

Planning Networks: Processing India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

Nikhil Anand

Abstract: *This paper explores how NGOs, state agencies and activists participated in the preparation of India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). The study is based on three months of fieldwork in the summer of 2003, during which I conducted semi-structured interviews and reviewed the documents used and produced in the planning process. While some critics view NGO involvement in state policy making with suspicion, others see it as a successful outcome of a long-standing demand for greater participation in governance. I argue that the form and structure of the NBSAP process provided a limited, yet critical, space for activists. On one hand, activists used this space to make strong critiques of state conservation practices, and to promote inclusive conservation practices. On the other, they were continuously pressured to make compromises, because of their new responsibilities as plan makers and in order to increase the likelihood of 'buy-in' from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). Rather than being seen as encompassed or 'co-opted' by state strategies of power, however, it is more useful to see activists and NGOs as engaging in tactical manoeuvres and practising an imperfect, yet necessary, form of politics. Conscious that they were participating in an unequal and temporally limited space, activists in NGOs sought to make this project of government as plural and fair as possible. Finally, I note that although the planning document was eventually rejected by the MoEF, the network that was initiated to create the plan may produce results that go beyond the NBSAP process itself.*

Keywords: Biodiversity, participation, NGOs, governmentality, NBSAP, India, environment, conservation

Nikhil Anand, Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305, USA.

Address for Correspondence

Nikhil Anand, Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology, Stanford University, Building 110 Main Quad, Stanford CA 94305, USA.

E-mail: nikhil.anand@stanford.edu

***Conservation and Society*, Pages 471–487**

Volume 4, No. 3, September 2006

Copyright: © Nikhil Anand 2006. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use and distribution of the article, provided the original work is cited.

INTRODUCTION

THIS PAPER is part of a larger project that explores the emergence and naturalisation of biodiversity discourses through activist networks, institutional regimes, and nation-states. It describes the processes and politics through which NGOs participated in the creation of India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). Required by the international Convention on Biological Diversity to produce the NBSAP, the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) nominated Kalpavriksh, an NGO long engaged with conservation projects, to coordinate the process in 1999. Eager to have a broad and participatory planning process, Kalpavriksh constituted a Technical and Policy Core Group (TPCG) consisting of government representatives and experts in different environmental and development fields. They sent out a call for participation in eighteen languages, through both the radio and print media, and nominated over seventy groups to produce as many plans at the state, ecoregional, thematic and substate levels. In addition to this, they also invited experts to present subthematic reviews. The TPCG sought participation from a wide range of sectors, including different central and state ministries, citizens, and corporate entities. In the words of the MoEF, the NBSAP was perhaps 'India's biggest environment and development planning process' (MoEF 2002a: 1).

This paper is based on three months fieldwork carried out in the summer of 2003 in India, and in Uttaranchal more specifically, where I conducted semi-structured interviews and reviewed correspondence and various documents produced by the national, state and sub-state NBSAP planning processes until December 2003.

I begin this paper by arguing that biodiversity was a particularly conducive concept for allowing collaborations. India's biodiversity planning process held great promise. Those who participated found it easy to disregard the power differentials that they initially brought to it. However, enthusiasm for conservation collaborations became contentious once the ideas explored in planning discussions had to be formalised into the concrete language of strategy and action plans.

Reminded that they were participating in a project of *governance*, activists were frequently reminded by the MoEF to cultivate the right discipline so as to create procedures to achieve a particular set of ends (see Foucault 1991). Sometimes, activists acceded to this paternalist pressure. Therefore, in the second section of this paper I focus on how, in making certain compromises, activist participation legitimised and produced new areas for the operation of the Indian state.

Finally, I conclude the paper by focusing on the ways in which activists challenged the expectations of the state. As the textual outcomes show, governance projects were themselves critiqued during the NBSAP process. The demand for participation was, to some extent, produced by and contained

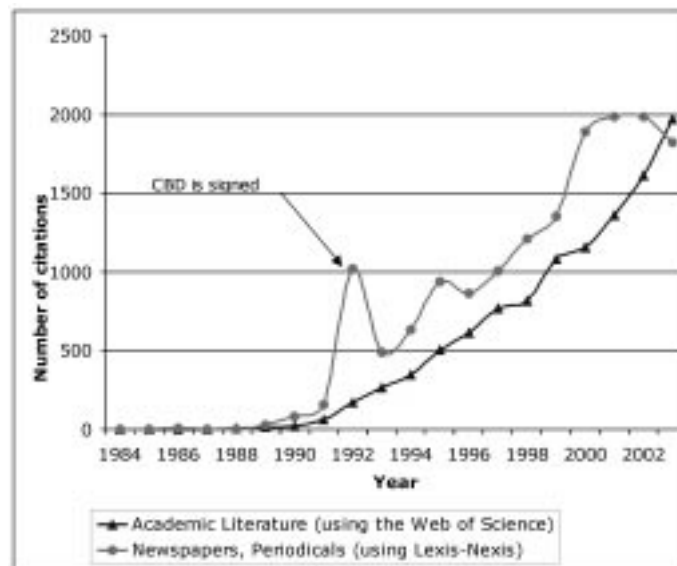
within the state's international obligation to produce a biodiversity plan. Nevertheless, by collaborating with each other and particular state functionaries, activists were able to use state space, and the processes produced therein, in interesting and compelling ways.

