

## Protecting our biodiversity

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In addition to envisaging a resilient nation effectively tackling impacts of climate change and natural disasters, the Vision expresses Bangladesh's commitment to conserve and enhance its biodiversity. This commitment has been translated into Article 18 A of the Constitution of Bangladesh (2011); the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act, 2012; the National Sustainable Development Strategy (2013); the 7th Five Year Plan (2015); and the National Conservation Strategy (draft 2016). As Bangladesh progresses fast towards becoming a middle-income country, we envisage changes in the ways she protects her biodiversity.

We expect changes in our mindset. We need to see conservation as a holistic action linked with our daily needs, our

economy, our culture, and our moral stands. Conservation is not a responsibility of the government or of any particular institution or of wildlife biologists alone, but is a

responsibility of every citizen of this nation.

Every species, small or big, has a role in the environment they are in. Conserving the Bengal Tigers of the Sundarbans or the vultures of Rema-Kalenga or the dolphins of the Jamuna is necessary as they are on the verge of extinction due to our actions. But, we also need to think of the ecosystems they live in and all other small and big lives, and the soil and the water, which make those habitats liveable. We need to value nature and its biodiversity not only as resources to be exploited, but a space to be explored sustainably, through conservation.

We sometimes calculate how much an ecosystem is worth by putting figures on its services – the oxygen it supplies, the food it provides, and the protection it offers us against cyclones, for example. Such economic valuations of ecosystem services are sometimes useful to convince the policy-makers and the people why we need to conserve an ecosystem or how rich we are if we consider the value of our natural systems – monetarily. But, an ecosystem or its species is a result of a very long evolutionary process. We can put a value on the services a snail offers us, but we cannot put a price on its million years' journey on this earth.

Species extinction is a natural process, but humans have expedited that process. What was supposed to happen in thousands of years, we are making it happen within a few decades. And that trend must be changed. Therefore, we need to see biodiversity conservation as our moral duty, irrespective of its role in nature.

We also need to see our development activities from a landscape perspective. Every developmental action in one place, at one time, does

not stay in that space or time. In addition to their good impacts on economy and human wellbeing, negative impacts of our development actions do spread out in nature. We need to consider nature-based solutions and technologies to minimise these negative impacts so that services an ecosystem naturally gives us would continue.

In ever-changing social and economic environments, we need to promote innovations in biodiversity conservation. Such innovations may range from using drones for biodiversity exploration and monitoring to using digital simulations as tools for awareness, influencing and decision-making, to incentive mechanisms for safe-guarding ecosystems.

As we progress towards Vision 2021, we expect that people's participation and political will for biodiversity protection increases day by day. We want to see our conservation policies and decisions supported by up-to-date knowledge and facts. We want to see a culture and a system of evidence-based decision making. We expect an ecosystem where conservation practices, knowledge and policies interact with each other, making each other stronger. In this way Bangladesh can ensure effective protection of her biodiversity at the local, national and regional levels, through collaborations, mutual trust, and collective aspiration.

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