

Hanoi, 22 December 1995

DECISION OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Approving the Biodiversity Action Plan for Vietnam

Pursuant to the Law on the Organisation of the Government dated 30 September 1992;

Pursuant to the Law on Environment Protection dated 27 December 1993;

According to the proposal of the Minister of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) in official Letter No. 2423/MTg dated 25 September 1995

DECISION

Article 1. - Approval of the "Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Vietnam" with the long-term and immediate objectives and the main contents as indicated in the attached document.

Article 2. - Implementation details

1. Activities must be implemented under a project format with detailed objectives, contents, location, scale, duration And outputs Project must be pre-assessed before funding decision. Mid-term and final assessments are necessary steps in the implementation process.

2. Responsibility of the Central Organisations:

MOSTE is the key Organisation ill implementing the BAP MOSTE has the responsibility to contact and discus with the concerned Ministries, sectors and local agencies ill carrying-out the BAP step by step MOSTE shall submit an annual report to the Prime Minister on the implementational outputs of the BAP.

* The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), based on domestic sources and foreign aid, following the main objectives of the BAP and in close coordination with MOSTE, has the responsibility to lay out annual implelnentation plans of each BAP objective for the related and local agencies.

* The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), the Ministry of Fisheries (MOF) and the National Centre of Natural Science and Technology are the major implementing Organisations of the BAP. These organisation shall work closely with MOSTE and MPI on the annual implementation plans and inform MOSTE about the outputs of their components. MOSTE shall collect this information and submit an annual report to the Prime Minister.

* The Ministry of Education and Training; the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs; the Ministry of Health and the State Committee for Ethnic Affairs and Mountainous Regions should pay priority attention that the related objectives and locations of the BAP are within their Social-Economic Programmes and should discuss with MOSTE and MPI any related issues.

3. Responsibility of Local Authorities:

The People's Committees of the provinces and cities directly under the Central Government have the responsibility to implement this Plan within their area.

The People's Committees of the provinces and cities directly under the Central Government shall make their own plan and discuss this with MOSTE, MPI and the concerned ministries on implementation matters, informing MOSTE about the outputs of their activities annually.

Article 3. This decision shall become effective as from the date of its signing.

For the Prime Minister

Signed

Nguyen Khanh

Vice Prime Minister

VIETNAM NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

(Approved by the Prime Minister Decision No.845/TTg of 22 December 1995)

Vietnam has been endowed by nature with an abundance and diversity of ecosystems, species and genetic resources which are generally regarded as biological diversity.

Investigations have shown that Vietnam is the home of 12,000 plant species of which 7000 species have been identified, 275 species of mammals, 800 species of birds, 180 species of reptiles, 80 species of amphibians, 2470 species of fish, 5500 species of insects. Vietnam's biodiversity is relatively unique as 10% of the world's mammal, bird and fish species can be found in Vietnam while over 40% of the local plant species are endemic and believed to be found nowhere else but in Vietnam. In addition, many livestock species have been domesticated and selected in this country since thousands of years now.

In terms of economic value, all agricultural, forestry or marine products, which come from the biodiversity resources are estimated to bring about US\$ 2 billion to the country's revenue every year. In many places, especially in the mountainous regions, the food and foodstuff sources, medicine plants and essential source of income rely largely on the biodiversity exploitation.

However, the national rapid population growth, the decreased forest areas, the over-exploitation of the bio-marine resources, the over-introduction of new varieties in agricultural production, have led to the reduction or loss of the ecosystems, resulting in the fact that 28% of mammals, 10% of birds, 21% of reptiles and amphibians are currently listed as endangered species. Once a species is lost, it will never be recovered and this also constitutes a loss of genetic resource. The speed of biodiversity degradation is more rapid in our country than that in other countries of the region.

Recognising the great economic, scientific, cultural and social value that biodiversity can contribute to the present and future development of mankind and being aware of the full responsibility for biodiversity conservation, Vietnam has joined many countries in the world to sign the Convention on Biological Diversity which entered into force in the middle of 1993.

In the 60's, Vietnam made the official initial steps to conserve its nature. In 1972, the promulgation of the Ordinance on Forest Protection led to the recruitment of 10,000 full-time public forestry-inspectors to work at all levels throughout the country. Since the 80's, the general endeavours to protect the environment including the biodiversity protection have been more intensive and systematic.

In 1985, the Vietnam's National Conservation Strategy was formulated. This strategy, the first of this kind being developed in a developing country, was highly welcomed by the world community.

