

**THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
10 YEARS ON
TAKING STOCK,
LOOKING FORWARD**



CBD



UNEP





Signed by 150 government leaders at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity is dedicated to promoting sustainable development. Conceived as a practical tool for translating the principles of Agenda 21 into reality, the Convention recognizes that biological diversity is about more than plants, animals and micro organisms and their ecosystems – it is about people and our need for food security, medicines, fresh air and water, shelter, and a clean and healthy environment in which to live.

1

How successful has the Convention been during its first ten years? The September, 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development will offer the international community an opportunity to assess progress under the Convention, as well Agenda 21 and the other Rio agreements. This review will give reason for both celebration and criticism, but most importantly it will help governments to set the Convention's direction for the next ten years.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

Since its entry into force in 1994, the Convention has been ratified by 180 Parties and it has helped change how governments and civil society approach the challenges of biological diversity. It has validated the three key concepts that are shaping global action today:



* **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.** The ideal of nature conservation has now been joined by the recognition that saving biodiversity must go hand in hand with meeting humanity's social and economic needs. This philosophy is the basis for the Convention's triple goals of conserving biodiversity, using its components in a sustainable manner, and sharing the benefits arising from genetic resources fairly and equitably.

* **THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH.** Rather than treating individual species or ecosystems in isolation, effective action views biodiversity in its entirety, as encompassing all essential processes, functions and interactions among organisms and the environment – including humans in all their cultural diversity. In this perspective, the “integrated management” of land, water and living resources becomes the most effective way to promote the conservation, sustainable use, and equitable sharing of biodiversity resources.

* **“MAINSTREAMING” BIODIVERSITY.** Although challenging, policymakers need to integrate biological diversity into other sectors and policies, such as natural resource planning, forestry, coastal and marine environment management and agricultural and rural development planning. The Convention can contribute to all chapters of Agenda 21 – and vice versa – including those on national planning processes, technical and scientific cooperation, capacity-building, and financial resources, to mention only a few.





In addition to this profound impact on the way people now think about biodiversity, the Convention already boasts a legacy of practical results, including:

* **INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS.** The Convention has helped promote a better understanding of biological diversity, its importance for socio-economic development, the goods and services it provides, the interlinkages between biological diversity loss and other global problems and the threats that human activities pose to its survival.

* **NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS.** Over 100 countries have participated in this first-ever comprehensive planning initiative for natural resources management. The action plans sharpen their ability to gather information about underlying trends, identify priorities, and set policy.

* **THEMATIC AND CROSS-CUTTING PROGRAMMES OF WORK.** The Convention has launched work programmes on agricultural biodiversity, the biodiversity of dry and sub-humid, forest biodiversity, inland waters biodiversity, marine and coastal biodiversity, access and benefit-sharing, invasive aliens species, scientific assessments, ecosystem approach, indicators, global taxonomy initiative, traditional knowledge, sustainable tourism and education and public awareness, thus moving from policy setting to implementation.



4

* **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.** The Convention has launched joint programmes with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the regional seas programmes facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme, the Global Plan of Action to protect the Marine Environment from Land-Based Sources of Pollution, and other programmes and agencies, such as FAO and IUCN. It has also worked closely with the Global Environment Facility to channel international financial support to where it is most needed.

* **THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY.**

Adopted in January 2000, the Cartagena Protocol is intended to address potential risks posed by living modified organisms and to ensure an adequate level of protection in the transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health. The Protocol breaks new ground through its practical application of the precautionary approach – the idea that lack of absolute scientific certainty is no reason to delay action to prevent potential risks. It also promises to make a real contribution to promoting technology transfer and to enabling developing countries to gain access to information and technology from the biotechnology industry.

THE NEXT 10 YEARS

There has been progress, then, but clearly not enough. Biological diversity continues to be destroyed by human activities at an unprecedented rate. Reversing the tide of destruction will require fundamental changes in the way resources are used and distributed. Action over the next 10 years must go far beyond anything seen to date.

