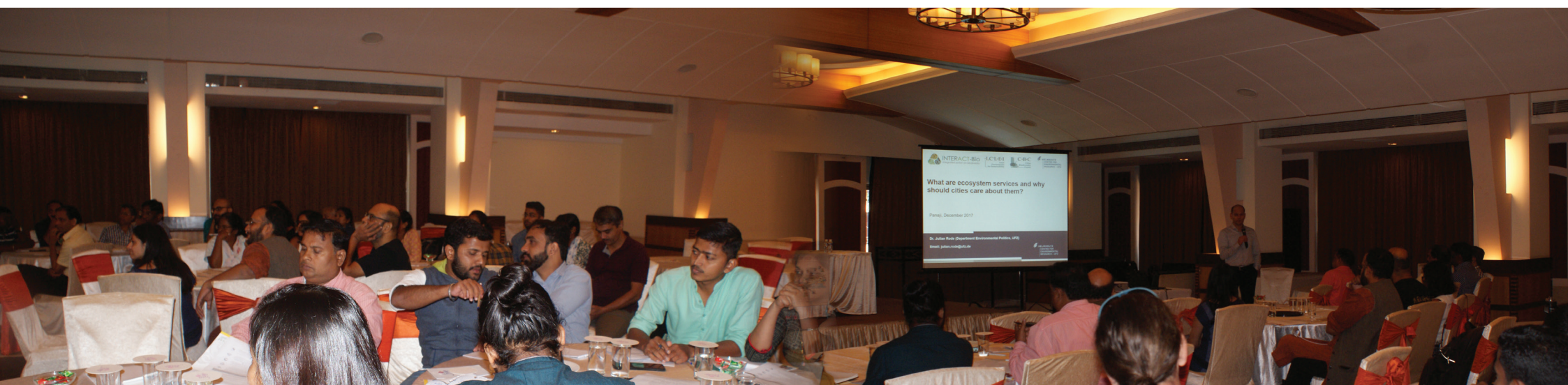
The workshop aimed to discuss the following aspects with the participants:

- The critical issues around biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services for the city of Panaji and which ecosystem services are important for the city
- The actors and activities which influence these ecosystem services
- Management measures or policy instruments needed to improve ecosystem services within Panaji

2. Emerging themes

2.1. Linking local and sub-national plans with national plans

Dr. Pradip Sarmokadam, Member- Secretary, Goa State Biodiversity Board was the key-note speaker at the event. He discussed about how the Goa State Biodiversity Board was working towards local level integration of biodiversity concerns, in line with the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan through the development of the People's Biodiversity Registers. Goa's State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan has not been updated since 2003 and needs to reflect the National Biodiversity Targets. The significance of ecosystem services to the city and its impact on the health and well-being of its occupants was also discussed, along with the lack of integration of



ecosystem services into urban planning. Dr. Sarmokadam underlined the role of an individual in protecting the environment and expressed that forums such as this one provide platforms to bring together like minded people who are active in their relevant fields and have the capacity to contribute significantly to the preservation of the various ecosystems of Panaji.

2.2. Identification of critical issues around biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services for Panaji

Discussions were held around the relevance of ecosystem services for urban sustainability and on the need for recognition that measures are needed to maintain and enhance their provision. The major issues within the city as identified were, poor sanitation management especially solid waste management, construction and demolition waste and sewerage; mining including sand mining which results in the loss/ erosion of the river bank and pollution of water; unsustainable tourism and associated behaviour such as improper/unfriendly environmental practices, littering by tourists, increase in number of casinos and hotels impacting local environment and poor regulation leading to traffic congestion; loss of tree and mangrove cover; rapid urbanization which is leading to increase in traffic volumes, land reclamation, construction activities which cause pollution and poor sanitation services outreach.