The Boundaries of Biodiversity

It is no accident that a wide variety of groups participated in a biodiversity plan. Biodiversity is an attractive idea for many because it serves as a catchall concept. First located in the discipline of conservation biology, the idea of biodiversity emerged as a strategy to expand the popularity of conservation, couched in a more generalisable and politically correct language of diversity (see Hayden 2003). As is evidenced in the existence of the global convention, the idea of biodiversity has by now been institutionalised by states and civil society organisations all around the world. In a 2003 article in *Conservation Biology*, Norse and Carlton claimed that the word had significant influence in global culture.¹ In agreement with their findings, my research indicates that biodiversity has been increasingly used in newspaper and magazine articles (Figure 1). Its growing usage suggests that the discourse of biodiversity holds something of interest not only for scientific, but also other publics.

Figure 1

Articles containing the word 'biodiversity' in popular and academic literature²



Coming out of an intrinsic appreciation for species variety and difference, biodiversity discourses favour local, territorialised responses to perceived problems. Along with habitat loss, the ‘unknowness’ of biodiversity presents a challenge to ecologists, who, unlike others in better-funded disciplines, tend to struggle for resources to do basic research. This work is made more difficult by tremendous political opposition to conservation projects. The increasing political engagement of *adivasis* has made the exclusive protection of all habitats no longer as politically viable as it once was. Therefore, many in scientific communities, for both financial and political reasons, believe they need to engage with a wider range of actors.

These circumstances provide a special opportunity to collaborate with forest resident communities. Many social and natural scientists have made strong arguments that *adivasi* ‘indigenous knowledge’³ can help conservation efforts. Therefore, ‘where the colonial sciences made certain kinds of local or indigenous knowledge invisible, the conservation sciences that grew out of them, particularly in their political expression, have made local knowledge – real or imagined – into a hyper-visible, exaggerated, deeply romanticised, feature of ecological science itself’ (Rademacher 2004). As some have cautioned, there are dangers in essentialising people as ‘knowing’ particular natures and cultures (see Malkki 1992; Li 1999; Baviskar 2002).⁴ However, it is important to note that while people were consistently made invisible in colonial conservation projects, biodiversity projects make these peoples visible, knowledgeable, and to an extent, knowable.⁵

Biodiversity has therefore emerged as a field of overlapping interests—a ‘boundary object’ that is ‘both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites’ (Star and Griesemer 1989: 393). It is an ‘issue that draws varied interpretive communities together by their common abilities to read [it]’ (Tsing 2001: 16). As Escobar (1998) and Rademacher (2004) argue, biodiversity provides ground for contests over meaning, and provides space in which formerly ignored groups can exercise a degree of agency and affect through collaborations with others.

Planning for Diversity – Networks and Biodiversity Planning

It is not accidental, therefore, that the NBSAP engaged a wide range of groups. The TPCG also made a strong and concerted effort to make it an extraordinarily participatory effort.⁶ The idea of participation was reiterated through the performance of the NBSAP planning process.⁷ By decentralising the process and requiring over seventy different plans, an official recognition of India’s diverse national resources, as well as its social and political institutions, was assured. Celebrating this degree of social diversity and political decentralisation, the TPCG launched a television, newspaper and radio campaign to advertise the planning process and to invite different people to

participate. A significant public response resulted: hundreds of thousands of people were reached by the advertising, and the TPCG received direct or decision-making involvement (counted as members of subsidiary working groups and respondents to the call for participation) from approximately 2400 people (MoEF 2002b).

But the TPCG also inherited a fraught and contentious legacy of biodiversity conservation in India. Since colonial times, exclusive conservation areas and national parks have displaced resident groups to make way for commercial timber extraction or tourism (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Saberwal 2000; Agrawal 2005). Over the last century the state has worked towards identifying and marking park borders and the unacceptable uses of forest resources by resident peoples. These practices label forest residents as threats, and have generally denied them access to forest resources. This has resulted in bitter struggles between resident communities (many of whom identify themselves as *adivasis* or tribals) and conservationists (Gadgil and Guha 1995). In more recent years, these conflicts have been ameliorated, to a small extent, by the designation of Village Forests and Joint Forest Management practices.

From the outset, the TPCG sought to include diverse groups in the planning process. They framed it in terms of protecting both livelihood security and ecological security. As a result, the participants in NBSAP planning had radically different, and sometimes contradictory, environmental values. In the summer of 2003 in the state of Uttaranchal, I found a range of diverse actors responsible for coordinating sections of the NBSAP. Each of the many plans in the state was coordinated by a different agency or organisation. The state plan was coordinated by the Uttaranchal Forest Department and the Zoological Survey of India. Two NGOs, Vividhara (2003) and the Foundation for Ecological Security, coordinated sub-state plans in Nahinkalan village and Pitthoragarh district respectively. As central TPCG coordinators, Kalpavriksh members brought the important aspects of these initiatives into the National plan.⁸ In addition to these groups, several other associations, including indigenous peoples movements, farmer seed sharing associations and pastoralists were involved in the national process.