In 1991, the Government approved the National Plan on Environment and Sustainable Development the period 1991-2000. This plan served as a basis, leading to the drafting and later on the adoption of the Law

on Environmental Protection in 1994, as well as to the establishment of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and Departments of Science, Technology and Environment in all provinces.

At the national level, it is an imperative to formulate and promulgate a National Action Plan on Biological Diversity.

1. REVIEW OF THE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY PROTECTION SITUATION OF VIETNAM

1.1. The economic utilisation of species

The economic utilisation of species can be seen first of all in the wood exploitation of between 1,3 - 1,7 million cubic meters per year while other forestry products such as rattan, canes, bamboo and fuel are also exploited for economic purposes. About 100,000 tons of bamboo were logged for the paper industry. Of the total national demand of energy, 75% is supplied by fuelwood. It is estimated that between 22 to 23 million tons of fuelwood are exploited annually from the natural forests. Besides, 2300 flora species and a number of wildlife fauna species are exploited to provide medicines, food for human being and livestock, raw materials for industries and handicrafts. A increasing amount of products are being traded with the neighbouring countries.

Every year, fishing products estimated at 1 million tons per year, have provided one half of the total amount of the national fauna protein. Between 60% to 70% are fish exploited from the sea resource. About 20,000 to 30,000 tons of fish, soft-shell turtles, frogs are provided by the freshwater resource, while cultured fish also yields about 200 tons a year.

1.2. Threats to the biodiversity

With the gradual reduction of the ecosystems resulting in the gradual loss of habitats, many species are facing the danger of extinction. In Vietnam's Red Book, scientists have listed over 300 fauna and 350 flora species as endangered species facing the danger of extinction. This situation is generally caused by:

* Over-exploitation:

The exploitation of wood and other forestry products still poses a big threat even though there is now a strong limit on the forest areas which are legally exploitable. The large-scale exploitation of energy is hard to control and poses the biggest threat to the biodiversity in many countries. The forest quality and capacity have been more and more reduced in the areas close to human residence. In many areas, forests have been divided, becoming smaller in size and separate from one another. Consequently, they can no longer support and create the environment for the abundance of species like before.

Over-fishing is also a fact of life that occurs throughout the country. Moreover, the fishing methods are not applied according to approved standards. Destructive methods have even been in practice such as using traps, heck set-up, small-meshed nets, dynamite and toxic substances in some areas.

Coral exploitation is the highest concern in the Central Coastal Area from Da Nang to Thuan Hai Provinces. The exploitation of dead coral in the tidal areas to generate raw materials for the cement production using dynamite (in Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan) seriously damages the living environment of many marine organisms and reduces the capacity of erosion prevention in the coastal areas.

* Shifting cultivation and the encroachment of arable land

A number of ethnic minorities have practiced shifting cultivation for generations. According to their practice, the fields can be cultivated for some consecutive years then abandoned for a few years as a fallow period to wait for forest restoration before being subject again to the slash-and-burn cultivation. This practice used to clear only a small size of forests while it could help enrich the species by providing habitats for new ones. Due to the population growth, this practice is no longer stable and the sequence of land use is

gradually shortened with the consequences of gradual deforestation. The immigration, forest clearing for arable land or aquaculture, also contributes to the gradual area reduction of the forest ecosystems.

Shifting cultivation is also a reason for forest fire. Of the remaining 9 million hectares of forests, 56% is fire prone in the dry season. The forest areas being burned each year are between 20,000 to 30,000 hectares, even 100,000 hectares in certain year. Deforestation resulted in a major reduction in biodiversity.

* Water Pollution

Oil pollution is regarded as the worst disaster for the marine environment. As a result of oil exploitation and sea transport, the proportion of oil mixed with the coastal water has often exceeded the permissible level of between 0.4 to 1.0 mg/l many times. Quang Ninh province also suffers a serious problem of sedimentation on the coastal areas due to coal and clay exploitation. Millions of tons of sand and mud due to the dredging activities at the sea-ports (Hai Phong dredges 3 - 5 tons per year) often cause the estuary and coastal sedimentation which contain oil and toxic substances, creating negative impacts on the coastal ecosystems and marine organisms.

* The degradation of the coastal areas

The construction of coastal aquaculture ponds, land reclamation from the sea to create fields for salt production or for agricultural cultivation, human settlement along the coastal areas often contributes to the reduction of the tidal zones, the increase in the salinity, changes in the sedimentation process, causing destruction to or serious degradation of the tidal swamps. The large-scale exploitation of sand and stones for construction and of other mineral resources causes land erosion in the coastal areas of the Southern Central Region and the reduction of water resources, affecting the lower layer of the marine ecosystems.

