



SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND 2010: PERSPECTIVES FROM EXPERIENCES

In 2002 the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a strategic plan that included the target of achieving by 2010 a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth. This target was subsequently endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly and incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals. In 2006, by resolution 61/203 of 20 December, the General Assembly declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity and decided that it would hold a high-level segment at its sixty-fifth session, in 2010. The Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting, to be held in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010, will review progress made in implementing the strategic plan and achieving the 2010 biodiversity target and will identify future biodiversity targets.

Since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, environment and sustainable development have received considerable attention, resulting in several assessments and status reports on the contribution of biodiversity to sustainability and human well-being. The Convention on Biological Diversity laid the foundations for an integrated and holistic approach to conservation that called for both sustainable use of biodiversity and sharing the benefits of such use equitably through its access and benefit-sharing provisions. Sustainability and equity, which were the foundational principles underlying the adoption of the Convention during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, need rethinking; ways must be found effectively to integrate the principles into future discussions on biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and benefit-sharing.

The experience of countries over the last 15 years in implementing the Convention and responding to emerging challenges suggests that a brutally pragmatic global conceptual vision must be forged. That experience, especially with regard to biodiversity loss as a result of various natural and anthropogenic factors, reveals a range of options for reducing biodiversity loss in the future; these options focus on conservation rather than on humans.

The adoption of the global biodiversity targets by the Convention on Biological Diversity and subsequently by the World Summit on Sustainable Development warrants the adoption of integrated and holistic approaches to assessing the impacts and outcomes of past and current actions to reduce biodiversity loss and to looking at further development of the targets beyond 2010.

Based on available information collated from national reports by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (third national reports), Millennium Development Goal reports, annual reports of agencies at various levels and assessments and analysis of information and data, the following are the key messages that raise some status and trend issues related to biodiversity loss:

- (a) People rely on biodiversity for their daily livelihoods without realizing that they do so and without responding to the speed at which biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services are being eroded permanently;
- (b) There is a general awareness among policymakers that biodiversity is an asset for future development. Such an awareness is, however, not always translated into action to conserve, use and share biodiversity in a sustainable manner;
- (c) While environmental issues such as climate change are receiving significant attention at various levels, the very basis of mitigation and adaptation options for dealing with climate change, i.e., biodiversity, lacks the attention and support that it needs;
- (d) Implementation of and compliance with the Convention on Biological Diversity and actions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals are being pursued from various angles and by various agencies, often with no connection or relationship, threatening the very basis of achieving sustainable development;

- (e) The rigour with which science is used in policymaking and implementing biodiversity conservation actions is still being questioned; this threatens the credibility of the arguments for tackling biodiversity issues at the policy and political levels;
- (f) Environment and biodiversity are often used and understood in a confusing manner by stakeholders. The result is a lack of focus on biodiversity under the common country assessment and United Nations development assistance framework processes at the country level;
- (g) There is a need for cooperation between agencies and stakeholders to coordinate their programmes and actions to reduce biodiversity loss and promote the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity, particularly in the light of recent diminishing attention to conservation action and a tendency to underestimate its impact;
- (h) In spite of many good intentions to launch coordinated actions to reduce biodiversity loss and enhance human well-being, translation of such intentions into actions by countries and agencies is weak.

While arguments in favour of sustainable development and redefining sustainability as a concept with a focus on better environmental management are increasing, issues of equity, ethics and rights and privileges of communities still need policy support and lessons must be drawn from experience with implementation. Translating such concepts into actionable programmes needs a priority focus.

Considering the need to evaluate, discuss and design a set of global targets for reducing biodiversity loss to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development beyond 2010, it is time for stakeholders to reflect upon and answer the following questions:

- (a) How and why are current biodiversity targets being met or not met?
- (b) What conditions at the local, national, regional and global levels are prevailing on conservation action that either promotes or prevents action to reduce biodiversity loss?
- (c) What are the existing strategic and policy gaps that hamper the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation across country development frameworks?
- (d) If biodiversity is to receive due attention, what interventions are needed and how can they be delivered and used?
- (e) Should the next set of targets for reducing biodiversity loss in aid of long-term poverty reduction and sustainable development be developed with achievable and accountable timelines supported by some rational and practical means to realize them?
- (f) To what extent should the future strategic plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity employ a "bottom-up" approach rather than a "top-down approach"?
- (g) When is it time to invert the traditional exhortation to "think global and act local"?
- (h) What will be the relevance of development discourse in the absence of a balanced focus on components of environment and their impacts on human well-being? How can the lack of such a focus be corrected, if it exists?
- (i) What would a realistic and inclusive roadmap for designing and delivering future biodiversity targets look like?
- (j) How will countries rise above their national interests to tackle biodiversity and sustainability so that we look again at the past with a sense of concern?
- (k) If sustainability is about managing resources for the future without compromising on present needs, what challenges need to be considered when defining the post-2010 biodiversity targets, given the patterns and modes of biodiversity loss?