Some participants also discussed the impacts of salinity ingress which affects ground water in the city, attributing it to salt water ingress due to climate change. The impacts of pollution on water quality were also enumerated with impacts on the salt pans thus affecting salt production. It was also highlighted that high levels of *Escherichia coli* in coastal waters of Panaji have impacts on the health of tourists as well as residents. Mining barges were identified as major causes of pollution in the city's waterways and some concerned participants also flagged the fact that Panaji is scheduled to be the next coal hub through where coal will be imported from Australia and taken to Karnataka. Stray dog menace and introduction of invasive species are resulting in the displacement of native species. Participants raised issues about poor governance being the foremost factor affecting the biodiversity of the city. According to them, apathy of government officials is responsible for degradation of the ecosystem services in the city.

2.3. Tourism- Panaji's main consumer of Ecosystem Services

The dialogue revealed that the future development of Panaji, and the relationship to its ecosystems, will be closely connected to the tourism sector. The growth of the city and most of the negative environmental impacts are related to mass tourism, including hotel construction at the coast and casino boats. How can it become more sustainable? Are plans and strategies underway for promoting more sustainable tourism? There exist

numerous synergies between conservation/restoration of healthy ecosystems and tourism, since tourists typically enjoy clean air and water bodies as well as green spaces. For instances, studies could be provided to tourism authorities and business that highlight these ecosystem service benefits to the tourism sector. Moreover, there could also be many untapped opportunities for eco-tourism activities, which could be assessed and promoted.

2.4. Solutions that will strengthen Ecosystem Service Provision in Panaji

Some activities and management measures put forward as solutions included conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems around Panaji (terrestrial and aquatic), improving water quality in the river, awareness programmes targeted at Panaji's youth, responsible tourism and fishing, mangrove and sand dune restoration, sand dune parks, parallel education platforms, asset mapping of natural resources, stories, promoting and documenting traditional practices and knowledge, management of sluice gates, embankments and freshwater bodies; identification and protection of sacred groves, medicinal plants, important water bodies and the development of a seed bank.

2.5. How can ICLEI South Asia facilitate the various entire action points described above?

From the discussions a rather obvious path for ICLEI South Asia to take would be to support the city of Panaji in pursuing sustainable tourism. An analysis based on Step 4 of the "ecosystem service opportunities" guidelines¹ specifically targeted at the tourism sector could be employed to identify concrete entry points for supporting sustainable and nature-based tourism.

ICLEI South Asia's relationship with the city also reveals that the city is open to, and even has funds available for green urban planning, but that this should be demanded and supported by the Goa State Planning Authority. Hence, it seems worthwhile to establish further contacts and offer support to these planning authorities. Further efforts may increase interest and awareness among these authorities, for instance offering support with policy-oriented ecosystem service assessments may result in more successful outcomes.

1. Rode, J., Wittmer, H. (2015), Acting on Ecosystem Service Opportunities — Guidelines for identifying, selecting and planning economic instruments to conserve ecosystems and enhance local livelihoods, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research GmbH — UFZ, Leipzig. Accessed at http://www.ufz.de/export/data/2/80087_ESO_Guidelines_2015.pdf

3. Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework implications

Going forward, the dialogue and the points raised can be viewed through the Post-2020 lens, specifically in point 5 of ICLEI's 10 Point Framework, which promotes the creation of an enabling environment that supports the mainstreaming of the multiple social and health benefits of nature at the local and subnational levels to improve the quality of life and resilience of communities, enhance social cohesion and lead to financial benefits and savings for both individuals and governments. In addition, Point 3 promotes the creation of an enabling environment for significantly increased private sector investment and development aid in nature-based solutions at local and subnational levels, as they are closer to the mainstreaming sectors and best positioned to build and sustain functional and resilient ecosystems and urban-rural linkages. In this regard, both points highlight the necessity for the issues raised in this dialogue to be addressed, as their resolution can prove to be hugely beneficial to India and the Post-2020 agenda.

Supported by:



based on a decision of the German Bundestag



INTERACT-Bio project at a glance

Full title: Integrated subnational action for biodiversity: Supporting implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans through the mainstreaming of biodiversity objectives across city-regions

Funded by: the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) through the International Climate Initiative (IKI)

Project duration: Four years - January 2017 to December 2020

Project countries: Brazil, India and Tanzania