

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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TIGER CONSERVATION STRATEGY WORKSHOP

The attached document from the Global Tiger Forum is provided by the Secretariat.

## TIGER CONSERVATION STRATEGY WORKSHOP

The 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Global Tiger Forum, held at Dhaka, Bangladesh, in January 2000, identified four (4) key issues affecting the future of tigers. These were:-

1. The loss and degradation of habitat
2. The reduction of preybase
3. Poaching and illegal trade
4. Reconciling human development needs and tiger conservation.

While item No. 3 – Poaching and illegal trade – is the mandate of CITES, but other items do not fall within the ambit of CITES, as acknowledged in the report of the High Level Political Mission of CITES in the year 2000 and as reflected in the item No. 32 of CoP.14, Doc.52 of CITES Secretariat circulated for discussion in the 14<sup>th</sup> CoP of CITES in June 2007.

Considering the renewed threat tiger was facing world over again, leading to dissemination of a significant part of its wild population in many tiger range countries, in the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Global Tiger Forum, held at Kathmandu, Nepal, in April 2007, it was *inter alia* decided that "*GTF should work with the IUCN(SSC and Cat Specialist Group) to convene an international workshop to develop a global tiger conservation strategy in a participatory process, involving range countries and other stakeholders – non-range states, international and national NGOs, and local communities as appropriate and feasible*".

The 14<sup>th</sup> CoP of CITES, after detailed discussions on Asian Big Cats, also decided *inter alia* that "*Contingent upon availability of external funding, the Secretariat shall: convene a tiger trade enforcement meeting within 12 months of the end of COP14; and cooperate in the development of a Conservation strategy workshop, to be facilitated by IUCN and Global Tiger Forum (building on recent scientific work, including the 2006 Tiger conservation Landscape Assessment) and other relevant organizations*".

The Global Tiger Forum Secretariat was in correspondence with IUCN, Species Survival Commission, all member tiger range countries and key international NGOs on this subject to work out how fruitfully the conservation strategy workshop could be organized, what should be the level and magnitude of the participation, which could be appropriate venue and whom we can approach for funding the said workshop. While some feedbacks have been received with respect to the topics to be discussed, but no specific view has emerged yet about the venue and time of the workshop. Consequently, the issue of funding the workshop has also remained unresolved.

The feedbacks received indicate that, while there have to be some generic approach and actions, but there would be the need for individual actions within the overall perspectives and framework, to suit the specific situation and requirements of individual countries. The broad items which have been identified for discussion, for adopting proper global tiger conservation strategy are the following:-

1. Comprehensive scientific assessment of tiger population for a bench mark year and cycle thereof
2. Landscape level habitat protection with graded managerial interventions for core, buffers and corridors
3. Protection of preybase of tiger including its enrichment where necessary
4. Addressing man-tiger conflict in order to reduce the same

5. Human resource development and capacity building of various stakeholders through appropriate training and sensitization programmes
6. Anti-poaching and anti-trade operations (note given separately under 'Enforcement Workshop')
7. Follow up of the National Tiger Action Plans including its updating and working out the cost; where necessary
8. Informal and formal arrangements for transboundary cooperation and its follow up actions
9. Massive education and awareness programme to garner public support for tiger conservation
10. Deciding the issue of captive breeding of tiger based on scientific and practical considerations

Key issues which are essential for discussion in order to work out field based action programmes are given herein after under each head separately (except item No. 6, which has been dealt with separately under the broad topic 'Enforcement Workshop'):-

1. **Comprehensive scientific assessment of tiger population for a bench mark year and cycle thereof:**

One of the decisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of Global Tiger Forum (GTF) was that each range countries will be requested by GTF Secretariat to build a baseline data on the distribution and estimated population size of tiger and submit the same to the Secretariat by December 2001. This decision was taken so that the global position of tiger is documented at the beginning of the new millennium in a bench mark year. While a number of countries have taken up assessment of tiger population after this decision and request from the GTF Secretariat, but unfortunately this has not been done for a bench mark year. For example, assessment of tiger population and distribution was done in Cambodia in the year 2002, Bangladesh (2004), Vietnam (2004), Russia (2005), Nepal (2006), Myanmar (2006-07), India (2007), China (2007). The same has been done spread over four years in Thailand (2000-2004) and six years in Indonesia for major protected areas (2001-2007). No comprehensive assessment of tiger population has been done in Bhutan after 1998, Malaysia after 1993 and no assessment at all in last 10 years for Lao PDR and North Korea. Apart from that, the methodology adopted for assessment varied from country to country, starting from questionnaire survey, pug mark census, verification of signs and scats, abundance of preybase, records of prey killed by tiger, camera trapping etc. This has been done in some cases singly and in other cases through combined methods. This puts the entire assessment reports by governments into a big question about its validity. It is therefore important to standardize methods depending upon different habitats, ecological conditions, country specific scenarios and agree to some standard format for presentation of results. For this, following issues are necessary to be known:

- For countries who have not done any comprehensive estimation at all in the last 10 years, like Laos and North Korea, about the reasons for not undertaking the same.
- For countries like Bhutan and Malaysia, what support they expect from GTF/developed countries/international NGOs to conduct fresh survey before the end of the year 2009.
- Are the countries planning for a regular cycle for tiger estimation and distribution? If so, will it be 5 years/10 years for national estimation and 2 years/3years for estimation in major protected areas?
- Is it possible to harmonise the estimation to a fixed time of a year for tiger landscape/tiger conservation unit, which extend beyond the international boundary, to avoid overlaps due to cross border movements of animals.
- Commitment regarding time bound support (technical and financial) from developed countries and international NGOs.

## 2. Landscape level habitat protection with graded managerial interventions for core, buffers and corridors:

Deliberations in various international conventions regarding IUCN, CITES and GTF have clearly indicated that shrinkage and degradation of the habitat is one of the key reasons for declining tiger population and that tiger cannot be saved in protected areas if the overall landscapes suffers from serious deterioration. Even though several international organizations have suggested landscape level tiger conservation through establishment of TCU's and TCL's with graded managerial interventions for core, buffers and corridors, the present status of response for this plan and follow up action programmes varies from country to country. It is therefore necessary to know the exact steps taken in individual countries to adopt landscape level habitat protection programme and if there are formulated legal/administrative provisions/orders to implement the concept. The key issues required to be known are:

- Have all countries identified and demarcated core areas for tiger conservation and installed legal frame work that no destructive development would be allowed in such areas.
- Have they identified and demarcated buffer zones for each core area and have provided corridors linking one area with the other. If so, proper documentation and dissemination of information.
- Are there legal provisions and measures in place to completely stop or controlling diversion of forest land having tiger, for non-forestry purposes. If so, what are the provisions and penalties and if the real culprits and kingpins have been punished for such violations (instead of handling agents/intermediaries).

## 3. Protection of preybase of tiger including its enrichment where necessary:

The decline of preybase is also another major reasons for vanishing of tiger over several landscapes. It is thus essential that future strategy for tiger conservation must have strict provisions for protection and development of the preybase and taking up captive breeding of wild preybase and their release back in the wild, in severely depleted areas to provide natural food for tiger. There are still some countries which allow hunting of tiger's preybase without proper assessment.. It is thus necessary to know:

- Whether the countries have taken up appropriate assessment of the carrying capacity regarding tiger and its preybase, before allowing such huntings. If not, why not?
- Have they identified the reasons for depletion of the preybase and taken effective actions to control and improve the same.
- What are the legal provisions available for protection of tiger preybase.
- Are the legal provisions properly implemented and appropriate (maximum) punishments given to offenders involved in decline/destruction of the preybase.
- Where the preybase has declined to a critical state, have they taken up captive breeding of wild preybase and releasing back of the same in identified tiger habitat. If not, what prevents them in taking up the same.

## 4. Addressing man-tiger conflict in order to reduce the same:

Due to destruction/disturbance of habitat and reduction of preybase, tiger has been forced in many areas to come out of its existing habitat in search of food and are depending on livestock for its food. In this process of lifting of livestock there are also cases of confrontation with man leading to injuries and death to human being. It will be futile to think of effective tiger conservation over long term unless these tiger-human conflict issues are addressed. For this purpose, following issues are essential:

- Documentation of human beings killed and injured by tiger over the years, with the trend and analysis thereof. (Details to be furnished)
- Developing proper database of killing and injuries of livestock by tiger with the trend and analysis thereof. (Details to be furnished)
- Managerial interventions that have been made to reduce the killing or injury of human beings and livestock by tiger. (Details to be furnished)
- Launching of proper compensation/relief schemes to address such killing or injury both to humans and livestock. (Details to be furnished)
- What are the processes to grant/release such compensation package to the local people. Whether these are efficient and quick.

