

MONDAY, 15 JANUARY 2018, 12:00

EU's global biodiversity policy: effective in delivering for both conservation and sustainability?



Despite international efforts, global biological diversity continues to decline at a rapid pace. While distressing on its own right, it has also been widely documented - and acknowledged - that the loss of biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems threaten our social and economic wellbeing [1]. Strengthening biodiversity conservation across the globe, in both developing and developed countries, is therefore of great importance to avoid irreversible losses and related increased hardships to human welfare.

The [EU Biodiversity Strategy](#) forms the basis for the Union's global action, committing it to combat the biodiversity crises by minimising the EU's global biodiversity footprint (i.e. minimising impacts of EU's internal policies and consumption patterns on biodiversity loss outside the EU) and by addressing biodiversity concerns as an integral part of the EU external environmental governance. In practice, the EU pursues these objectives through a framework of instruments including international dialogues and negotiations, trade restrictions and incentives, dedicated legislative acts such as the EU regulations on illegal timber and wildlife trade and capacity building.

Upon evaluation, the EU external biodiversity policy has a number of things to be pleased with. It includes relatively strong objectives and concrete activities as well as wide-ranging and active involvement in international conventions. Furthermore, the existing framework of policy instruments is in general compatible with and responding to the set objectives. In particular, EU involvement in global wildlife trade - including both negotiations and implementation - is an area in which existing evidence points to effective achievements in implementing the EU's objectives. For example, the available data in this area [3] indicates the EU bans on wildlife trade have effectively contributed to limiting global trade of targeted species over the past decades.

However, there is also a lot left to be desired. Even by the most generous interpretations, the EU external biodiversity policy appears ad hoc and fragmented, consisting of a range of different types of instruments and relying heavily on integration into other policy domains such as trade and development cooperation. Several implementation challenges remain, with the current level of integration of biodiversity objectives into both the EU's trade agreements and development cooperation with non-EU countries being limited. While frameworks for screening for possible negative impacts of trade and development cooperation investment on the environment exist, they still need to be improved and applied in a more systematic and vigorous manner in the area of biodiversity. Furthermore, the emphasis on biodiversity-related actions in partner countries' priorities for EU financing setting is still limited.

Finally, and very crucially, it is evident that the existing monitoring framework for EU external biodiversity policy falls short in assessing the actual effectiveness of these actions. The key monitoring framework, the assessment of progress in implementing the EU Biodiversity Strategy, seems incomprehensive and provides information primarily on the progress of the process without assessing the impacts and effectiveness of EU policy fully. Furthermore, no consideration is given to assessing EU's role in influencing the global biodiversity policy agenda through its efforts in the international biodiversity fora. The 14th Conference of Parties (COP14) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) takes place in Egypt in November this year. Evaluating the effectiveness of policy instruments implementing the global 2020 biodiversity targets will be one of the [key items on the agenda](#). It seems appropriate for the EU to step up its game in this regard, providing also an example to the Member States to follow suit. In this

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and contributes to multiple goals on sustainable development [4]. Similarly, illegal wildlife trade can

negatively affect emerging business opportunities such as wildlife tourism thereby undermining opportunities for green development pathways in partner countries. Furthermore, seeking synergies between biodiversity and other policy areas, [such as circular economy](#), could help to bring multifaceted solutions for sustainability in developing countries. Consequently, EU's external biodiversity policy can support governments' attempts to deliver improvements across a range of SDGs, way beyond the dedicated goals for conservation (i.e. SDGs 14 and 15). However, this requires both improving the coherence of the EU policy framework and stepping up its delivery. The [Eurostat report on EU's progress on SDGs](#), published at the end of last year, reports promisingly that the EU financing to developing countries is on the rise (SDG 17). However, the question still remains how effectively this financing contributes to the delivery of the SDGs in the recipient countries, both for biodiversity conservation and beyond.

For a detailed analysis of the above insights in the EU's external biodiversity policy please see the chapter by IEEP's Marianne Kettunen in a new book on [EU external environmental policy by Adele, Biedenkopf and Torney](#). In addition to biodiversity, the book provides a systematic analysis of EU's external action across other thematic areas, such as climate change and regions.

[1] e.g. www.teebweb.org

[2] E.g. the 2016 [Fitness Check of the EU Nature Directives](#) and [Article 17 reporting](#)

[3] UNEP-WCMC (2014 & 2015) Analysis of the impact of EU decisions on trade patterns, reports 1 to 4, United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre - UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.

[4] Nigel Dudley, Natasha Ali, Marianne Kettunen and Kathy MacKinnon (2017) Editorial essay: Protected areas and the Sustainable Development Goals, DOI: [10.2305/IUCN.CH.2017.PARKS-23-2ND.en](https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2017.PARKS-23-2ND.en)

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