Fixed Instruments – Management Plans

The TPCG worked hard to accommodate and focus discussions and arguments towards the production of a series of planning documents. These documents emerged from a process rife with power differentials, and I will focus on these differentials in this section. I argue that power was exercised and consolidated at at least three levels. First, its framing as a planning process for biodiversity determined who would take part and what could be said. Second, authors had the unenviable job of translating complex and dynamic living diversities into static and legible planning documents. These translations entailed exercises of power at a different level. Finally, because their participation legitimised the

process, state agencies exercised a disproportionate amount of influence in determining the final form of the planning document.

Sherry Ortner has observed that networks say little of precisely who is *not* taking part (Ortner 1995). This was true in the case of the biodiversity plan in Uttaranchal state, and the National Plan more generally. Even by official evaluations, while participation in the NBSAP was significant, it was not entirely satisfactory. According to members of the TPCG, this was partly due to insufficient efforts made by those coordinating the different plans to fully integrate everyone in the process. Yet the lack of participation was also a structural problem.

The process called upon people to make a biodiversity plan. Since the concept is less than two decades old, the discourses of biodiversity were new, unfamiliar, and sometimes insignificant to many people. Unlike the catchy contraction of 'biodiversity,' its Hindi equivalent, *jaiv-vividhta* (trans: living-diversity) was a word that even some TPCG members felt awkward using. Some pro-wildlife groups, further, were suspicious of Kalpavriksh's pro-people approach or technical qualifications and refused to participate.

Second, the fixed nature of the forms and objectives of the network process indirectly prevented participation by a wide range of actors. One person familiar with the NBSAP resented how 'the very format in which management plans were required – identifying gaps, setting timeframes and monies required' actually confined participants to a limiting structure. This format did not provide space for discussing the kinds of political solutions that some actors favoured (NBSAP interview, July 2003).

Finally, though some funds were available, they were insufficient. The process, therefore, tended to include those that could make available the time, energy, and resources that the participatory process required.

Fortun (2001) argues that the identity of a network imposes exclusions in the very instance of its formation. Mobilising around the idea of a biodiversity plan meant only those who were interested in *biodiversity*, and *planning* for biodiversity took part in the process. It drew largely on those who favoured managerial approaches to biodiversity conservation, so, unsurprisingly, a third of the participants were academics and scientists. They agreed to 'identify gaps' in conservation, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of various institutions (SWOT analysis). By agreeing to this framework, participants in the NBSAP agreed to work towards making management decisions for biodiversity conservation.

As management plans, the documents had a material reality. By their assessment of a degraded present and ways to reach a biodiverse future, they fixed a natural and social landscape that required that specific actions be taken. These steps included extending protected areas, protecting the rights of resident peoples, and regulating the markets of non-timber forest products and commercial wood extraction, among others. Due to the nature of participation in the NBSAP process, the plans describe a sort of imagined consensual real-

ity, but a single reality nonetheless, that made claims to biodiversity conservation in the event that its recommendations were followed.

There is an irreconcilable tension between planning and participation. One steering group member of the Uttaranchal plan was aware of this tension when he said, 'if we consulted with stakeholders, we may have not come up with concrete recommendations' (interview, July 2003). Participation privileges diversity. Planning, however, necessarily makes simplifications of more complex and diverse communities (Scott 1998). Further, management seeks to move problems from the field of politics to those of technics (Ferguson 1994). 'Management plans seek to transform practice into a scientific question, they do not necessarily alter the elements that [are] the subject of contention' (Sivaramakrishnan 2002). Contestations largely disappear in plans, and are only visible through certain 'signposts'—moments of textual contradiction when the appearance of order is momentarily disrupted (Thompson et al. 1986). It is through these moments of disruption that we see how power works in otherwise 'neutral' planning documents.

To its credit, the *transparency* of the NBSAP process allowed me to see these workings in sharper relief. Following the journey of the state plan through the offices of different participants, I observed small, yet significant contests over language and meaning. For example, the Zoological Survey of India compiled the Uttaranchal plan from an earlier state planning document.⁹ It was then sent to an active senior member of the TPCG for comments. The member made critical observations. Noting that (in section 8.3) the state required that all village forest communities incorporate the new Forest Department JFM rules,¹⁰ the member took exception to this clause, claiming that 'this contradicts the earlier action points, suggesting that Van Panchayats (VP) should be permitted to function autonomously'. When the coordinator of the State process received this criticism, he suggested that the TPCG member rewrite the section. The member agreed and submitted the following revision for section 8.3 of the Uttaranchal BSAP:

'Not all VP forests may require new plantations or annual implementation plans. The management systems developed by the communities themselves based on their indigenous knowledge must be built upon rather than replacing them with the new plans. This needs to be highlighted in the 2001 Uttaranchal Rules.'

