The special Panel discussion on the above topic began with a welcome note from Prof. Geeta Bali, General President, 99th Session of the Indian Science Congress who highlighted the relevance of the Panel to the overall discussion under the Congress theme. This was followed by an introductory address by the Convenor of the Session, Prof. R. Ramamurthi of Sri Venkateshwara University, Tirupati, who also welcomed the panellists and discussants to the event. He identified the need to focus on governance issues from a sustainability perspective and outlined the structure of the Panel discussion. He then introduced the Panellists and invited each of them to make a 10 minute presentation on their views related to the topic of the Panel followed by a round of discussions on the presentations through a pre-selected discussant group.

Opening the technical session, Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati, Chairman, National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) outlined the current national and international discussions on the topic of governance from international environmental management and bio-resource utilisation perspectives. He presented the state-of-play at the global level besides outlining the status of debates on biodiversity and international environmental governance through the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) process (Rio + 20, 2012). Focusing on the history of discussions related to biodiversity governance he highlighted the role of women, science and policy linkages in moving forward the governance agenda. He further focused on the key elements of the proposed Special Report being prepared by NBA on biodiversity governance. Elaborating the agenda for UNCSD 2012, he highlighted the key issues and themes coming up for discussion and decision making by Heads of State at Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 and opined that issues such as International Environmental
Governance (IEG) and Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) has much to learn from on-the-ground activities in how communities and women have managed and governed the natural resources. With a focus on learning such from experiences, the need for UNCSD to consider such lessons in the final outcomes of Rio +20 meeting was also mentioned.

Discussing the “Green Agenda” that is all pervasive now ranging from Green Economy to Green Development, Green Growth, Green Investments and Green Jobs, he mentioned that countries and stakeholders have begun to question how Green is the new Green. Presenting the salient features of bioresource management through conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits, Dr. Pisupati drew attention to changing paradigm of governance from ‘old governance’ model that is State controlled to ‘all governance’ that is multi-stakeholder facilitated. He argued that biodiversity conservation can also be understood as ‘Biodiversity protection is less pro-poor on a net benefit basis’. Focusing on three pillars of governance based on equity, justice and participation, he highlighted the centralised policy making and lack of recognition to public good as the key challenges countries like India are facing. Presenting the characteristics of biodiversity governance in the ambit of participatory decision making, rule of law, transparency, equity, accountability and strategic vision, Dr. Pisupati recollected the issues related to both inter-generational and intra-generational equity. He subsequently explained the principles that underpin biodiversity governance, namely the precautionary principle, polluter pays principle, principle of global commons, principle of equity and justice, principles of access to information, technologies and capacities, principle of community rights and principles of local governance. Discussing the role of women in biodiversity governance, he spelt out the key issues as need to focus on rights-based approaches for women, the need for empowerment, securing and sustaining opportunities, providing timely support and role in decision-making. He then outlined a series of activities being undertaken by the National Biodiversity Authority to address the issues of national, regional and local biodiversity governance, including development of People’s Biodiversity Registers (PBRs), development of Community Protocols as a component of rights-based approach and others. Lastly, he called for the panellists and discussants to come up with some innovative ideas to move forward the discussion on governance at national level.

Dr. R. Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Advisor, Government of India, made a presentation on ‘Biodiversity, Climate Change and Development’. He articulated the importance of biodiversity for human well-being and development. Relating the current development paradigm with ecological sustainability, he called for steps to minimize the differentials within and between economies. Citing the experiences from India on the role and relevance of issues such as indigenous knowledge and
role of women in societal development both in the past and currently, he highlighted the need to ensure continued and better use of data and science in policy and decision making. He suggested specific focus on the issue of agrobiodiversity conservation citing the low per-capita cultivable land holding in India (1.2 hectares) and decreasing focus on local agriculture due to industrialization. He cautioned that the future of agriculture not only depends on technology but also the genetic base.

Suggesting the need to collate, analyse and use biodiversity information, Dr. Chidambaram suggested better use and improvement of ‘e.science infrastructure’ in the country and called for a “Biodiversity Foresight Analyses” in India. He stressed the need to identify, incubate, adopt technologies relevant to biodiversity in a manner technology transfer and use relates to issues of access to resource and benefit sharing. He provided an example of activities under the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) under the Environment Stewardship Programme as good cases for partnerships beyond the conventional sectors. He supported the ‘Network of Indian Universities on Culture and Biological Diversity (NIUCBD)’ initiative facilitated by S.V. University and NBA as a good model to bring a link between science and society.

