



Linking the climate change and biodiversity agendas

Speech by Hans Friederich, IUCN Regional Director for Pan-Europe, delivered at Conference of INGOs to the Council of Europe on 28 April 2010.

Last year, the world was focused on the effects of climate change, and the political debate was directed towards the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference. The outcome of the summit was not what we had wanted: no binding agreements; no clear new targets and few extra funding pledges.

Nevertheless, some positive steps were made, not the least towards recognizing the importance of natural systems in mitigating climate change effects. USD 3.5 billions were pledged to kick-start work on “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries” (REDD).

This year, the International Year of Biodiversity, provides an opportunity to move the attention of the press and the politicians towards nature and natural resources. One of the priorities for IUCN is to stress this link between nature and climate change and to encourage integration and convergence of the political agenda on both topics.

The 2010 target for biodiversity

Eight years ago, at the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development, more than 190 national governments agreed to support a decision made earlier that year at a Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to “significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss at global, regional and national levels” by 2010 - this year. Countries in the European Union had already agreed in 2001 to go one step further and “halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010”.

The Parties to the CBD meet again in October this year in Nagoya, Japan, to evaluate progress and agree on new biodiversity targets for the world. As a prelude to this, and hopefully to generate greater political momentum ahead of Nagoya, many heads of government from around the world will also address the biodiversity crisis in September at the UN General Assembly in New York.

It is now clear that the 2010 target – vague and difficult to measure as it is – will not be met. The IUCN’s Countdown 2010 Initiative, which now has more than 1,000 partners, has played a crucial role in raising awareness about biodiversity and its threats in Europe. We have created a European Business and Biodiversity platform, involving some 80 industry leaders from 6 different sectors. The European Green Capital Stockholm serves as a role model in 2010 to promote best environmental practices to all other European cities, and Countdown 2010 is one of the key partners in the European Capitals for Biodiversity project. During the past years we have assessed the status of 6 taxonomic groups at European level and by the end of 2010 we will have reviewed the conservation status of 6,000 European species (mammals, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, dragonflies, beetles, molluscs, plants and freshwater fish. In the UK only, six

species that were extinct in the wild, including the majestic Osprey, have been re-introduced, and are flourishing. While there are many such conservation success stories, the overall picture is bleak.

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species paints an ever-more alarming picture of the state of biodiversity on our planet. Of the almost 50,000 species assessed last year, more than 17,000 are threatened. The European Red List shows that 15% of mammals, nearly a quarter of amphibians, one fifth of reptiles, 9% of butterflies, 14% of dragonflies and 11% of saproxylic beetles (beetles that depend on decaying wood) are threatened with extinction in Europe.

As part of the species assessments, we have also identified the main threats to biodiversity, including over-exploitation, habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, and the spread of invasive alien species. With increasing recognition of the vulnerability of our flora and fauna we now realise that climate change is an additional challenge for biodiversity.

Mitigation and adaptation

IUCN is urging the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) that will meet in Nairobi in May 2010 to encourage all Parties to the CBD to recognise that mitigating climate change is a central component in their efforts to address biodiversity loss. Climate change mitigation and adaptation need to be fully integrated into the full range of CBD Programmes of Work.

Nature contributes to the mitigation of climate change, through sequestering and storing carbon and by enhancing carbon stocks in a range of ecosystems, including forests, peat lands and other wetlands. According to the 2008 Eliash Review, forests represent the most significant terrestrial carbon stock: they contain 77% of all carbon stored in vegetation, and 39% of all carbon stored in soils. Forests sequester and store more carbon per hectare than any other type of land cover.

According to an assessment carried out in 2009 by the World Resources Institute for the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, there are an estimated 1 billion hectares of lost forests and degraded lands worldwide that offer potential for restoration at a mosaic and landscape scale. The estimated carbon sequestration potential of this area is 70-140 GtCO₂e up to 2030 – equivalent to or up to twice as much as from avoided deforestation. Clearly, the two strategies must go hand in hand.

The UNFCCC Copenhagen Accord that was agreed last year, but has not been ratified by all Parties, includes intent to establish a REDD-plus mechanism. REDD-plus goes beyond reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation to include forest conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Ensuring that the UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Mexico in December this year adopts a decision on REDD-plus is one of the priority areas for IUCN's involvement in the UNFCCC process.

Along with contributing to mitigation, nature supports people to adapt to climate change through providing ecosystem services, such as soil nutrient-cycle and carbon sequestration. IUCN promotes the concept of ecosystem-based adaptation, which includes a range of local and landscape-scale strategies that enable both people and nature to adapt in the face of climate change. This includes the maintenance and restoration of "natural infrastructure" such as mangroves and watershed vegetation as a cost-effective means for reducing vulnerability to

storm surges and floods. A recent case study of managed re-alignment of the sea defences at Freiston Shore in the UK (a process that involves deliberately breaching sea-walls in order to allow the coast line to recede) illustrates that this is a viable alternative to engineered infrastructure.

Another strategy deals with connectivity of protected areas and ecological corridors in production landscapes, involving a full range of stakeholders and governance arrangements. The European Green Belt, stretching from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, is the best European example of how to create ecological corridors.

The current text of the document on adaptation from the UNFCCC Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action makes reference to: "building resilience of socio-economic and ecological systems, including through economic diversification and sustainable management of natural resources". IUCN will make every effort during the negotiations in 2010 to ensure that this reference is maintained in the text.

The need for synergies

As countries are starting to discuss how to respond to the decisions that will be reached in Nagoya and Cancun later this year, IUCN calls for synergies to be made at national level between implementation of the biodiversity convention and efforts to address climate change through both mitigation and adaptation.

IUCN encourages all countries to ensure that mutual collaboration and cooperation is incorporated in the preparation of new National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and National Adaptation Programmes of Action and mitigation plans. This should include recognition that the ecosystem approach is applied where appropriate when implementing responses to climate change.

In parallel, at the international level, IUCN recognizes the need and the potential for increased collaboration between the CBD, the UNFCCC, and other multilateral agreements addressing aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, ecosystem services and development, including the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UN Forum on Forests, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

IUCN strongly supports the establishment of a cross-sector expert group to develop a joint work programme on biodiversity and climate change between the CBD, the UNFCCC and other relevant conventions.

We hope that with these measures, the climate change discussions and the biodiversity debate will be better coordinated, so that resources will be better used in future, and actions will support the development of resilience in natural systems and human society to deal with the inevitable effects of climate change.