The TPCG member attempted to create room in the biodiversity plan for some community institutions to escape state intervention. This was done by suggesting that department approved plans are not *necessary* for all village forests; leaving to these same communities the right to determine how much should be planned for, and to what extent the state needs to be involved. Recognising that this recommendation was inconsistent with new Uttaranchal Forest Rules, the TPCG member tried to influence the 2001 Uttaranchal rules themselves through this paragraph.

Unhappy with this language, the Forest Department responded not by disagreeing explicitly, but by making small yet significant changes to the language, deleting and adding sections as follows:

Not all VP forests may require new plantation or annual implementation plans. However, annual implementation plans addressing the whole range of activities should be prepared with the participation of the local communities. The management systems developed by the communities themselves based on their indigenous knowledge should be built upon rather than replacing them with new plans (emphasis added).

Thus the Forest Department official re-inserted the requirement that all village forests *must* have comprehensive management plans. Moreover, the insertion of 'with the participation of local communities' suggests that these plans will be made by the Forest Department, and not be made primarily by the local communities.

The political differences among NBSAP participants frequently emerged through such textual negotiations. Language has political effects, and different groups struggled for dominance by battling over language. In this case, the Forest Department ensured that its version of section 8.3 was privileged over that of the TPCG member. The example reflects a strong asymmetry of power relations between state and NGO participants. Furthermore, those who will now read section 8.3 of the Uttaranchal BSAP will do so without ever knowing that behind its simplified, easy to understand lines is a history of contestation. As such, the plan hides disagreements that were central to its production.

Power works discreetly through planning documents. The Forest Department overruled the TPCG member's position not by confrontation, but by collaboration – making small and critical changes to the wording, literally and figuratively inserting itself into what were more autonomous village forest systems. In its final form, the plan confirmed the Forest Department's version. By participating in the biodiversity planning process, the participants agreed to subject themselves to this form of power. Aware that they were part of a project whose objective was to formulate a state plan, those participating recognised that they were subject to unequal power differentials. Through collaborations mediated by structural inequalities, the NBSAP favoured strategies that facilitated the expansion of the state bureaucratic apparatus.

Hiding its contentious relations of production in the 'apolitical' language of the technocratic plan, the NBSAP network produced biodiversity strategy documents. This apolitical language was constituted by, and was constitutive of, the politics of 'statemaking' (Ferguson 1994; Sivaramakrishnan 2002). These documents legitimised biodiversity conservation as a necessary activity requiring the attention of states and NGOs. Marking a new form of government, planning documents were produced by activists and NGOs, not by state agencies. As a set of plans that ultimately had to be acceptable to the state,

they continued to be subject to its disciplinary power.¹¹ Yet, NGOs also contested this power. I shall describe these contestations in the next section.

Mixed Processes – Contradictory Participations

Biodiversity discourses are a particularly fruitful terrain for collaboration. All the same, it was the MoEF that initiated, legitimised and marked the conclusion of the process. Though NGOs and activists participated, not all were equally bound by its rules. The different frameworks, innovativeness, and creativity of these groups introduced a degree of agency and institutional diversity that is not generally seen in planning exercises.

Activists used the space provided by the planning network to launch directed and sophisticated state critiques, sometimes articulating positions that state officials interpreted as inappropriate and insulting. Even as activists participated in the state-mandated planning process, they continued working on other confrontational national and transnational campaigns.¹² Activists often saw participation in the network as a temporally limited, yet important opportunity to make nuanced critiques of the state, the market, and at times, the other groups collaborating with them.

As a result, the final NBSAP draft, compiled from the different state and regional plans, contained criticisms of the state itself, including, but not restricted to, a critique of its agricultural development policies and its command-and-control forest policy. Sections of the plan pointed to the authoritarian conservation paradigms of the state, which restricted communities from accessing forests for their basic needs. The plan also described ways in which state institutions were themselves destructive of biodiversity through 'root causes,' such as inappropriate trading regimes and contracts (see MoEF 2004).

Throughout the process, officials in the MoEF continuously pressured the activists involved to 'tone down' such language. Officials insisted that activists should act 'responsibly' and be aware of the fact that this was a state, not an activist, document.¹³ In doing so, the state tried to reoccupy its hegemonic position as the expert and teacher of statecraft (Gramsci 1971: 259). It sought to produce consent by patronising and educating restive subjects. Yet, the state's ability to enforce these changes was limited to critiquing technical inaccuracies, because, on the one hand, activists refused to compromise beyond a certain point. On the other, the state openly celebrated the idea of broad participation, both nationally and globally.¹⁴ Therefore while the state would have preferred a more compliant civil society that respected its authority, the actual practice of consulting civil society during the NBSAP process was at times distinctly *uncivil*. Participants were divided, and spoke (and sometimes shouted) with multiple and 'inconsistent' voices.

