



Programme »Implementing the Biodiversity Convention«

The Biodiversity Convention

The concept of »biological diversity« or »biodiversity« refers to the diversity of life on Earth, encompassing genetic diversity, species diversity and the diversity of ecosystems. Intact ecosystems provide water, energy and food and are thus the basis of our very existence.

At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, biodiversity became the subject of a binding treaty in international law – the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD.

The CBD entered into force in 1993. Its objectives combine the conservation of biodiversity with the sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources. To date, 191 parties have joined the Convention.

By ratifying the CBD, the industrialised nations have committed themselves to assisting developing countries in implementing the Convention.

GTZ's programme »Implementing the Biodiversity Convention«

There is a far greater degree of biological diversity in developing countries than in other regions. Here, these natural resources are a particularly important asset, especially for people living in poverty, since they are the source of essential items such as food, clothing and medicine. The loss of biodiversity jeopardises the economic, social and cultural aspects of poor people's lives, and increases their vulnerability. At the same time, poverty often forces people to overexploit resources. Against this background, biodiversity and its protection and sustainable use have been key themes of German development cooperation ever since 1985. Since that time, some 540 mostly bilateral or regional projects have been supported. Furthermore, Germany is the third largest donor to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a financing mechanism for projects serving to implement the Rio conventions.

In 1994, the supranational project »Implementing the Biodiversity Convention« (BIODIV Programme) was set up. Acting on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) the BIODIV Programme seeks to foster the implementation of the Biodiversity Convention in developing countries. It also promotes the further development of the Convention as well as its instruments and bodies.

The BIODIV Programme supports and advises national and supra-regional projects and programmes conducted within the context of bilateral development cooperation, such as the Central Africa Forests Commission (Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale, COMIFAC) and the African Union. The programme uses smaller projects to pilot approaches for mainstreaming the »new« themes of the CBD (ABS, traditional knowledge, biological safety) within German development cooperation.

The BIODIV Programme focuses on the following **key issues** due to their relevance to development cooperation.

Sustainable management of protected areas has long been a component of many bilateral activities aimed at conserving biodiversity. As protected areas are vital to attaining the objectives of the Convention, a work programme was set up under the CBD with the purpose of safeguarding existing areas, identifying gaps in the national system and building networks. Besides ecological aspects, those responsible for protected areas must take into account the needs and interests as well as the knowledge and practices of people living in the vicinity. In this context, the issue of governance is key to the protection of biodiversity and the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources.

The BIODIV team fosters the development of new strategies and schemes to engage in a broader concept of conservation both for and with people. This approach to conservation for development is complemented by the organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops. The focus is on innovative financing mechanisms that



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safeguard protected areas in the long run, as well as on strategies for establishing adequate governance structures for different ecological and socio-economic environments.

Access and benefit-sharing (ABS) is a further key theme of the BIODIV Programme. The »Bonn Guidelines« were developed under the umbrella of the CBD to establish the outlines of an international system that will govern access to genetic resources and the sharing of the benefits derived from their use. Adoption of an international ABS regime is now envisaged by 2010. The regime aims to create an incentive to conserve biodiversity in the countries in which genetic resources originate by affording them an equitable share in benefits and technologies. This approach includes not only the use of genetic resources, but also the associated **traditional knowledge**.

Since 1998, the BIODIV Programme has been supporting partner institutions such as ministries and NGOs in South Africa, Bolivia, Viet Nam, the Philippines and Madagascar to develop and implement their national ABS legislation. Building on the experience gathered, the Dutch-German ABS Capacity Development Initiative for Africa was launched in 2005 in cooperation with the Dutch foreign ministry. Since then, support has been provided for a series of strategic meetings, preparations in the run-up to sessions of the CBD Conference of the Parties and working groups aiming to inform African delegates about the complex issues surrounding ABS and to prepare them for upcoming negotiations. The **ABS Capacity Development Initiative for Africa** has been open to further donors since 2008.

The introduction of techniques and products of genetic engineering can have far-reaching ecological, socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences. In order to address these risks, the **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety** was developed under the CBD umbrella, and entered into force in September 2003. An important element of the Protocol is the precautionary principle. It permits member states to impose import restrictions and prohibitions on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) even if there is no conclusive evidence of their potential hazards. The BIODIV Programme is responsible for imple-

menting the German Biosafety Capacity Building Initiative launched by the BMZ. In that context, the programme advises the Biosafety Unit of the African Union, and helps to build capacity in partner countries by carrying out pilot projects, for instance in China.

Environmental communication is important in enhancing the understanding of complex linkages, highlighting options for action and gaining support for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Building upon the CBD work programme on **Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA)**, the BIODIV Programme conducts a range of activities to communicate the Convention's objectives and raise public awareness of the importance of biodiversity. Activities are implemented together with various counterparts and networks in Germany and in partner countries, making use of exhibitions, brochures, special events and short films. Biodiversity conservation is an excellent door opener to discussing basic values such as global justice, tolerance, solidarity and action learning.

Biodiversity and climate change

The interactions between biodiversity loss and climate change are known, but are still in need of extensive research. According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the impacts of climate change (e.g. flooding, droughts, fire) are predicted to reach and even exceed those of the present causes of biodiversity loss. Globally, they are likely to become the major direct drivers of ecosystem degradation before the end of the century.

Just as climate change impacts severely upon the stability of ecosystems and biodiversity, changes to ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity impact upon the climate. Intact ecosystems such as peatlands and forests play an important role as CO₂ sinks. By helping to reduce greenhouse gases, they can contribute to the mitigation of climate change.

Biological diversity is also essential for adaptation to the impacts of climate change. For instance, it provides a safety net of genetic resources such as crops resistant to drought, while mangroves and coral reefs protect coasts against flooding and erosion.

Therefore, one important objective of the BIODIV Programme is to highlight the interdependence of biodiversity and climate change and help ensure that mitigation of and adaptation to climate change proceeds in a manner that maintains or enhances biodiversity.



Photo: al-Janabi

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Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Germany
T 06196 79 - 0
T 06196 79 - 1115
E info@gtz.de
I www.gtz.de

Authors:
BIODIV Team

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For further information:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische
Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
Programme »Implementing the Biodiversity Convention«
Contact: Dr. Konrad Uebelhör

T 06196 79-1362
F 06196 79-80-1362
E konrad.uebelhoer@gtz.de
I www.gtz.de/biodiversity

