

Foreword

The Convention on Biological Diversity signed by many nations at Rio de Janeiro recently recognises the intrinsic value of biological diversity and its ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values, as well as its importance for evolution and for maintaining life-sustaining systems of the biosphere. The Commonwealth of 50 diverse sovereign states is not only rich in cultural diversity but also in genetic wealth. Many mega-diversity areas occur in the Commonwealth. It has therefore been an act of vision on the part of the Commonwealth Science Council to have initiated a Biodiversity and Genetic Resources (BDGR) Programme over six years ago.

This report is an eloquent testimony to the power of co-operative efforts. Much valuable work has been done at minimum cost. Valuable genes, species and ecosystems have been saved. The concept of ecological and economic key species has been promoted and operationalised. Human resource development and capacity building have received priority. The BDGR programme can now look forward to its next phase with added vigour and support, thanks to the universal interest in preserving biodiversity and utilising genetic resources for developing eco-friendly biotechnology products. We must maximise the benefits of our genetic endowments for improving the livelihood security of the economically underprivileged sections of our societies.

Indira Gandhi, quoting the **Atharva Veda**, in her address at Stockholm twenty years ago, pleaded:

*What of thee I dig out,
let that quickly grow over,
Let me not hurt thy vitals,
or thy heart*

Loss of biological diversity is like hitting the vitals, since without such diversity it will not be possible to achieve sustainable advances in biological productivity. This underlines the significance of the BDGR programme of the Commonwealth Science Council. I have every hope that this dynamic programme will play a significant role in the achievement of the scientific goals of the Biodiversity Convention, signed by over 150 nations at Rio de Janeiro.

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