Many activists participated in the process mainly to ensure that the national plan contained language that was empowering for local communities, but not all of them believed in the emancipatory potential of the final document that

the process would produce. In fact, many participated even as they described the ultimate futility of plans themselves. The Foundation of Ecological Security (FES) is a case in point. Mandated to prepare a sub-state plan for the Gori River Valley, FES refused to make a 'plan'. Their reasons for this manoeuvre were elegant:

'It is considered possible, however difficult, to draw out action plans for projects, task forces, bureaucracies and institutions that will 'implement' a plan in a project mode. It is quite another matter to work with and evolve a commonly accepted plan between hundreds of village communities, for a common, jointly inhabited landscape, and the way they use it. Village communities are stratified, even within themselves, on the lines of caste, class, race and gender, and the complex political nature of resource-use and appropriation, is highly contested, even over generations. While individual village-plans, and even village-cluster plans are possible, they are only practically possible in time-frames and spelt-out activities under project-modes. The more fundamental dimensions such as changes in land-use, changes in patterns of land-holding and tenure, iniquitous resource distribution, are one set of complex considerations of a political nature. The resolution of divergences in the wider circles of identification—of 'global' commons as in the valuable Protected Areas, in the many mutually incompatible use and exchange-values imputed to biodiversity, and the compulsions that arise from failing livelihoods, we feel, cannot be planned for under a process such as this. At least not locally. And certainly not in the time-frames envisaged.' (FES 2002).

The irony here was that FES made this critique even as it *participated* in the planning process, as a *coordinator* of a particular plan, no less. In fact, the extract above is from the planning document they produced—a document they prefer to call a 'Biodiversity Log'. As coordinator of a sub-state biodiversity plan, FES positioned itself both outside of *and* inside the process. It pointed to structural and methodological problems of planning, and it rejected the idea that complex social and political issues can be consensually resolved through planning. It identified the problem of biodiversity conservation as a political one that cannot be simply planned for, regardless of participation. Yet, it considered the planning process useful for other reasons. It saw the NBSAP as an important location in which to collect and consolidate 'information', which, always already political, has powerful effects.

'It is not about what the government does or does not do in response to us. In the villages, these points will come up time and again—they will be discussed again and again till they permeate everyday village discourse to

the point where equity—and the demand for equity—grows stronger.' (FES staff, interview).

The quote above suggests that for organisations, participation in networks and planning processes do not prohibit the exercise of political agency through other channels. Rather than being completely 'co-opted' by the state and its biodiversity planning processes, some NGOs and activists occupied restless and incomplete positions within them.

Networking Activities

Before I conclude I would like to make a final point. Even as information was being exchanged among participants, their relationships were extended through their participation in the NBSAP network. As Riles points out, one of the purposes of networking is 'to link [people] through communication to exchange ideas... (it) is a means to an end as well an end in itself' (Riles 2000: 50).¹⁵ The NBSAP had the effect of making professional what were prior personal relationships between NGO activists and state officials. But the process also rendered personal the professional collaborations that the plans produced.

For example, one researcher in a government agency had professional relationships with officers in the Forest Department and others doing environmental research. Yet, before working on the NBSAP, he did not know many activist NGOs working in the region. Through the process he developed a special respect for those working in these organisations. Marveling at the speed and level of sophistication of their analyses and critiques in the NBSAP process, he exclaimed one day, 'these people have their fingers on the pulse of the issues' and referred me to their work (interview July 2003).

Through the government researcher's engagement in the NBSAP I wish to make two points. His position points not only to the blurred boundaries between civil society and the state (Gupta 1995), but also to the fact that 'state' officials brought their own interests and enthusiasm to the process. Because I have focused on the different ways in which activists contested plans, I do not mean to imply that state officials and scientists were unified or monolithic in an opposition to civil society. In fact, I specifically point to this example to suggest that they were not. The NBSAP network, therefore, served as a place for persons from different 'divisions' of government and civil society to meet and learn of the many ways that creative collaborations can be explored with others – not only within the biodiversity planning process but also beyond it. The network formalised relationships among different participants, and forged a space where different participants could collectively identify the structures that were promising and problematic. It allowed for a form of politics that was based on, and grew out of, contingent, innovative and tentative alliances.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has described the possibility and promise of 'civil society,' asserting that networks and alliances can challenge marginalisation through the universalising languages of rights and participation (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Yudice 1998). A different body of scholarship, just as prolific, identifies in these processes an historic expansion of neoliberal governmentality (Gordon 1991; Rose 1996; Triantafillou and Nielsen 2001). In the calls for decentralised governance, this group of scholars identify new and expanding regimes of power in which NGOs and 'civil society' have been co-opted by the downsizing state to perform the functions of government more effectively and efficiently.

Tsing (2005) suggests that part of the reason for diverging accounts of the same phenomenon has to do with the different audiences to which separate literatures appeal, as well as the multiple ways that they theorise the dynamics of social change. Taking Tsing's call to focus on the particularity of connections seriously, I have focused here on India's NBSAP process. This was a complex and layered process in which NGOs' demands for greater participation overlapped with the development priorities of state and international funders. After several years of critical mobilisation, activist NGOs were successful in getting called on by the MoEF to produce a biodiversity plan.

At its outset, a contradiction was embedded in the effort. Born out of MoEF sanction, both the process of the NBSAP, and its final product, had to be acceptable to the MoEF. The document had to occupy a consistent place in a larger set of state planning documents. Towards this end, participants were frequently urged to moderate their demands in order to maximise the likelihood of 'buy-in' from different state agencies. Language that the Uttaranchal State Forest Department found contentious, for instance, was modified. Language prohibiting bioengineered seeds was reformulated to appeal to the state's development priorities. In such concessions to 'practicality' and 'implementability', we find the operations of power, wherein the need to appeal to dominant groups enforced compromises with the proposals envisaged by NGOs and activists.

