



Eighth session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

3 February 2014

Statement of the Executive Secretary

- Honourable co-chairs of the Open Working Group:
 - Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, Permanent Representative of Hungary,
 - Mr. Macharia Kamau, Permanent Representative of Kenya,
- Distinguished delegates of Member States,
- Representatives of major groups and stakeholders,
- Colleagues,
- Let me thank you for inviting me to be with you today. It is a great pleasure and a privilege to have this opportunity to share my thoughts about the role of biodiversity for sustainable development.
- The key message I want to convey is simple: humanity's fate is tightly linked with biodiversity – the variety of life on earth. And biodiversity is **essential** for sustainable development and human well-being.
- Likewise, we will not achieve internationally-agreed goals of preserving and restoring biodiversity and using it sustainably if we fail to mainstream biodiversity into development policies. It is fitting therefore that biodiversity is being discussed in the 8th session of the Open Working Group, the last session to deal with thematic issues. Because biodiversity underpins or is deeply connected to all of the issues that have been explored in the seven previous sessions.
- Biodiversity is a vital asset in global and local economies. Biodiversity directly supports major economic activity and jobs in such diverse sectors as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, pharmaceuticals, pulp and paper, cosmetics, horticulture, construction, and biotechnology.
- Our oceans, part of your discussions, are rich in biodiversity and include a wide range of ecosystems that support human well-being and livelihoods. They are also intimately linked to critical global processes, such as climate regulation and nutrient cycling. The numbers speak for themselves:

- Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biological resources for their livelihoods
- The world's fisheries employ more than 180 million people, with the global marine fish catch worth US\$ 70 to 80 billion per year
- Overall, marine ecosystem services are valued at US \$4.5-6.7 trillion annually.
- You will also be discussing forests this week. The biodiversity of these vast biomes, spanning tropical and temperate areas, is the basis for ecosystem services that support poverty eradication, food security, energy and clean water.
 - More than 1.6 billion people worldwide depend on forests for food, medicines, and fuel as well as their jobs and livelihoods.
 - Three quarters of the world's freshwater is provided through forested catchments.
- If we neglect biodiversity and permit its continued decline, we will undermine the goals of poverty eradication, food security, human health and adaptation to climate change – all vital for the well-being of us all, but especially for the poorest of this world.
 - To many, the goods and ecosystem services derived from biodiversity provide livelihoods and directly constitute social safety nets, and can mean the difference between misery and well-being.
 - Food production depends largely on biodiversity and the services provided by ecosystems. The thousands of different crop varieties and animal breeds are founded in the rich genetic pool of species. Biodiversity is also the basis for soil fertility, pollination, pest control and all aspects important for producing food for a growing population. Bees and other insects that pollinate crops are estimated to be worth more than US\$ 200 billion per year to the global food economy.
 - Biodiversity and ecosystem functioning provide goods and services essential for human health – including nutrients, clean air and water, and regulation of pests and vector-based diseases. Biodiversity is the basis of traditional medicine, and a large number of top-ranking global prescription drugs contain components derived from plant extracts.
- The natural infrastructure provided by biodiversity is a ready-made cost-effective solution to challenges of the 21st century.
 - Ecosystems function as natural water infrastructure, costing less than technological solutions. Forests protect water supplies, wetlands regulate floods, and healthy soils increase water and nutrient availability for crops and help reduce off-farm impacts.
 - Biodiversity plays a major role in mitigating and adapting to climate change by contributing to long-term sequestration of carbon, and reducing the impacts of extreme events such as droughts and floods.