As part of its review of Agenda 21, the World Summit on Sustainable Development will explore how the Convention on Biological Diversity could best contribute to sustainable development over the next 10 years. Some of the options that could be considered include:

1. STRENGTHEN NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. While the Convention's international institutions are up and running, some governments still lack the capacity to participate fully in them. Many have yet to evaluate their national policies and circumstances, adopt national strategies and plans, establish the necessary institutions or laws, or appoint experts to the Convention's international rosters. Greater capacity-building is needed to ensure that all governments actively contribute to and benefit from the Convention.





2. INVOLVE ALL STAKEHOLDERS. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to the involvement of women, the private sector, local and indigenous communities and the poor in developing and implementing national planning processes.

3. TARGETS. The Convention can be thought of a long-term plan. Most Parties have completed the preliminary planning and assessment phase of implementing the Convention. Now it is time to start planning activities designed to achieve agreed targets. The first step in this next stage, one which the Convention will be pursuing on over the next two years is to set targets, such as slowing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2015.

4. EDUCATE THE PUBLIC. Despite progress, the costs and importance of biodiversity loss are still not well enough understood by large segments of the public. One way to highlight the stakes involved could be to emphasize the role of biodiversity destruction in causing natural disasters and reducing options for recovering from them. The growing scale and frequency of crop failures, forest fires, flooding, and invasions of alien species could be used to demonstrate that the biosphere is not impervious to human impact. The links between biodiversity and poverty eradication, food security and medical developments also need to be stressed.





5. INTEGRATE BIODIVERSITY POLICY MORE FULLY INTO NATIONAL DECISION-MAKING. The Convention must be further mainstreamed into social and development policy. Unfortunately, this is more easily said than done. Even though many governments have established multi-departmental committees to mainstream biodiversity into all policy areas, these committees have often had little or no impact. Emphasizing environmental impact assessments, certification schemes and efforts to reflect biodiversity values in national accounting systems could help. At the international level, a major push is needed to integrate biodiversity into the policies of the World Trade Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

6. RATIFY THE BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL. The Protocol promises to help developing countries participate more meaningfully in what is set to become one of the major industries of the 21st century, “biotechnology”. But this will only happen once the Protocol enters into force and its institutions and procedures start working. Fifty ratifications are required, and the process is moving slowly.



8

7. ACCELERATE ACTION ON GENETIC RESOURCES.

Work on the Convention's third goal of promoting access and benefit-sharing arrangements in proceeding slowly. Greater progress is needed on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing, preserving, maintaining and promoting the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities; on promoting cooperation on science, technology, and research and development; and on transferring technology. The Parties to the Convention have established working groups to address the issues of traditional knowledge and of access and benefit-sharing.

8. MAKE FASTER PROGRESS ON MARKET

INCENTIVES. The failure of markets to reflect the value of biological diversity is one of the starting points for the Convention's work on incentive measures. This work concentrates on quantifying the value of biodiversity and then internalizing this value into market prices in order to encourage the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.



9. STRENGTHEN SYNERGIES AND COLLABORATION.

The Convention is the link between biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, etc., among others. The partnerships already launched with other biodiversity-related treaties will remain central to broadening participation in the Convention. Reinforcing these partnerships and capturing potential synergies will be an important task for the foreseeable future. Collaboration with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (for example on elaborating a definition of forests as carbon “sinks”) and the World Trade Organization (notably on revising the Agreement on Agriculture) would be valuable steps forward.

10. IMPROVE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL

GOVERNANCE. Decisions are needed on streamlining national obligations (especially reporting under different agreements), streamlining administrative procedures and expenses, and improving cooperation on decision-making at international and national levels, especially on forests and other topics that are addressed in more than one forum.

11. INCREASE FINANCIAL RESOURCES. Despite many generous bilateral and multilateral contributions, the Convention remains in great need of new and additional financial resources. New and creative sources need to be found.





**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:**

**The Secretariat of the Convention
on Biological Diversity**

393 St. Jacques, Suite 300
Montreal Quebec, Canada H2Y 1N9
Phone: 1 (514) 288 2220
Fax: 1 (514) 288 6588
e-mail: secretariat@biodiv.org
Website: <http://www.biodiv.org>