However, because it was not easy for the MoEF to control the contours of participation, the plan also contained text that defied its expectations. We should note that the NBSAP was neither 'practical' nor 'implementable'. Participants incorporated within it a host of their own concerns, making them relevant to biodiversity – and producing particular textual results. NGOs managed to include strong critiques of state and market institutions in the NBSAP documents.

It was inclusion in the NBSAP process therefore, that gave certain groups legitimacy to speak, act and collaborate. These groups then used their legitimacy to build relationships beyond the constraints and demands of this particular planning effort. Engagement in the NBSAP process was contingent and

strategic. Understanding the plan as an unlikely eventuality, they sought to make it as open and inclusive of their agendas as possible.

By participating in confrontational and contradictory ways, NGO and activist groups were not only at times undisciplined, but they also actively and consciously refused to be disciplined. They engaged in opportunistic manoeuvres, operating within the terms of, and yet occasionally beyond, the 'power topographies' (Ferguson 2004) that legitimised their work. Activists saw their participation as a temporally limited space within which they could maneuver and use this project of government to establish within it a degree of plurality and creativity (Certeau 1984: 30). By working restively and conditionally with a government project, some participants sought to engage *tactically* to reach particularly defined ends that were not those that the state desired.¹⁶

That this was a precarious and temporary opportunity was soon made very clear by the state. First by stalling its completion, then by delaying its confirmation, the state resisted the final draft presented by the TPCG. Then, on 5 October 2005, the Ministry summarily rejected the plan, citing *technical inaccuracies* as the reason. In doing so, the ministry went from celebrating the initiative as an example of good governance (see MoEF 2002a) to calling the document 'unscientific'. It now proposes to start the entire NBSAP process over again with a different NGO, perhaps with a more diluted version of participation. Kalpavriksh, meanwhile, along with others in the network, has been making arrangements to release the NBSAP document as a 'people's plan'.

It would be a mistake to evaluate the failure or success of the network solely in the texts of these plans, or in the responses of the state. Parts of the network exist even after its time has passed. By engaging in the production of a planning document, activists produced a critical political space for the emergence of important collaborations. It is towards the messy spaces of contestation, compromise and collaboration that I urge more attention for a continued engagement of our theoretical and political practices.

Acknowledgements

With the final revisions this paper now concluded, I am only too conscious of the tremendous energy that so many have invested in this work. I shall risk a longer set of acknowledgements than this paper qualifies for, primarily because of the generosity of intellectual and emotional energy that has been granted to this project by so many I feel privileged to know.

In India, I would like to thank so many persons who have been doing the most critical and engaged work in difficult situations—Ashish Kothari, Kanchi Kohli and Tejaswini Apte of Kalpavriksh; E. Theophilus of the Foundation of Ecological Security; and Ajay Mahajan and Bhopal Singh of Vividhara, among so many others.

The group of mentors and peers at Yale University that suffered through the earliest drafts—Michael Dove, Anne Rademacher, Amity Doolittle, Carol Carpenter, Kevin Woods, Jonathan Cook, Corrina Steward, Sarah Davidson and Robin Barr. At Stanford University, I am especially thankful for the efforts of the paper writing group led Liisa Malkki and including Hannah Appel, Elif Babul, Rebecca Daly, Robert Samet, Rania al-Sweis and Arana Hankin. Thank you for reading and responding to this paper as many times as you did. Thanks also to James Ferguson and Amita Baviskar for astute feedback to early drafts of this paper when it was presented at the conference *Anthropology of the State/ The State of Anthropology* in April 2005.