- Even the built environments of our cities are linked to, and affected by, biodiversity. Ecosystem-based solutions to common urban challenges can both protect biodiversity and be cost-effective. For example, green spaces in our cities reduce violence, enhance human health and well-being, and strengthen communities.
- The need to address biodiversity as a key element of sustainable development in the post-2015 period has been widely recognised in a variety of ways. For instance, the importance of the Strategic Plan on Biodiversity was reaffirmed by governments at Rio+20. The United Nations General Assembly encouraged Parties to consider the Strategic Plan in the elaboration of the post-2015 UN development agenda. The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda proposed a post-2015 goal on managing natural resource assets sustainably. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network proposed a goal on securing ecosystem services and biodiversity, and ensuring good management of water and other natural resources.
- The good news is that there is a widely-agreed framework for addressing biodiversity, linked with sustainable development – the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Targets. It was agreed by 192 governments in 2010 and further reaffirmed in the Rio + 20 outcome document. **But to successfully achieve the Strategic Plan and its Targets, biodiversity must be addressed in the SDGs.**
- The Biodiversity Issues Brief (BIB) prepared for this Open Working Group, sets forth an approach for how biodiversity could be addressed in the SDGs.
- This paper is the product of broad interagency collaboration and cooperation including not only the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, but also UNEP, UNDP, FAO, and the World Bank, with contributions from UN Women, WMO and other biodiversity-related conventions (CITES, CMS, ITPGR and Ramsar)
- The BIB suggests that biodiversity be included as targets and indicators in the priority goals that are likely to come out of the SDGs process, such as poverty eradication, food and water security.
- The BIB further suggests that biodiversity might also be part of an SDG on healthy and productive ecosystems. This latter goal could be an effective way, an “umbrella” perhaps, under which biodiversity, oceans, forests, wetlands, mountains and other ecosystems issues could be addressed in a coherent and integrated way. This goal could also capture the need to restore degraded ecosystems, including depleted fisheries and forest stocks, and soil fertility, in order to provide the food, water and energy security that will be needed for future populations, and to prevent and reverse desertification.
- The BIB also notes the importance of a goal on governance and enabling conditions, in order to have an integrated approach at the national level for implementing the SDGs and the three dimensions of sustainable development.

- The BIB points out the benefits of involving stakeholders at all levels. One such benefit is that expertise and knowledge, including the traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities, can be mobilised in support of implementation.

Distinguished delegates, colleagues, and friends:

- The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity can provide a foundation and source for goals and targets in the SDGs. But it also provides a very useful model that member countries may wish to consider in addressing the issue of the “means of implementation.”
 - While the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and its Aichi Targets has been globally adopted, the primary means of implementation is at the national level, reflecting national priorities and actions that respond to national, regional or local challenges.
 - Likewise in the development context, all countries can engage in a global flexible framework that takes different levels of national conditions and capacity into account.
 - It also provides a means for integrating sectors at the national level, linking biodiversity with development planning and economic development.
 - It is also the basis for integrated landscape and seascape planning and management for the achievement of multiple goals.
 - This focus on the national level as the basis for defining priorities also provides the level of ownership that can enable governments and stakeholders to promote and engage with the great variety of financing mechanisms now available. Three-way cooperation, private investment, fiscal instruments and other vehicles, in addition to ODA, can be mobilised under this framework.
- Whatever form the SDGs may take, it is clear that business as usual will not be sufficient to meet the challenges of this century and beyond. And many countries have seen first-hand the benefits of investing in biodiversity, and the cost-savings of decoupling resource consumption from economic growth. Therefore more attention will be needed on how to deliver whatever set of SDGs is agreed, including more effective and innovative governance systems and more effective use of nature-based infrastructure.
- I finally want to note that it is important that outcomes of this process recognise and reaffirm globally-agreed commitments. More specifically, it will be important to ensure that the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and Aichi Targets in their entirety are not diminished by our work here, and that any specific goals and targets developed for the SDGs do not inadvertently weaken existing global, regional and national commitments.
- Delegates,

- The future we want needs to be based on living in harmony with nature, in order to sustain those future generations. Countries which fail to recognize this and opt for short-term economic gains at the expense of nature will risk facing food, water and health insecurity and increased impacts from extreme weather.
- People are an integral part of nature. The benefits of biodiversity have been the foundation of the well-being of all past human civilizations, and the degradation of ecosystems and depletion of natural resources have been the root causes of collapse of past civilizations. They continue to underpin our wealth, health and well-being today. We owe it to future generations to ensure that biodiversity will provide them with the same benefits.
- I look forward to discussions in the days to come.
- Thank you for your attention.