5. **Human resource development and capacity building for various stakeholders through appropriate training and sensitization programmes:**

In many tiger range countries effective tiger conservation has not been possible due to inadequate capacity of the field staff including enforcement agencies, to implement the programmes/provisions scientifically and effectively. Very often staff rejected from other spheres of forestry management are put to wildlife conservation. There is hardly any motivation for the staff to carry out the job of wildlife conservation properly, which are mostly in interior areas having no facilities for common services and are subject to threats from insurgents and militants. These act as de-motivation factors for the staff to work sincerely. It is thus necessary to know whether the countries have got the following:

- Adequate and appropriate staff for wildlife conservation who have interest and commitment for the subject.
- Are there any incentive measures in position to compensate the hardships/risks of posting in interior areas and taking care of education and welfare of their families.
- How much percentage of the staff posted in wildlife conservation are properly trained. If less, what prevents in doing so?
- Whether the staff posted are properly equipped in terms of arms, ammunitions and mobility to challenge sophisticated/organized poachers and mafias.
- Whether appropriate provisions are there for giving rewards to protection staff for glaring detection of wildlife crime cases in spite of the risk involved. If so, what are the details of such awards and incentive schemes.

6. **Anti-poaching and anti-trade operations:**

(Note given separately under Enforcement Workshop)

7. **Follow up of the National Tiger Action Plans including its updating and working out the cost; where necessary:**

12 countries' national Tiger Action Plans have been compiled by GTF Secretariat with the help of International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and those have already been circulated to all tiger range countries, developed countries interested in tiger conservation and international NGOs. However, out of the 12 Action Plans, Myanmar (2003), Bangladesh (2004), Thailand (2004), Bhutan (2005) and Nepal (2007) are comparatively recent and comprehensively prepared. While that of Indonesia, even though it is comprehensive, was prepared in the year 1994 and has become outdated. The Action Plans of China (1998),

Russia (1996), Vietnam (2005) and India (2007) can be termed as strategies only. The National Tiger Action Plans of Cambodia (1994), Malaysia (1995) can be treated as blue prints only. There are no tiger action plans with respect to Laos and North Korea. Out of the 12 National Tiger Action Plans, seven are costed, viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Cambodia, India, Nepal and Vietnam. It could thus be seen that the tiger action plans varies in quality, details and also there are many action plans without any cost figures. Since IFAW has agreed to publish a revised document on its own cost, by the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of GTF in 2010, it is necessary for the countries to do the following:

- For post 2000 action plans, the countries should develop cost figures, latest by mid 2009, so that the updated version of the Action Tiger could be prepared and placed during the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of GTF in early 2010.
- For countries not having recent updated tiger action plans they must give commitment for updating of the plan within mid 2009, along with developing the cost figures and submit the same to GTF Secretariat for compilation.
- The Action Plans with the cost figures should indicate year wise cost and time frame for implementation of each line of activities.
- Countries having recent updated Action Plans should report on the actual implementation of the Action Plans and problems faced in the implementation of the Action Plans with suggestions for substitutions or modifications of the programme, if necessary.
- The countries should indicate the support they require from outside, if any, in terms of technical expertise and funding as necessary, for preparation/implementation of the Plans.

8. **Informal and formal arrangements for transboundary cooperation and its follow up actions:**

A notable feature of protected area systems of tiger range countries is that a significant number of them lie adjacent to each other across the national border. Sizeable populations of tiger also live in such areas. It therefore calls for international cooperation and agreements between tiger range countries for transboundary conservation to ensure the long term future of tiger in such areas. As per reports available, agreements for transboundary cooperation, especially related to wildlife, so far as tiger range countries are concerned, exist between the following countries:

- India and China (March 1995), Nepal and China – TAR (1996), India and Nepal (January 1997), Russia and China (November 1997), India and Bhutan (April 2007), Vietnam and China (Year ?), Vietnam and Lao PDR (Year ?)

Broad elements of these resolutions/recommendations/protocols, which are common to most of the countries are:

- Cracking down individually and jointly poaching and illegal trade in wild species
- Developing basic and scientific database and dissemination of the same
- Organizing institutional training and field based training and visit programmes
- Holding periodic meetings and discussions to analyse and monitor the results of the actions taken
- Opening local level institutional mechanism for quicker reciprocal action on agreed points
- Launching national and world wide campaign to stop smuggling and illegal trade of wildlife

Certain issues which are specific to some agreements, in addition to above, are:

- Experimental captive breeding of tiger with a view to release them back in the wild (India – China)
- Improving national legislation to address the requirements of CITES (India – Nepal)
- Studying and monitoring the illegal trade routes between countries (India - Nepal & India - Bhutan)
- Studying and monitoring transboundary movements of wild animals (India - Nepal & India - Bhutan)
- Developing in-country mechanism to involve all enforcement agencies (India - Nepal & India - Bhutan)
- Harmonious census period between two countries for avoiding overlaps (India – Bhutan)
- Establishment of complimentary transboundary spaces for focused conservation plan (India – Bhutan)

In addition, negotiations are at final stage of communication between India and Bangladesh for conservation of tiger in Sundarbans and at preliminary stage between India and Myanmar. Another identified area, which has got huge prospects of transboundary cooperation, is the conceived idea of a Tri-national Park between Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia.

