

# Halting biodiversity loss: A global mandate to act

Mozzercork 2008

- Biodiversity's existence is essential for the planet. Beyond being a key resource for human life, the future of the Earth itself and its uniqueness are immeasurably important.
- In recent decades the world's leaders, citizens, scientists and institutions have demanded that the environment and its vital biodiversity be preserved and used sustainably. This demand has resulted in numerous international tools to aid in the sustainable development required for Earth's future.

## Biodiversity is a global common good

A globally significant event took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 when the world's leaders came together to discuss sustainable development issues at the UN Conference on Environment and Development. Although nature conservation was not new at the time, it was clear that previous action was insufficient to solve the environmental and developmental problems at hand. Biodiversity, ecology and sustainability concepts arose out of the wish for sustainable futures.

New and globally binding protection mechanisms were demanded by NGOs, scientists and the public within the growing debate on sustainable development in the 1980s. Even though new mechanisms were established in Rio, implementation is often still unsatisfactory and challenging.

Action at the local level is now recognised to be key to the success towards global sustainability. Local and regional authorities are not only closest to most of the world's population, but they administer large areas of land, including cities that

currently demand 75% of the world's resources.

The following highlights some of the most relevant international biodiversity targets and conventions to which local and regional authorities can link their work.



## UN Conference of Environment and Development (UNCED) 1992

This first UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro brought together more than 178 heads of state. The UNCED produced *Agenda 21*, establishing a roadmap towards global sustainable development for the 21st century and three thematic agreements: conventions on climate change, forests and biodiversity. They all outline targets and cooperation mechanisms for those countries who ratify the agreements.

For the first time, a relevant role of local governments

was recognized internationally in Chapter 28 of *Agenda 21: Local Agenda 21* has been driving thousands of local sustainable development initiatives worldwide by including the notion of stakeholder involvement in policy processes.

In the opinion of many experts, the local level has so far been most successful in reconciling environment with development. Following the strong local government activities to protect the climate, *Local Action for Biodiversity* is now put on the international agenda.

### Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The CBD is one of the three Rio Conventions. With 190 signatories, it entered into force in December 1993.

As a key instrument for sustainable development, the Convention's objectives are:

1. To conserve biodiversity,
2. To sustainably use biodiversity and its components,
3. To fairly and equitably share biodiversity's benefits.

The CBD's basic strategy, the *Ecosystem Approach*, is made of 12 principles and applicative guidelines that aid biodiversity management. Local governments are not party to the CBD themselves, but can influence its implementation via their national governments. The parties, or nations, meet every two years at the *Conference of the Parties* (CBD COP) to decide on implementation strategies. [www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int)

## Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000

In 2000, at the UN Millennium Summit, state heads agreed to combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. The MDGs guide the UN system and members to work towards a common goal with clear objectives and measurable targets. All

states and all leading development institutions have agreed to the MDGs and their success by 2015, explicitly realising the importance of local actors.

Biodiversity relates specifically to the following goals: decrease poverty and hunger (1), promote gender equality (3), ensure environmental

sustainability (6) and global development (8).

Local governments, especially in the developing world, are highly affected by MDG fulfillment. Lacking enforceability, the MDGs serve as a framework for justifying projects and their funding. Indeed, biodiversity-related initiatives are benefitted if

they relate to specific MDGs. Localisation of the MDGs is supported internationally by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), who help bridge the local and global levels of many issues relevant for local and regional authorities. [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals) & [www.cities-localgovernments.org](http://www.cities-localgovernments.org)

## Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) 1975



CITES is an international agreement aiming to ensure regulation of the international trade of species. CITES entered into force in 1975 and currently has 172 signatories. Three categories of protection based on levels of endangerment regulate the international trade of plants and animals. This promotes sustainable trade and raises awareness.

CITES has listed 33,000 species worldwide, and through its ranking and regula-

tions protects these species, and therefore also global biodiversity. CITES is supported by UNEP and IUCN.