Note

1. Norse and Carlton use the Google search engine to argue that its 3.1 million 'hits' 'indicate that a scientific concept can achieve cultural prominence' (Norse and Carlton 2003:1476).
2. This figure was charted based on data collected through library search services Lexis–Nexis and the Web of Science, on March 19, 2004. On Lexis–Nexis, I searched for the term 'biodiversity' in full text of major international newspapers. The search for biodiversity on the Web of Science was done for the word 'biodiversity' in article title, keywords, or abstracts for articles listed in the Arts and Humanities, Science and Social Science Citation Indexes. While the data does not permit comparison across the categories of academic and popular sources, this analysis is useful for the purposes of examining a growing trend of biodiversity citing practices in academic and popular media.
3. The concept of indigenous knowledge has been critiqued by Agrawal (1995) and Dove (2000). Yet groups have been using it as a concept to make epistemic claims not otherwise recognized by states and other dominant groups.
4. It is important, however to also acknowledge the dangers that are present in this project of tying peoples' place to both nature and culture (see Conklin and Graham 1995, Tsing 1999, and Dove 2000). Malkki points to the dangerous situation that is imposed when the rights and claims of people are tied to particular 'traditional' cultures (Malkki 1992: 7). She asks what happens to the claims of these persons should they choose to move to the city, or wish to claim particular benefits of modernity.
5. Escobar sees this visibility as significant. Arguing that the concept of biodiversity employs 'heterogenous parameters, practices and actors', he argues that the complexity encouraged by *biodiversity*, is especially conducive to being inscribed with multiple meanings ascribed by different actors, not least by social movements that are arguing for a degree of autonomy (Escobar 1998: 55). For Escobar, biodiversity discussions and programmes are an 'important space of struggle for social movements', because their agendas are partially coincident with other actors (Escobar 1998: 72). These include those who speak the language of techno science, and argue for the need for biodiversity using the global-centric narrative of habitat loss and fragmentation and those who, while silent on this global narrative argue for national sovereignty of third world nations to negotiate terms of biodiversity treaties to govern the flow of genetic resources. They are also those in progressive NGOs in the south that use discourses of biodiversity to critique capitalist expansion (Escobar 1998).
6. In direct contrast to the high modernist discourses of development (see Scott 1998), biodiversity has a complicated relationship with modernity, at once the purview of and outside of the claims of scientists and 'unmodern' people alike. On the one hand, the specific knowledges of particular places made it very difficult for states and scientists to claim authoritative knowledge on its functions and management. On the other, resident groups have been mounting increasingly strong resistance to authoritarian conservation paradigms. Their par-

ticipation in the NBSAP simultaneously marked a recognition of their claims and also an attempt to secure their consent for biodiversity conservation.

7. For a critique of participation see Rahnema 1992, Ferguson 1994, Bornstein 2004.

8. In Uttarnchal, the key organisations coordinating the NBSAP were as follows:

The State Forest Department: In its attempt to control and manage forests, the imperial and postcolonial Forest Departments in the state have a deep history of struggle with local communities over the use of forest resources (Gadgil and Guha 1993, 1995). The new Village Joint Forest Management Rules (2001) represent the most recent efforts in a consistent campaign to insert a significant degree of Forest Department supervision into the management of vigorously defended relatively autonomous village forests systems.

The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES): As a national NGO with an office in Munsiri, Pithoragarh District, FES sponsors tree plantings and strengthening village forest institutions in the district. Critical of the new Village Forest Department Rules, it nevertheless favours certain kinds of state regulation (over non timber forest products, for example) to conserve biodiversity.

Vividhara: This is an NGO that emerged out of an anti-mining struggle in Nahinkalan village, Dehradun district. It has recently initiated community-based natural resource management programmes, and environmental education programmes for school children and village residents.

Zoological Survey of India: With an office in Dehradun, ZSI is a central government supported scientific institute, first constituted in 1916 to catalogue and classify India's zoological diversity. The ZSI constitutes a significant federal research presence in the state capital.

Kalpavriksh: A national advocacy group based in Pune, this group insists that ecological security and livelihood security need to be considered together in the management and expansion of protected areas.

9. The Uttaranchal plan is based on an earlier report produced by TERI and commissioned by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department.

10. Van Panchayat Forests (Village Council Forest) are a distinct legal category in Uttaranchal which had enjoyed relative autonomy from regimes outside of the state forest department before the imposition of new Village JFM rules in 2001. These rules brought village forest councils under direct supervision of the forest department.

11. Foucault (1995: 219–220) describes the influence of disciplinary power in its ability to divide and separate, complex realities into more manageable pieces, prior to operating upon them. Following him, I argue that the operation of power in the first instance was defining and delimiting 'biodiversity' as a 'thing' to be managed.

12. In another essay, I argue that farmers participating in the NBSAP sometimes adopted the transnational discourse of indigenous persons struggling against the state, and at other times, claimed the rights to state development programmes as modernising subjects (Anand 2004).

13. When this negotiation did not yield the effects this ministry desired, it withheld its final approval and adoption of the document—first by inaction and subsequently by citing unspecified 'scientific inaccuracies' in the text. I will describe this in the conclusion.

14. The NBSAP process was showcased by the MoEF at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The audience for India's policy processes therefore, is not only the Indian public, but also a larger transnational public, such as the one present in Johannesburg for the international summit.

15. For some, the NBSAP provided a space to crystallize their common environmental goals through negotiation and planning. But equally significant is that the NBSAP served to create an epistemic community—one in whose heterogeneity, 'a new web of personal relationships' (Riles 2000: 68) could be created.

16. Appadurai (2002) describes the ways in which slumdweller in Mumbai are negotiating their demands with other slum associations, state employees and UN bureaucracies.

