

Biodiversity

Life Insurance for our Changing World

This week, in New York, leaders of the world will review progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals embody the international community's aspirations for a better world, where hunger and poverty are eradicated, all people enjoy basic rights, and equity and health prevail in all countries. We call upon the leaders to recognize that to make the MDGs a reality in a highly populated planet, biological diversity needs to be used sustainably and its benefits more equitably shared.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth: genes, species, ecosystems. The services we use from ecosystems, such as clean water, food, fuel and fiber, medicines, and climate control, cannot be provided without biodiversity. Failure to conserve and use biological diversity sustainably will perpetuate inequitable and unsustainable growth, deeper poverty, new and more rampant illnesses, continued loss of species, and a world with ever-more degraded environments which are less healthy for people. Unless we change the way we use natural resources and distribute the wealth generated, the MDGs will be remembered only as a utopian ideal.

The importance of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to achieving the MDGs has already been recognized by world leaders in their support for achieving a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 – the so-called 2010 target. They set this target because biodiversity is disappearing at an unacceptable rate as a result of human activities. Habitat conversion, overexploitation, pollution and climate change, are driven by an ever increasing demand for natural resources. This requires urgent and concerted action. We must sustainably manage and protect biodiversity, guarantee the continued provision of ecosystem goods and services and ensure that the world has the capacity to adapt to future changes.

As advances in reducing poverty and improving well-being for our growing human population are made, we will more clearly understand the need for effectively functioning ecosystems. A wide range of crop and livestock genetic diversity is essential to ensure that our agro-systems can adapt to new challenges from climate, pests and diseases. The biological wealth in marine environments will be needed to feed growing populations and provide livelihoods for coastal communities around the world. Wetlands are needed as water regulators to protect us from floods and storm surges, to help in moderating climatic change with other ecosystems such as forests, and to act as living filters for pollutants and excess fertilizers. We must not forget that biodiversity is central to many of the world's cultures, the source of legend and myth, the inspiration for art and music. It is the basis for medicinal knowledge, drawing on the property of a variety of plants and animals for healing. Provision of these services across all these ecosystems depends on maintaining biological diversity.

We, the heads of the secretariats of the international Conventions dealing with biological diversity, emphasize the important role that biodiversity plays in the achievement of all the MDGs. Biodiversity can indeed help alleviate hunger and poverty, can promote good human health, and be the basis for ensuring freedom and equity for all. All of us rely on biodiversity, directly or indirectly for our health and welfare. The 2010 biodiversity target is thus the foundation for our well-being, and continued sustainable existence. We must ensure that biodiversity will be available for us, and for all future generations. We thus urge governments and civil society to act in helping to conserve and use biological diversity sustainably, thus ensuring all a share in the benefits of a diverse world.



Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary,
Convention on Biological
Diversity (CBD)



Willem Wijnstekers
Secretary-General, the
Convention on
International Trade
in Endangered Species
of Wild Fauna and Flora
(CITES)



Robert Hepworth
Executive Secretary, the
Convention on
Migratory Species of
Wild Animals (CMS)



Peter Bridgewater
Secretary-General,
Convention on Wetlands
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)



Francesco Bandarin
Director, the World
Heritage Centre (WHC)