It is not necessary that all conservation proposals must lead to formal agreements. For some issues and cases, soft options or informal understanding between the operating agencies at the field level can also be worked out. Similarly, a protocol or understanding once signed/agreed or developed must be followed up to see that these are reflected into actions for ultimate benefits. The workshop therefore should know from countries:

- Actual follow up actions on all existing protocols signed/agreed between various countries with further updating of the same, if that is necessary.
- Identification of the actions which do require formal agreement for meeting international obligations and implementation as well as the actions that could be worked out and implemented at operational level, without going through the Ministry of Foreign affairs.
- The countries should also indicate what role they expect GTF to play in development and follow up of these protocols including updating, where necessary.

#### 9. **Massive education and awareness programme to garner public support for tiger conservation:**

It is a hard realization of all actors involved in wildlife conservation, the tiger conservation in particular, that no programme of tiger conservation would be successful without support of various stakeholders involved in the issue. Most of the people do not understand the role played by tiger in ecosystem conservation, which ultimately has an ameliorating influence on human existence. This education and awareness programme must cover the grass root level people living in the fringes of protected areas, other stakeholders involved/linked/affected by tiger conservation, as well as elites, decision makers and politicians. It is therefore necessary to know from each country:

- Whether proper education materials – literatures, video and mass media approach are in position, reflecting the value of tiger conservation.
- Whether tiger conservation has been included as a part of syllabus of primary, secondary and college levels.
- Whether proper networking of institutions exist between clubs, schools, institutions and community groups for a harmonious approach.
- Whether private sectors have been approached to contribute for tiger conservation with benefits of income tax etc. If so, with what results.

- Whether sensitization courses and discussions have been initiated to involve the decision makers, law enforcement agencies and policy planners, to take up the issue of tiger conservation in the overall national development goals.

The countries may update the workshop on these issues.

10. **Deciding the issue of captive breeding of tiger based on scientific and practical considerations:**

Even though the majority of tiger conservationists believe that captive breeding of tiger has got no beneficial effect for wild tiger conservation, still following the Earth Summit at Rio (1992) on sustainable utilization of resources and principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity, a group of people are lobbying for captive breeding of tiger for the purpose of conservation of wild tiger. The issue was discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of GTF held in India, in November 2001, and a resolution G.A. 2.01.1-Conf was adopted, interalia *"Opposed any move to legitimize trade in captive bred specimens, parts and derivatives of tigers except those involving exchange, gifts or making available live specimens between institutions that are recognized by the World Zoo Organisation (IUDZG)".* This was also discussed in the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of GTF in April 2007, which endorsed the stand of the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of GTF until further review in subsequent period, after the outcome of the 14<sup>th</sup> CoP of CITES and results of tiger strategy workshop of China (July 2007) are known. The parties in the CITES CoP14 also discussed the issue at great length and decided interalia *"Parties with intensive operations breeding tigers on a commercial scale shall implement measures to restrict the captive population to a level supportive only to conserving wild tigers; tiger should not be bred for trade in their parts and derivatives".*

The tiger strategy workshop at China in July 2007, though presented divergent views, but held that the strategy for tiger conservation cannot be taken in isolation based on the perception and problems of captive bred tigers only. The decision has to be taken on holistic basis, on critical examination of the efforts made towards in situ tiger conservation, analysis of the reasons for its success and failures as the case may be. While the workshop did open some conceptual alternative approach, but it was felt by the majority that those are required to be substantiated by specific success stories, relevant case studies and more brain storming discussions on reasons for success and failures of wild tiger conservation at various sites under varied conditions in different countries.

The main issue here is that till today nobody has been able to give an accepted justification about retaining the huge stock of captive bred tigers, which may be in the level of about 15,000 world over, the highest figure reportedly being in the United States, (the stock being mostly with private individuals) and the second highest being in China, (mostly with tiger breeding farms). The question that comes up are:

- What are the reasons for holding such a huge stock of tiger population in captivity when the requirements for re-introduction in the wild or their use for scientific and educational purpose are limited?
- How much of such population is genetically fit for release in the wild?
- Who keeps vigilance over the disposal of the body parts from such tigers dying in captivity.

A time has perhaps come to decide the issue once for all, so far as the species tiger is concerned, because of the inherent high cost involved in rearing of the tiger in captivity, complexity of the process that is involved in rehabilitation of the tiger in the wild, success achieved by some countries in improving wild tiger population within the protection regime, and that the country having largest captive tiger population with private individuals do not have any wild tigers and no scope for holding tiger in the wild and the country having largest tiger population in private farms are left with only 50 tigers in the wild and there is a limit upto which enrichment of wild population is possible.