REFERENCES

- Agrawal, A. 1995. Dismantling the divide between indigenous and scientific knowledge. *Development and Change* 4:413–439.
- Agrawal, A. 2005. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Makings of Subjects*. Oxford, New Delhi.
- Anand, N. 2004. Reconfiguring discourses: National transformations of the global convention on biological diversity. *Tropical Resources* 23:31–36.
- Appadurai, A. 2002. Deep democracy: Urban governmentality and the horizon of politics. *Public Culture* 14:21–47.
- Baviskar, A. 2002. The politics of the city. *Seminar* 516:40–42.
- Bornstein, E. 2004. *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe*. Routledge, New York and London.
- Certeau, M.d. 2002. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Conklin, B. and L. Graham. 1995. The shifting middle ground: Amazonian Indians and ecopolitics. *American Anthropologist* 97:695–710.
- Dove, M. R. 2000. The Life-Cycle of Indigenous Knowledge, and the Case of Natural Rubber Production. In: *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and its Transformations* (eds. R.F. Ellen, A. Bicker and P. Parkes), pp. 213–251. Harwood, Amsterdam.
- Escobar, A. 1998. Whose knowledge, whose nature? Biodiversity, conservation, and the political ecology of social movements. *Journal of Political Ecology* 4:53–82.
- Ferguson, J. 1994. *Anti Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Ferguson, J. 2004. Power Topographies. In: *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics* (eds. D. Nugent and J. Vincent), Malden, Blackwell, MA
- Fortun, K. 2001. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Foucault, M. 1991. Governmentality. In: *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller), pp. 87–104. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Second Edition. Vintage Books, New York.
- Foundation for Ecological Security. 2002. *A Biodiversity Log and Strategy Input Document for the Gori River Basin*. Foundation for Ecological Security.
- Gadgil, M. and R. Guha. 1993. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Gadgil, M. and R. Guha. 1995. *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. Routledge, New York.
- Gordon, C. 1991. Government Rationality: An Introduction. In: *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (eds. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller), pp. 1–51. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers, New York.
- Gupta, A. 1995. Blurred boundaries - the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state. *American Ethnologist* 22:375–402.
- Hayden, C. 2003. *When Nature Goes Public: The Making and Unmaking of Bioprospecting in Mexico*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Keck, M. and K. Sikkink. 1998. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University, Ithaca.
- Li, T. 1999. Compromising power: development, culture and rule in Indonesia. *Cultural Anthropology* 14:295–321.
- Malkki, L. 1992. National geographic—the rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees. *Cultural Anthropology* 7:24–44.

- Ministry of Environment and Forests. 2002a. From the Local to the Global: Developing the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. In: *Towards Sustainability: Learning from the Past, Innovating for the Future*. MoEF, New Delhi. Last accessed at <<http://envfor.nic.in/divisions/ic/wssd/doc3/chapter1/css/Chapter1.htm>> on January 3, 2006.
- Ministry of Environment and Forests. 2002b. Workshop Papers. National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) Project – Final National Workshop, INSA Auditorium, New Delhi, 2002.
- Ministry of Environment and Forests. 2004. Securing India's Future: The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Draft Manuscript. Government of India.
- Norse, E.A. and J.T. Carlton. 2003. World wide web buzz about biodiversity. *Conservation Biology* 17:1475–1476.
- Ortner, S.B. 1995. Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37:173–193.
- Rademacher, A. 2004. Comments for Flocking Together: Ornithologists and Research Assistants in Twentieth-Century Africa. Program in Agrarian Studies, Yale University.
- Rahnema, M. 1992. Participation. In: *The Development Dictionary – A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (ed. W. Sachs), pp. 155–176. Orient Longman Limited, Hyderabad.
- Riles, A. 2000. *The Network Inside Out*. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Rose, N. 1996. Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies. In: *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government* (eds. A. Barry, T. Osborne and N.S. Rose), UCL Press, London.
- Saberwal, V. 2000. Environmental Alarm and Institutionalized Conservation in Himachal Pradesh, 1865–1994. In: *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representation and Rule in India* (eds. A. Agrawal and K. Sivaramakrishnan), pp. 68–85. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. Yale Agrarian Studies Series. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. 2002. *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Star, S.L. and J.R. Griesemer. 1989. Institutional ecology, translations and boundary objects—amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's museum of vertebrate zoology, 1907–39. *Social Studies of Science* 19:387–420.
- Triantafyllou, P. and M. R. Nielsen. 2001. Policing empowerment: the making of capable subjects. *History of the Human Sciences* 14:63–86.
- Thompson, M., M. Warburton and T. Hatley. 1986. *Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale: An Institutional Theory of Environmental Perception and a Strategic Framework for the Sustainable Development of the Himalaya*. Ethnographica, London.
- Tsing, A.L. 1999. Becoming a Tribal Elder, and Other Green Development Fantasies. In: *Transforming the Indonesian Uplands: Marginality, Power and Production* (ed. T. Li), pp. 159–202. Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam.
- Tsing, A.L. 2001. Nature in the Making. In: *New Directions in Anthropology and Environment* (ed. C.L. Crumley), pp. 3–23. Altamira Press, Lanham, Maryland.
- Tsing, A.L. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Uttaranchal Forest Department. 2001. Village Joint Forest Management Rules. Uttaranchal Forest Department.
- Uttaranchal Forest Department. 2003. Uttaranchal State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Uttaranchal State Forest Department.
- Vividhara. 2003. *National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan- Nahikalan Sub State Site, Uttaranchal*. Vividhara.
- Yudice, G. 1998. The Globalization of Culture and the New Civil Society. In: *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures* (eds. S. Alvarez, E. Dagnino and A. Escobar), pp. 353–379. Westview Press, Boulder.