

SUPPORTING LOCAL ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY THE ROLE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS



Supporting Local Action for Biodiversity:

The Role of National Governments

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Foreword



The need for city governments to tackle the challenges of biodiversity loss is more important than ever as the world's population has grown enormously in recent decades, particularly in developing countries. Urbanisation processes are undoubtedly responsible for some of this loss. Yet strategic urban planning can make cities more compact, reducing the spatial footprint of development and allowing for more shared infrastructure. This in turn reduces per capita resource use. Biodiversity reciprocates by providing ecosystem services crucial to the functioning of cities such as flood prevention, which in turn promote adaptation to climate change. The historic decision made at the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the Convention on Biodiversity to adopt the 2011-2020 *Plan of Action on Sub-national Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity* acknowledges the important contribution cities can make to stemming this loss, and defines multi-level cooperation between different levels of government.

The present publication helps those in every tier of government around the world as they manage biodiversity in cities. It has been written for national focal points, departments and ministries dealing with the urban environment to provide practical advice on supporting biodiversity action at the local level. With nearly 50 interesting case studies from around the world, it provides a consolidated series of actions toward implementing the COP10 Plan of Action. This publication also complements ICLEI's Local Action for Biodiversity Guidebook, which demonstrates how local authorities can incorporate biodiversity into urban planning and management.

As the world's premier sites of innovation, cities play a crucial role in reversing the loss of biodiversity. And as cities are some of the biggest beneficiaries of biodiversity and ecosystem services, their citizens – particularly the poor -- and their economic activities are inextricably linked to the wider urban environment. The interest of cities in the biodiversity agenda is growing fast, and we must seize this opportunity to make them more effective actors in the implementation of the Convention. It is my hope, therefore, that this guidebook will inspire national governments to achieve their targets for 2020. There is no time to lose.

Joan Clos
Under-Secretary General and Executive Director



On October 29, 2010, in Nagoya, Japan, the 193 national governments of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a decision with deep strategic implications: basically, the Parties recognize that they will not be able to meet the ambitious goals defined in the new 2011-2020 Strategic Plan of the Convention without the effective help of their sub-national and local authorities. Faced with the steep rate of biodiversity loss which jeopardizes the chances of achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals, Parties have decided to invite sub-national and local governments to help them, involve them when revising their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and include their achievements in their regular reporting duties to the Convention.

The 2011-2020 Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity adopted at COP 10 defines the ways and means for collaboration between levels of government, proposes a governance system, a monitoring and reporting structure, provides indicative activities and suggested fundraising mechanisms for Parties. The Plan reflects a 4-year long outreach and consultation process with Parties, networks of local authorities such as ICLEI, NGOs and many UN agencies including first and foremost UN-HABITAT, an active member of the CBD Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity since 2007. The present publication is part of our concerted effort to provide Parties, sub-national and local governments with guidelines and best practice cases to implement this historical decision. While ICLEI's excellent "Local Action for Biodiversity Guidebook" provides all the necessary information for local authorities to incorporate biodiversity into urban planning and management, this guidebook is intended to advise national governments on how to mobilize and support their sub-national and local governments to help achieve the 2020 targets of the Convention, improve the quality of life of their citizens and bring biodiversity back into cities. In this light, I commit the Secretariat to continue working with UN-HABITAT and many others on this important subject – as we know, the campaign for life on Earth will be won, or lost, at the local level.

Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif
CBD, Executive Secretary



Photo Credit: UN-HABITAT

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Introduction

Background

Loss of biodiversity is one of the world's most pressing crises. Apart from its intrinsic value, biodiversity matters because it sustains the ecosystem services upon which human societies depend. According to the recently published Global Biodiversity Outlook 3, despite the 2010 target to significantly reduce the rate of the loss of biodiversity, we continue to lose the diversity of living things by every measure.

It is estimated that the current species extinction rate is between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than it would naturally be¹, largely as a result of human activities such as habitat destruction.

As noted in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, this loss has been substantial and largely irreversible, with some 10 to 30% of mammal, bird and amphibian species currently threatened with extinction.

Human activities associated with cities such as converting natural areas to farming and urban development,

introducing invasive alien species, polluting or over-exploiting resources such as water and soils and harvesting wild plants and animals at unsustainable levels all play a disproportionately influential role in the loss of species and their habitats.



“Biodiversity is the variety of life and its processes; and it includes the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences among them, and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur”.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines biodiversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems” (Article 2, CBD).



The Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the three “Rio” conventions along with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is also one of six biodiversity-related conventions with the other five being: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

Each country that signs one of these conventions, becoming a Party to that convention, has a responsibility to respect the objectives and provisions of these multilateral agreements and to adjust its own domestic legislation to ensure the conventions are implemented in their own countries.

Although cities occupy just 2% of the Earth’s surface², they are home to more than half of the world’s population, and they use 75% of the world’s natural resources. They are also responsible for 70% of all the waste produced globally³.

The ecological footprint⁴ of city dwellers clearly extends beyond the boundaries of urban areas. This is most true of urban residents in the developed world whose environmental impact is disproportionately high. For example, the average North American living in a city such as Boston or New York has an ecological footprint of 8.4 hectares which dwarfs that of the average person in India, whose footprint is just 1.98 hectares.

Furthermore, the planet is urbanizing at an unparalleled rate. The United Nations estimates that, by 2030, almost 5 billion people worldwide will live in cities which is more than double the total in 1995⁵; of them,

The number of highly urbanized zones or megalopolises continues to grow and in 2007 there were 22 cities with more than 10 million inhabitants, and another 400 with more than 5 million. The majority of these “megacities” are and will continue to be in the developing world where resources are strained.

Also noteworthy is the growth of small and medium cities and the rapid urbanization of rural settlements which often encroach into valuable agricultural land or important natural habitat⁷. If not managed adequately, the current activities and growth of especially the world’s urban population will continue to accelerate the unprecedented loss of our planet’s biodiversity.

Recognizing that many of the key drivers of this loss are human activities in urban areas, the Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity was formally established at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress in October 2008. This partnership brings together key United Nations (UN) agencies — the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), UN-HABITAT, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - international organisations, including ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and academic networks (URBIO, URBIS), with the aim of supporting local authorities in meeting the three objectives of the CBD: conserving Earth’s biodiversity, sustainably using its components and ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits.

While Parties are the primary implementers of a Convention, local authorities are increasingly playing a complementary and growing part in the achievement of the CBD objectives.

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