

# **The Important Role of the Convention on Biological Diversity towards a Sustainable Society**

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As defined in the 1987 Brundtland Report, sustainable development is “meet[ing] the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Despite this ground-breaking articulation, there remains a lack of consensus on the basic concept of sustainability. Regardless of how one defines sustainability, however, when considering sustainable human well-being, it cannot be denied that the natural world is determining factor.

Clean water and air, pollination of crops, food, buffers from floods and storm surges, non-proliferation of infectious diseases, cultural values, raw materials to meet consumer demands are the direct result of an incredible diversity of plant and animal species and their intricate interactions. Together they provide the ecosystem services that ensure the well-being of humanity.

Yet impacts on the natural functions of our planet have never been as destructive as in the last 50 years. Over the past hundred years, humans have increased species-extinction rates by as much as 1,000 times the typical background rates over Earth’s history. The WWF’s 2008 Living Planet Index shows a frightening overall decline of 27 per cent; populations of tropical terrestrial species appear to have declined by 46 per cent. Considering that we rely on the environment for the basic necessities of life, we must work to reduce the degradation and losses we are causing. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), one of the most widely subscribed-to multilateral environmental agreements, provides the framework to achieve this.

With its three goals to conserve biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, the CBD has at its heart, sustainable well-being: first of nature and in turn ours. While intergenerational equity of resource use is

considered by the Convention, one of the most urgent issues is the here and now. Cities occupy 2 per cent of the planet's surface but their residents use 75 per cent of the Earth's natural resources. Natural capital accounts for 26 per cent of the wealth of low-income countries. Current degradation of the natural environment is directly impacting our society's abilities to meet its needs today, let alone in the future. It is for this reason that the CBD is key to any efforts to achieve more sustainable living.

Unfortunately the objectives of the Convention will only be achieved when the value of biodiversity, including its non-monetary components and the ecosystem services generated, is well understood by the public and fully integrated into decision making at all levels. This necessitates the engagement of all stakeholders: the business community; scientists; youth; women; non-governmental organizations; indigenous communities; parliamentarians; cities; and the list goes on. Moreover, it requires integrating biodiversity and ecosystem-services considerations into land-use policy and planning, agricultural, forestry, fisheries and tourism policies, scientific agendas, and into trade and development-cooperation policies.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has laid-out goals and guidelines to ensure the protection and sustainable and equitable use of this diversity and facilitate the inclusion of these into other sectors. Yet still, as fourth edition of the UNEP Global Environment Outlook outlines, one cause of the unprecedented loss of biodiversity is the inability of current policies and economic systems to incorporate the values of biodiversity effectively in either political or market systems. In other cases, where helpful policies that are already in place, often they are yet to be fully implemented. Indeed, international agreements are only as strong as their Parties' plans for on-the-ground implementation in their own countries.

Japan's contribution to conservation of biodiversity is in line with the spirit and letter of its recently finalized third national biodiversity strategy and action plan, which calls for a "Grand Design" based on adaptive management, the precautionary approach and the full engagement of society. This "Grand Design" cannot be achieved without mobilizing science and technology in support to the three objectives of the Convention. Furthermore, Japan continues to achieving the 2010 Biodiversity Target of significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss at the

global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

As host of the upcoming tenth meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Japan has a major contribution to make in mobilizing the national and international scientific community in support to the objectives of COP10.

What is lost in one country is lost to the world. Neither flora nor fauna adhere to human drawn borders and therefore initiatives at each level must be mutually reinforcing and require dialogue and cooperation. Only through synergistic action and social solidarity will we reverse biodiversity loss. And it is for this reason that the engagement of every country is imperative for the successful conservation of life on Earth and achievement of sustainable well-being.