* The transition to the market economy

Changes towards the market economy mechanism have had strong impact on the farmers. The farmers are now under pressure to apply many new varieties and species in order to have the produce yields that meet the current market demands. This poses a great danger to the traditional varieties and plant species which have long been suitable to grow in the local climate and soils. They have the valuable phenotypes but may be ignored by their failure, in a short- term perspective, to meet the present market demands.

The present situation regarding the exploitation and utilisation of species makes the biodiversity protection task more urgent than ever before.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE VIETNAM NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

2.1. The long-term objective of the Plan is to:

- protect the rich and unique biodiversity resources within the sustainable development framework of Vietnam;

2.2. The immediate objectives of the plan are to:

* Protect the country's endemic ecosystems, the vulnerable ecosystems which are now facing the danger of reduction or destruction caused by human economic activities.

* Protect those biodiversity components which are now subject to be over-exploited or ignored.

* Promote and identify the utilisation values of all biodiversity components on the basis of sustainable development of natural resources in order to serve the country's economic targets.

3. MAIN CONTENTS OF THE ACTION PLAN

Biodiversity protection is a long-term task which needs to be carried out by different 5 - year programmes. A number of the following urgent actions should be included in specific Plan:

3.1. Policies and legal issues

The Law on Environmental Protection passed by the National Assembly provides the general guidance for the environmental protection. However, many more by-law regulations and supporting documents should be prepared in order to strengthen the enforcement of the Law and other legal documents.

Law enforcement is one of the pressing issues to which more attention should be paid. This requires the strengthening of technical and management capacity for the concerned institutions, staff training is also needed for these institutions. A number of laws and regulations should be reformed while the introduction of economic instruments based on the market mechanism as well as punitive actions need to be studied and implemented.

The by-law regulations should deal with such issues as the exploitation and sustainable use of natural resources, the control of the trading in the rare species as well as the unique bio- materials of Vietnam, pollution prevention and control. These issues should be included also in the regulations on environmental impact assessments.

The effective protection of biodiversity requires a clarification, readjustment or strengthening of the functions, and duties entrusted to the State management organisations concerned as well as of the regulations on those activities carried out by economic establishments that have impacts on the environment. Therefore, priority should be given to the sectoral review of the functions and duties of the organisations which manage the protected areas.

3.2. Establishment and management of protected areas

3.2.1. Immediately establish and well manage the protected areas with high biodiversity values. Planning and enlargement of forest and forest land in 87 specialised forests which have been identified. Primary priority should be given to those protected areas of high biodiversity values such as: Pu Mat (Nghe An Province); Vu Quang (Ha Tinh Province), Hoang Lien Son (Lao Cai Province), Ba Be (Cao Bang Province), Cat Ba (Hai Phong), Cuc Phuong (Ninh Binh Province), Ke Go Lake (Ha Tinh Province), Bach Ma (Thua Thien Hue Province), Nam Ca (Dac Lac Province), Chu Giang Sinh (Dac Lac Province), Bi Dup (Lam Dong Province), Cat Tien (Dong Nai Province).

Strengthen and develop the buffer zones surrounding the protected areas, discourage intensive farming on sloping land, gradually stop the shifting cultivation, stabilise the life of the people and raise their awareness so that they will voluntarily join the protection force.

3.2.2. Develop the planning and creation of a number of important wetland areas in Ca Mau, or close to the Red River delta, the bird colonies and the Tam Giang Lagoon, etc.

These areas are located outside the specialised forests but close to human residence where the people have great demands to exploit these areas for such many different purposes as aquaculture, coastal forests and waterway transportation, etc. It is therefore necessary to pay special attention right from the outset to the biodiversity protection of these wetlands and to the prevention of contamination sources, especially from the water and to the control of the water over-drainage.

3.2.3. Build a number of protected areas for sea and inland water bodies. As the sea areas with high biodiversity are usually the ones that can provide high economic values, priority should be given to the protection of those sea areas that have highest biodiversity values.

3.2.4. Build gene banks of flora, micro-organisms and domesticated animals. Supply genetic materials for hybridising and selecting varieties to serve economic purposes as well as to "ensure" the genetic sources in

nature. To enhance capacity of zoos which can serve as places for sight-seeing, training and raising the general awareness on the environment. These places are also useful for scientific research, conservation of wildlife which are endangered, and when conditions permit, these species should be released back to the protected areas.