Recognizing the need to engage in a series of dialogues and discussions on the issues above, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is calling for stakeholders to be realistic, responsive and strategic to make the best possible use of the global attention being called for in 2010 to reshape the biodiversity agenda. Complexity does not excuse inaction; the discussions over the coming months on redefining the biodiversity agenda should therefore result in conservation action and not just conversation.

With that in mind UNEP organized an informal meeting of experts on the development of post-2010 biodiversity targets on 15 February 2009, in Nairobi. The outcome of the meeting was summarized by the meeting chair, Mr. Carlos Martin-Novella, Special Advisor to the German presidency of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in the report of the meeting. The Chair's summary is reproduced verbatim below. The full report of the meeting (UNEP/DELCSUST/1) is available online at www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance.

REPORT OF THE EXPERT MEETING ON SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND 2010: PERSPECTIVES FROM EXPERIENCES

Chair's summary

The significance of the 2010 target could not be underscored enough. Current targets were imperfect but helped to keep biodiversity high on the agenda. The current targets paved the way to focus on the following:

- (a) There was a need for broader stakeholder involvement;
- (b) There was a need for an improved science-policy interface (e.g., Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services);
- (c) The targets had improved the understanding of the value of biodiversity (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity report, akin to the Stern Review);
- (d) The targets had generated many success stories;
- (e) The targets had produced a unifying message with one objective but a multitude of approaches.

In spite of a wealth of achievements, the targets had been developed through a political process without engaging the scientific community and without setting a baseline from which to measure progress in achieving the targets. In addition, the targets had not been directly linked to sustainability and thus were not taken into account by policy makers and managers.

The deadline for meeting the targets was fast approaching and there was an opportunity to revisit the targets in a more systematic manner.

Building blocks for the post-2010 scenario

It was crucial for the post-2010 agenda to be based on several key building blocks. Those should be constructed with the involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous communities and the private sector. The scale (i.e., the regional level) would also remain an overarching factor. The communication strategy for engaging those sectors and harmonizing vernacular terms would also be significant. Some key building blocks, as identified by participants, are described in the following paragraphs.

Science

The science of biodiversity ecosystems, being complex and incomplete and therefore subject to attempts at rationalization, sometimes confused or left decision makers at a loss. The scientific basis of policy was, however, important, meaning that there needed to be a stronger interface science and policy. Such an interface needed to be based on the links between human well-being and livelihoods, the natural capital base and biodiversity. In other words, from the perspective of sustainability, the capital base required to support biodiversity needed to be ensured so that key ecosystem services were sustainably maintained, at the current time and in the years and generations to come. It was necessary that a scientific rationale that combined those components in a coherent framework formed the conceptual basis for understanding how the biodiversity post-2010 targets would be constructed.

Metrics and time frame

There was a need for a quantifiable post-2010 target. Even if it was imperfect, it needed to be a proxy by which to measure progress and to indicate gaps and needs. A target without explicit time frames and milestones was uninteresting to politicians. A high conceptual and brutally pragmatic vision had to be articulated.

Economics

The point at which hard decisions were taken was based on financial terms. If it could be demonstrated to ministers that millions were being lost as a result of unsustainable use, then action would be taken because it made financial sense.

Coordination

Coordination at all levels was a key issue. There needed to be coordination with current processes such as national biodiversity strategies and action plans, United Nations agencies and grass-roots activities. Alignment with other existing targets was also necessary. There needed to be a convergence of plans and implementation measures to be effective. Climate change was one of the major issues that any post-2010 target would need to incorporate. That included its links with adaptation and reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation.

The year 2010 was strategic for the targets and there was a series of key meetings that would take place, including the Trondheim and Bonn meetings and a meeting in Italy that might feed into the Group of Eight meeting). As the International Year of Biodiversity came closer, along with the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly and the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others, those building blocks could be carried forward and form a basis for discussion at those strategic meetings.

For further information, Contact: Division for Environmental Law and Conventions (DELIC) at delc@unep.org