Local governments, especially those near ports and trade centres, have direct impact and responsibility for the species arriving and leaving the area. Local authorities can also align local policy with their national laws protecting species, that are required for all CITES participating nations. [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

## UNESCO Programmes, 1970 & 1972

There are two UNESCO programmes that relate well to biodiversity and local and regional authorities. The *Man and Biosphere Programme* (MaB) establishes biosphere reserves. A biosphere reserve is an international conservation designation given by UNESCO from its Programme on Man and the Biosphere, initiated in 1970. Meanwhile the World Network of Biosphere Reserves has over 480 Biosphere Reserves in more than 100 countries. Targeting the ecological, social and economic dimensions of biodiversity

loss, biosphere reserves have three inter-connected functions: conservation, development and logistical support. These functions are integrated into a zoning system with core, buffer and transition areas. Its flexible character accommodates a great variety of activities, helping to build people's capacity and foster positive relationships between cultural and biological diversity.

Biosphere Reserves can include urban areas where sustainable economic development is promoted via partnerships with citizens

and local businesses. This is in part done through zoning around a core protection area. The gradual zones can include wilderness areas to settlements. Each biosphere reserve has its own appropriate governance system ensuring it meets its functions and objectives.

UNESCO is also responsible for the 1972 *World Heritage Convention*, which stems from two separate movements: preservation of cultural sites and nature conservation. World Heritage sites belong to all people of the world, irrespective of the

state territory on which they are located. 184 state parties adhere to the Convention that includes 851 properties on the World Heritage List. These sites include 660 cultural, 166 natural and 25 mixed properties within 141 states.

Biodiversity not only represents natural value, but is often an important part of cultural identity and tradition that can receive a special designation protecting and promoting individual local sites at a global scale. [www.unesco.org/mab](http://www.unesco.org/mab) and [whc.unesco.org](http://whc.unesco.org)

## Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 1971

The Convention on Wetlands signed in Ramsar in 1971 is an intergovernmental treaty, providing framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. With 158 Contracting Parties to the Convention and 1718 wetland sites in 2008, it is

the first global environmental treaty dealing with a specific type of ecosystem. Wetlands and their related biodiversity are very threatened habitats, with an estimated half of all wetlands being lost in the last century.

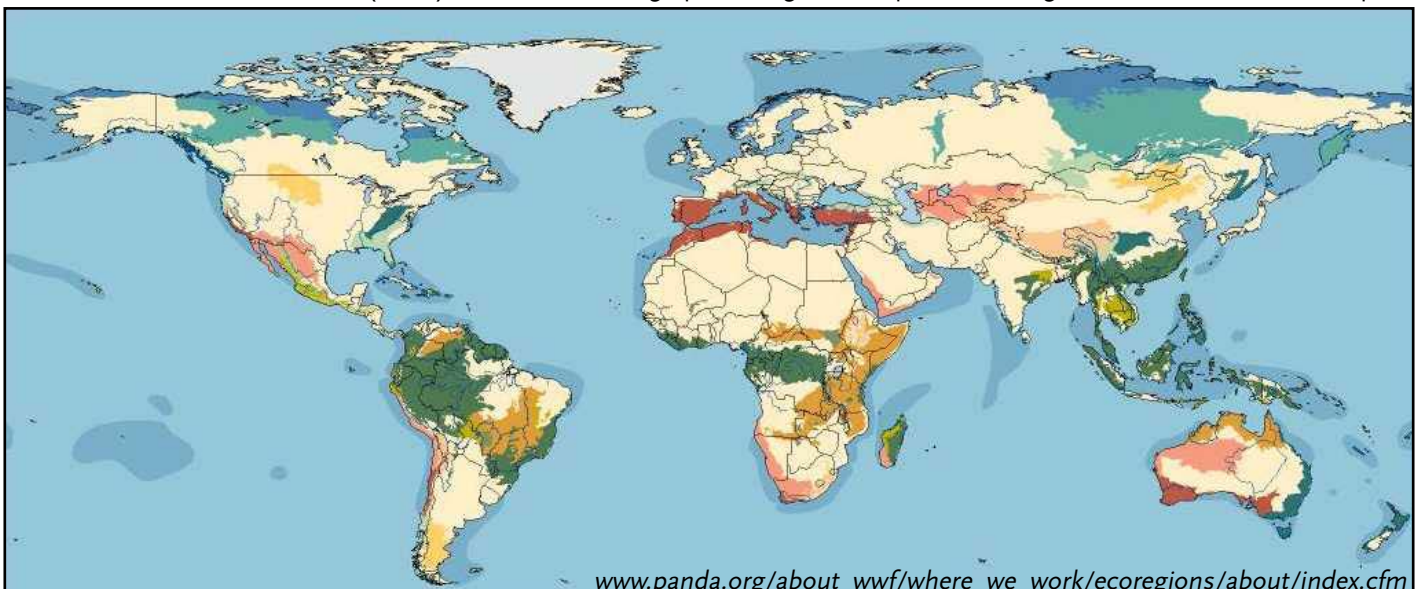
Local relevance: Wetland ecosystems support high concentrations of birds,

mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrate species locally. Wetlands are also important storehouses of plant genetic material, and contribute to local water quality and supply, control floods and erosion and buffer pollution in many areas. Climatic stability is also partly dependent on the health of

fresh water and oceans both in terms of the global climate and local ecosystems.

Resolution VII.8 sets the goal to activate local participation in wetland management. Initiatives in developing countries may receive funding support by the *Ramsar Small Grants Fund* established in 1990. [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

The World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) and National Geographic designated important ecoregions in their Global 200 maps.



## Natura 2000: Habitats and Birds Directives, 1992

Regional instruments are important tools to extend globally established conventions and targets to a more local scale. The following is an example of what exists within the European area.

Both the Habitats and Birds Directives from 1992 and 1979, respectively, are now used as mechanisms for meeting the target set by the Europe Union in 2001 to "Halt the loss of biodiversity

by 2010". Under these two directives falls the Europe-wide ecological network of over 18.000 protected sites, the Natura 2000 Network. Natura 2000 has become the core of EU biodiversity policy.

Since the Habitats and the Birds Directive are legally binding instruments for EU member states, local authorities can support the establishment of protected

areas endorsed by national government to become part of Natura 2000. The Natura 2000 network is perceived by the public as a positive eco-tourism and rural development label. The extensive EU funding scheme encourages regional authorities to target actors locally involved with Natura 2000 sites.

[ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000)

## The Aalborg Commitments, 2004

The Aalborg process is a series of events and commitments towards action for local sustainability of European cities and towns. With meanwhile more than 2000 participants across Europe, it is the largest campaign for urban sustainability. Numerous local government organisations as well as the European Commission support the process.

Biodiversity management lies at the heart of sustainably used ecosystems. By

committing to a wide range of important goals, local and regional authorities can crosscut issues like biodiversity, transportation and urban planning.

European local authorities can join the Aalborg commitments to show their dedication towards biodiversity and to participate in the European movement. Upon joining, the authority is expected to set individual targets and timeframes. The ten commitments include

good governance, sustainability management, healthy consumption and lifestyle, better mobility, viable local economies, and realizing the local role in global issues.

Promoting and increasing biodiversity is an explicit goal of the third Aalborg Commitment. Also explicit is improving soil, air and water quality, all of which connect very directly with biodiversity management.

[www.aalborgplus10.dk](http://www.aalborgplus10.dk)

This document is part of a series of factsheets that are intended to provide guidance and information on biodiversity management to decision-makers at the local and regional level. For more detailed information on how local and regional authorities have contributed to stopping biodiversity loss, please visit our web site [www.countdown2010.net/lara](http://www.countdown2010.net/lara) or contact us directly. All factsheets can be downloaded from [www.countdown2010.net/lara](http://www.countdown2010.net/lara).

## Facts & Figures

- Dry and sub-humid lands hold 35% of the world's population and is the origin of many food crops, such as wheat, barley and olives.
- 90% of the people living in dry lands are in developing countries. These places are also key for many migrating bird species.

## Urban biodiversity ...

is biological diversity of urban areas. It is heavily influenced by the built environment and the economic, social and cultural dynamics of these densely populated places.

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ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability  
[www.iclei.org/biodiversity](http://www.iclei.org/biodiversity)

Local Action for Biodiversity  
[www.iclei.org/lab](http://www.iclei.org/lab)

This factsheet was compiled in 2008 by ICLEI with the support of Countdown 2010, ECNC and LAB.



Supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, The Netherlands.