Focusing on the issue of ‘Role of Women in Biodiversity’, Dr. Lucy Mulenkei, Executive Director, Indigenous Information Network, Kenya cited several examples of how local custom, practice and knowledge have contributed to enhancing and managing our biodiversity globally. Highlighting the common approaches at community level in countries such as Kenya and India, she suggested creation of network/communities of practice for local and indigenous communities (ILCs) in India. Taking example from the negotiations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on the role and participation of women and ILCs, she drew attention to the forthcoming CBD meeting in India (Eleventh Conference of Parties – COP 11) as an opportune moment for India and the world to showcase better commitment to cause of ILCs and women as managers and custodians of biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge. She acknowledged the work currently underway in India through the NBA in recognising the equitable principles of access and benefit sharing as well as governance. In conclusion, she requested better collaborations between ILCs and countries on governance issues including learning from ILCs on governance issues.

Mr. Arun Kumar Bansal, Additional Director General of Forests, Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), Government of India made a presentation on ‘Conserving Forest Biodiversity in India: Challenges and Opportunities’. He mentioned that biodiversity is synonymous with life on earth. Detailing the salient features of biodiversity in India, he stressed the experience of India in community participation. He added that such actions warrant global attention due to the fact such management practices are age-old in India with evolving concepts such as Joint Forest Management
(JFM) in the country. He identified the current challenges in forest management in the country and the missing link between forest resource conservation and management and over-arching biodiversity management principles. He elaborated the experiences of Participatory Ecological and Livelihood Assessment (PELPA) in JFM areas and suggested the use of such methods for micro-planning at local levels. Citing examples from the state of Orissa, he mentioned how JFMs could be good resources for PBR processes and be linked to activities through the Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) under the Biological Diversity Act.

Mr. Bansal then presented the status and trends in protected area management in India and called for the need to involve communities in activities related to eco-development and eco-tourism. He provided examples of such approaches in the country. He also called for special protection and management of sacred groves and suggested NBA to look at the possibility of declaring such sacred groves as Biodiversity Heritage Sites under the Act.

Responding the above four presentations, a pre-selected discussant group made brief interventions on the issues highlighted during the panel presentations. Dr. S Subramaniyam, Member, NBA made a brief intervention on strategic resource mobilisation needs for promoting biodiversity conservation and integrating women’s participation. He highlighted the experiences in India through the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) scheme of Government of India in establishing the Self Help Groups (SHGs) in promoting local livelihoods securities. He also presented details of such SHG based activities at various states in India and their relevance to conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity besides linking the same to benefit generation. He outlined special activities focusing on value-addition to bioresources, nursery development, management of critical habitats such as coral reefs and cultivation of medicinal plants as some possible approaches on linking conservation and development at local level.

Dr. Sanjay Deshmukh, Professor, Mumbai University made an intervention focusing on the role and relevance of coastal biodiversity in securing the ecological balance of the coastal regions besides securing livelihood opportunities for communities living in such areas. He presented a series of examples on how conservation and development action at coastal areas has already been achieved by several agencies in the country and called for better policies and practices to link local action to national and global policy making in securing coastal and marine biodiversity for development purposes.

Dr. Perluigi Bozzi, Coordinator, International University Network on Cultural and Biological Diversity, University of Sapineza, Italy made a presentation under the title, ‘ Genetic resources: Lessons from implementing actions linking education, research, policy and society’. He outlined the conceptual framework in linking the agenda under education, research, policy agendas and called for better society based approaches in decision-making. He also elaborated the work under the International University Network on CBD in the form of designing innovative curricula, piloting local actions in
countries such as Madagascar and other countries. He called for better articulation of local needs and resource base with decision making processes on managing the same. Citing Benjamin Franklin he cautioned the need to be careful in estimating the resources and their use opportunities.

Dr. Elumalai, Professor, Madras Law College, in his brief intervention highlighted the need to have inclusive approaches to policy and rule making as well as the implementation. Quoting from the experiences of various international frameworks including that of CBD and UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), he appreciated the efforts of NBA in outlining an inclusive agenda for effective implementation of the Biological Diversity Act in India. He requested for better capacity building and awareness raising about the Act and concluded by saying, if effectively implemented, the Act in India could be the best possible facilitative and legal framework to combine the needs of conservation and development.

Dr. S. Faizi of the CBD Civil Society Alliance made an intervention focusing on the intricacies of international policy and rule making and called for better approaches to decision making at national and international levels. He cited amply from the emerging dynamics of negotiations under the CBD and requested more participatory approaches at the COP 11 meeting. He also outlined the challenges to implement an Act such as the Biological Diversity Act with limitations of capacities, funding and awareness. He called for better participatory approaches for ensuring between conservation and development.

The session then took questions and comments from the participants who shared their experiences in making a paradigm shift in the way conservation and development is understood and practised in India. Several of them called for better capacity building, sharing of experiences and called on NBA to facilitate creation of such possibilities and platforms within the framework provided by the Act.

The session ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. S Sudarsanam of S V University to all the panellists, discussants and participants for their time and enthusiasm.