3.2.5. Organise integrated management of the coastal areas within the framework of sustainable development. Many activities in the coastal areas should be carried out in an integrated manner, such as: developing protected forests, mangrove forest exploitation, growing aquaculture, land reclamation for farming, human settlement and coastal industry. development, etc.

3.2.6. Enhance measures to protect agricultural biodiversity, bring into full play the various forms of "farming conservation"; encourage farmers to participate in the common protection efforts; special attention should be given to the conservation of popular traditional varieties which have long been adapted to the local geography and climate.

3.3. Awareness building

3.3.1. Utilise such mass media instruments as radio, television, newspapers, posters, etc. to raise the public awareness on biodiversity, encourage people to protect the general benefits of biodiversity.

3.3.2. Provide necessary information through short symposiums, study tours to biodiversity protection institutions within and outside the country to help management officers or policy-makers to have better understanding and knowledge concerning the biodiversity importance.

3.3.3. Carry out propaganda and dissemination of knowledge and methods necessary for the rational use of endemic natural resources for the ethnic communities so that they can both exploit and protect these resources. Encouragement and technical support should be rendered to people so that they can protect the traditional plant and animals for medicines and transform gradually from their natural exploitation methods to scientific ones by raising their awareness of sustainable use of the natural resource values.

3.3.4. Prepare biodiversity education curriculum for the school system which could be incorporated within the biological programmes or the environmental education in general.

3.4. Capacity building and staff training

3.4.1. Give priority to the training for officers who are involved in the biodiversity management at all levels and technical staff who are directly involved in enforcement. In addition, training should also be given to the members of mass organisations, associations and farming households who participate in the protection of biodiversity.

3.4.2. Set up a national biodiversity database and a biodiversity databank beneficial to the management and research activities promote the international information exchange concerning these issues.

3.4.3. Establish a system to monitor the changes in biodiversity resources in order to timely provide necessary information to the state management organisations.

3.5. Scientific research

Attention should be given to the following guidelines for scientific and technological research:

3.5.1. Carry out research on technologies which can be appropriately used in the rational exploitation and sustainable utilisation of biodiversity resources. Give priority to the scientific research on the exploitation technology and the use of biodiversity components in agriculture and pharmacy.

3.5.2. Carry out research on the criteria and standards to evaluate the changes in biodiversity resources, using these criteria and standards as the basis for the evaluation of these resources values.

3.5.3. Study issues relating to bio-safety, ensuring the safe reception and transfer of bio-technology.

3.5.4. Carry out research on and growing of precious and rare sea organisms and forest animals that have high economic values but are subject to over-exploitation and facing the consequent danger of extinction.

3.5.5. Study biodiversity issues occurring in neighbouring countries which have natural conditions similar to ours, recognising that Vietnam and these countries have various common demands in the protection of their mutual benefits as well as exchange of technology.

3.6. Socio-economic issues

The crucial issue of the National Action Plan on Biodiversity is to bring about the sustainable development of the country, to examine and anticipate the interaction between the Plan and the country's socio-economic conditions in order to have appropriate adjustments. The plan must create conditions for, and ensure the support of, the people who live nearby the natural resources for their increased benefits. Therefore, priority should be given to projects which assist the people with the building of the buffer zones, the application of advanced technological achievements, upgrading of infrastructure, improvement of the social welfare, so as to ensure the balanced income for the people, thus preventing them from further encroachment into the protected areas.

The socio-economic programmes managed by the line ministries or branches and implemented in the areas adjacent to the protected areas should be implemented in conformity with the plan on biodiversity protection. The exploitation of Natural resources must be carried out sustainability.

A number of new economic developments close to protected areas or areas which have sensitive ecosystems will be subject to pay a fee for the environmental protection.

3.7. International cooperation

The fact that Vietnam has ratified the Convention on Biodiversity creates a good basis for a broadened international cooperation in this area. It is necessary to appeal international organisations, foreign governments and individuals, to provide practical technical training and financial assistance for the step-by-step implementation of this plan.

With regard to the neighbouring countries, for the mutual interests of each country, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation in the scientific research, exchange of information and technology and to work together for the protection and development of their biodiversity values.

