

BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

ISSUE 22: JANUARY 2007

“DON’T LET THE PERFECT BE THE ENEMY OF THE GOOD!” CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2007 TRONDHEIM BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Since 1993 the Norwegian government has organised periodic biodiversity conferences in Trondheim as a support to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The link between biodiversity and human well-being has been articulated by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), and the CBD’s “2010 target” has been integrated into the Millennium Development Goals. The fifth, and most recent Trondheim conference, in November 2007, therefore focused on the relationship between biodiversity, ecosystem services and people — and in particular on trying to understand the synergies and tradeoffs between conservation and development. The recently released Chairman’s Report provides a useful summary of the main discussion points during the meeting and the conclusions reached.

A big focus was on trade-offs and the need to recognize and manage the trade-offs between ecosystem services for the broader benefit of society. Trade-offs can be temporal (benefits now, costs later); spatial (benefits here, costs there) or personal (some win, others lose). As the term “trade-off” implies, win-win scenarios are hard to come by, but the Conference conference highlighted that we can move towards a “win more – lose less” position if we pay careful attention to four priority areas: (1) valuation of, and improved access to, information on ecosystem services; (2) mainstreaming biodiversity into global, national and local planning; (3) tapping into existing – and promoting new – environmental markets; and (4) strengthening rights of local people and giving them voice.

In particular, given the risk that climate change poses to both environment and development, it is critical to recognise and maximise the contribution that biodiversity can play in mitigation and adaptation. This includes the contribution that biodiversity makes to both social and ecological resilience – the basis for adaptation. Protecting nature can also help reduce emissions of greenhouse gases – not just from forests but also from wetlands, peatlands and other intact ecosystems. Beyond the climate change agenda, biodiversity conservation can help in addressing a number of other current global challenges including the food and health agenda and the fisheries and oceans agenda.

But don’t we already know this? The need to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss as a contribution to poverty reduction and for the benefit of wider society is already the focus of the 2010 target. However, perhaps too much is being made of our apparent failure to meet this target in time. Many individual achievements have been made, and these reflect the national and international commitment to address biodiversity loss whether it occurs by 2010 or beyond. In fact it is beyond 2010 that we should now be focusing – ensuring we have the right partnerships, indicators and priorities in place. Climate change is high on the political agenda, and the Trondheim conclusions thus rightly start with a call to the UNFCCC for interaction. Making this happen is a two-way process and our biggest immediate challenge is to raise awareness for action through much better communications – not just talking to ourselves but engaging the interests of those outside our sector - from the general public, to international economists, to scientists, policy-makers and the media. Without this effort, biodiversity loss will continue to be a minority concern.

SOURCE

Schei, P (2007). *Chairman’s Report: The Trondheim/UN Conference on Ecosystems and People – Biodiversity for Development – The Road to 2010 and Beyond. 29th October -2nd November, 2007.* Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management, Trondheim, Norway.

The report is available to download from: <http://www.trondheimconference.org/trondheimskonferansen/>

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