The CBD's new strategy

The Convention on Biological Diversity has a new strategic plan that emphasises connectivity at the landscape scale

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Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 (GBO-3), this year's flagship publication of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), confirms that the world has failed to meet its target of achieving a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. It also warns that, unless urgent and concerted actions are taken, massive further loss of biodiversity is becoming increasingly likely and that such a loss would severely reduce many services that are essential to human societies.

In addition to its overall assessment of the 2010 target, GBO-3 identifies potential global-scale ecological 'tipping points', where ecosystems shift to alternative, less productive states from which it may be difficult or impossible to recover. The projected Amazonian dieback tipping point, for example, is a threshold level of deforestation at which the Amazon forest could collapse due to interactions between climate change, deforestation and fire. Similar large-scale tipping points with potentially devastating consequences for human well-being exist for freshwater, coral and island ecosystems, among others. Such dangerous biodiversity loss must be avoided, and the cost of inaction will be far greater in the medium to long term than the immediate investments needed to safeguard biodiversity.

Building on the findings of GBO-3, a new strategic plan for the CBD was adopted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) held in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010. The new strategic plan, which covers the period 2011–20, is based on the understanding that a more comprehensive policy response to the biodiversity crisis is needed, which should address underlying causes of biodiversity loss, such as consumption patterns, and focus on the value of ecosystem services for human well-being.

The key needs reflected in the new strategic plan are:

- greater efficiency in the use of land, energy and fresh water to meet growing demand
- the use of market incentives and the avoidance of perverse subsidies

Tipping point? A combination of climate change, deforestation and fire could lead to the collapse of the Amazon forest, including this flooded forest on the Rio Negro.
Photo: FAO/FFS CFU000106/R. Faidutti

- strategic planning
- the restoration of ecosystems
- the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of and access to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge
- support for and facilitation of local action
- communication, education and awareness-raising.

Forests, as home to an estimated two-thirds of all terrestrial species and a major source of essential ecosystem services, will be particularly important in fulfilling the mission of the new strategic plan. The overall mission of the strategic plan is to "take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity in order to ensure that by 2020 ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services, thereby securing the planet's variety of life, and contributing to human well-being, and poverty eradication".

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Most of the time, governance structures at the transboundary level hijack power from the lower, more local levels. Such power imbalances are one of the major problems in the implementation of TBCAs because the weak involvement of local levels of authority reduces their ownership of the TBCA process. In addition, the 'projectization' of TBCAs weakens their sustainability unless measures are introduced to transition from projects towards a longer-term approach that addresses financial sustainability (the fourth pillar of TBCAs).

Conclusion

TBCA governance processes are essentially political and their success depends largely on the political climate between the parties concerned. Moreover, the physical, institutional, economic and social contexts vary widely. Thus, there are no blueprints for the establishment of effective TBCA governance.

For success, the focus of TBCA governance processes should be on issues of shared interest. In the future, TBCA governance should be re-imagined to give sufficient role to non-state actors and to devolve an adequate share of power to local levels.

Reference

BirdLife International (2009). *Trans-boundary rainforest park will be a symbol of peace and stability* (available at http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/05/peace_park_west_africa.html).

While most of the targets in the strategic plan are relevant to forests, four targets relate directly to forest policy and practice[1]:

- Target 5—By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.
- Target 7—By 2020, areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring the conservation of biodiversity.
- Target 11—By 2020, at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water and 10% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascapes[2].
- Target 15—By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks has been enhanced through conservation and restoration, including the restoration of at least 15% of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate-change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.

The key tool for implementation of the strategic plan in forests is the CBD's programme of work on forest biodiversity, which was adopted in 2002 and reviewed in 2008. It has three main elements: (1) conservation, sustainable use and benefit-sharing; (2) institutional and socioeconomic enabling environment; and (3) knowledge, assessment and monitoring. Within these three elements there are 130 specific actions for achieving the objectives and strategic goals of the CBD, and the 193 Parties are implementing specific actions based on their national contexts.

The programme of work on forest biodiversity covers all types of forests, including tropical production forests. A key argument for biodiversity conservation in production forests in the context of climate change is that biodiversity underpins forest ecosystem resilience at multiple scales. A scientific synthesis in 2009 of over 400 peer-reviewed articles confirmed that the resistance and resilience of forests, and thus the ecosystem services they can provide, are directly linked to biodiversity (Thompson *et al.* 2009). Diverse, large and unfragmented forest landscapes have the best long-term climate-change mitigation and adaptation potential. If they are sufficiently large, transboundary conservation areas can contribute to a long-term, stable flow of ecosystem services. The need for investments in biodiversity to mitigate risks for forest health and stability, in particular in view of the impacts of climate change, as well as the key role of biodiversity to help societies adapt to climate change, was also emphasized by GBO-3.

The inter-linkages between forest stability and biodiversity also have important consequences for the planning, design and implementation of reducing emissions for deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD-plus[3]) and other forest-based mitigation and adaptation measures, because the permanence of forest carbon stocks and other ecosystem services depend on biodiversity. The CBD has welcomed efforts towards the introduction of REDD and invited governments to ensure that it does not run counter to the objectives of the CBD and that it provides benefits to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (Decision IX/5).

While biodiversity plays an important role in the effective long-term storage of carbon in forests, REDD-plus could have both positive and negative impacts on biodiversity. It is crucial, therefore, that biodiversity is appropriately considered in the development and implementation of REDD-plus. The potential to simultaneously address the biodiversity crisis and climate change is unprecedented, while poorly designed REDD-plus efforts could damage forest biodiversity and in the process threaten the continued provision of ecosystem services for human well-being. The CBD is supporting its Parties and key actors and stakeholders in ensuring that biodiversity benefits are at the forefront of discussions on REDD-plus. In the context of transboundary conservation, the potential of REDD-plus to enhance ecological connectivity should be explored.

The CBD's new strategic plan, with its strong focus on forest ecosystems, offers a unique opportunity to streamline global forest-related targets, such as commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The ambitious targets of the strategic plan will require strong partnerships and coordination between relevant actors at the local, national and international levels. A further strengthening of the collaboration between the CBD and ITTO will help to ensure that the targets can be achieved in tropical forests.

Reference

Thompson, I., Mackey, B., McNulty, S. and Mosseler, A. 2009. *Forest resilience, biodiversity, and climate change: a synthesis of the biodiversity/resilience/stability relationship in forest ecosystems*. Technical Series No. 43. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, Canada.

1 *Of a total of 20 targets, grouped under five strategic goals.*

2 *Target 11 is of particular importance in the context of biodiversity conservation in transboundary tropical forests, as it opens new opportunities for joint management of protected areas, buffer zones and ecological corridors across two or more countries, which could be supported, for example, through ITTO projects.*

3 *With reference to Decision 4/CP.15 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, REDD-plus refers to "policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries". The acronyms REDD and REDD-plus are used for convenience only, without any intention to pre-empt ongoing or future negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.*