4. ACTIVITIES NEEDED TO BE, CARRIED OUT IN THE PERIOD 1996-2000

In the five-year plan from 1996-2000, based on the State resources, efforts should be focused on the priority targets in order to carry out the following actions:

4.1. Policies and legal issues: complete a system of by-law regulations in order to create a legal framework for the implementation of the Law on Environmental Protection and of the Conventions relating to Biological Diversity:

4.1.1. Formulate regulations on the conservation, utilisation, exploitation and exchange of genetic resources, varieties and breeds with a view to:

* Manage rare and precious precious natural resources of the country which have immediate and long-term practical economic values.

* Protect the national sovereignty and act in conformity with those international conventions which Vietnam has ratified concerning these natural resources.

4.1.2. Coordinate all the existing laws and regulations on the management, exploitation and utilisation, of biological resources for whatever purposes with a view to:

* Identify the loop-holes and shortcomings of those documents previously promulgated by different ministries or branches.

* Reform and rectify these documents in order to make them compatible with the new changes in the national economic management mechanism and, at the same time, to ensure the sustainable exploitation and utilisation of the biological resources with a sustainable development approach.

4.1.3. Make public those less sustainable ecosystems in the "sensitive" terrestrial and aquatic environmental areas and promulgate corresponding protection regulations in order to prevent the degradation or destruction of these ecosystems as the result of adverse environmental impacts created by industrial development.

4.2. Establishment and management of protected areas

4.2.1. Locate and enlarge the forest protected and land areas in order to:

* Increase the size and acreage of each specialised forests of the total 87 forests already approved by the Government.

* Legalise all land use documents concerning these areas.

4.2.2 Consolidate and establish the protected areas with high biodiversity values which have been identified.

Priority for investment should be first given to these areas because of their national and international high biodiversity values. Along with the consolidation and establishment of strictly protected areas, synchronised plan should be worked out to develop the buffer zones so as to stabilise the living conditions of the local inhabitants.

4.2.3 Carry out the selection, planning and establishment of a number of important wetlands in the identified areas.

Special protection and priority should be given to these areas as these areas are rich in biodiversity but very sensitive to the environmental pollution and usually associated with many economic activities.

4.2.4 Carry out the selection, planning and establishment of a number of important marine reserves in the areas of Ha Long Bay, the coast line from Khanh Hoa to Binh Thuan Province, and in the Con Dao and Phu Quoc islands.

These areas are very rich in biodiversity, inhabited by many marine species and directly interlinked with the protection of the water resources and important fish grounds of the country.

4.2.5. Consolidate and establish genetic conservation centres for raising plants and animals, and micro-biological organism aimed at protecting the precious and rare genetic resources with high economic values and supplying genetic materials for breeding.

4.2.6. Strengthen and upgrade the capacity for the zoos in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City in order to better use them as facilities to educate people's consciousness of environmental protection in general and biodiversity conservation in particular. In addition, these zoos can also be used as research centres to raise

the rare and precious animals which are facing the danger of natural extinction and to release them back to their habitats when conditions arise.

4.3. General awareness building

4.3.1. Keep the public constantly informed of the values of biodiversity in order to enhance the population's awareness of these values so that they will have better sense of responsibility to protect the biodiversity resources.

4.3.2. Provide necessary information on biodiversity to officials at all levels particularly officials at the local levels in order to help them with better understanding of the biodiversity values; at the same time these officials should be assisted with information to make necessary decisions concerning the protection of these natural resources.

4.4. Capacity building and staff training

4.4.1. Organise short-term training courses, seminars within and outside the country to strengthen the capacity and professional expertise for the management and technical staff at all levels and branches who are involved in the biodiversity-related work.

4.4.2. Establish a national network of database on biodiversity with a view to have a unified system of database and information on biodiversity throughout the country, creating favourable conditions for the general capacity building.

4.5. Scientific research

4.5.1. Conduct research and studies on technologies for the sustainable exploitation and utilisation of biodiversity components; priority will be given to those technologies that could be used profitably in agriculture, medicines and pharmacy aimed at better utilising the values of biodiversity components and thus making practical contributions to the achievement of the national socio-economic targets.

4.5.2. Study the criteria and standards to assess the changes of biodiversity components in order to develop a long-term scientific basis for the protection, supervision and assessment of the trends in biodiversity.

4.5.3. Study the issues relating to the safety of the biodiversity values in the receipt and transfer of technologies especially biotechnology.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The National Action Plan on Biological Diversity is worked out to serve the long-term benefits of the country. It also demonstrates to the world community our responsibility towards the conservation of the common heritage of mankind.

All organisations, branches concerned are Obligated to implement this Action Plan.

Hanoi, 22 December 1995

Minister of Science, Technology and Environment

(signed)

DANG HUU