

BIODIVERSITY AND MDG: SEARCHING FOR BALANCE

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The awareness in nature conservation is increasing, governments through the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDG\)](#) want to improve human welfare attending some of the principal endemic problems of our century: poverty, hunger, health, education and sustainable development. The propose is an inventory of targets and deadlines to improve the situation of millions of people that are living in a poverty situation with the work and commitment of the involved national governments.

Poverty and hunger alleviation are directly related to the conservation of the natural resources (Pisupati and Warner, 2004) in order to assure productivity preservation of crops, livestock, forests and fishery. MDGs give some indicators and objectives to deal with these problems but they don't make a real connection with the importance of the natural resources.

But, which is the real connection between both issues and the weight of environmental sustainability in socio-economic development?

In 2000, 189 countries and 147 world leaders signed the [United Nations Millennium Declaration](#) in the context of the United Nations Millennium Summit to reduce world poverty radically by 2015. In this context, they pointed eight goals, The Millennium Development Goals (MDG), with 21 quantifiable targets and 60 indicators to monitor the process.

One of the main ideas of the initiative is to bring development everywhere and to everyone, in this sense the United Nations have developed a roadmap with guidelines and advises for the implementation of the different measures to tackle the goals. One of the peculiarities are their double dimension; all the nations working in the same line globally, and locally working in the specific realities and needs of each country. It is necessary to control, measure and get an inventory of those needs to develop a suitable action plan.

Millennium Development Goals identify and tackle poverty in its multiple dimensions: hunger, economy, gender equality of opportunities, education, health systems and in one of the goals they introduce the environmental sustainability. All of the elements mentioned are essential for human development but, in my opinion, our natural environment is crucial to enhance the others. The main criticism of the goals is because omits the value of biodiversity to make possible the other elements of the list. Therefore it should have a more relevant presence in the list of goals.

If we analyze all the goals point by point, we can find a strong link with biodiversity conservation for each of them. Hunger, is connected to food security and how to guarantee the access to poor people to the basic diet (Roe and Elliot, 2004). Hence, to ensure their livelihood, a sustainable management of the natural resources is needed. The environment is the principal supplier of medicines and health care products. We depend on the biodiversity to ensure and provide health assistance worldwide.

Going deeper through the goals and attending to the 7MDG, some indicators (indicator number 25 or 26 for example) focus just on the quantity instead of the quality of the natural resources (Roe, 2003), omitting the important fact of the different uses of the lands, legislation, management or the ancestral rights of the local communities... A reductionist definition of biodiversity and natural resources is used, just taking into account the amount of land protected or used and measured facts (Pisupati and Warner 2004).

The synergies related to biodiversity and poverty are not clear, their interactions not measured and the solution definition out of the political agenda (Roe and Elliot, 2004). There is no scientific evidence to quantify, measure and monitor the dependency of both variables and how the loss of biodiversity affects worlds welfare. This lack of scientific consensus makes biodiversity vulnerable.

Complexity contributes to the lack of commitment in the political arena at different levels. Although, there is a consensus in the idea of preserving the biodiversity, there is no agreement in how to achieve it, because "natural resource management and biodiversity conservation are imprecise sciences" (Roe, 2003). Furthermore, the protection of the biodiversity needs an important financial investment to be solved and all of these reasons make the political action more difficult (Pisupati and Warner 2004). The United Nations have a big chance to facilitate the process where all the stakeholders and actors should be involved. Scientific community have to reduce the uncertainty in the knowledge around the issue to show the importance of preserving our natural resources. Policymakers have to mobilize more efforts into the cause, investing more money, enhancing the knowledge and technology transference and building new mechanisms to monitor and ensure the transparency of the process.

There are multiple factors that slow down the process to carry out nature conservation goals, guiding it to fail into meet MDGs. The lack of human capacity in public institutions, investments, technology, knowledge and intervention are some of them.

Dealing with the development there are some endemic loops that make difficult the resolution of the conflicts. In most of the cases the main nature services to conserve are in poor areas, which are basically too poor to execute the changes needed to overcome the goals. Developed countries should assist them giving the tools to perform their own sustainable development. These measures imply financial investments, educational programs, technology transference and governability plans.

Biodiversity is a wide term, uncertain and related to multiple issues with a non clear definition. It implies animals, forests, oceans and part of this features are still unknown for us. Experts cannot come up with a common definition of forests, we don't know still some species of animals, we cannot determine some phenomena... little by little science is discovering new details about nature. But this uncertainty is used, most of the times, to create confusion in the public opinion and by the leaders to no take action.

WE COULD RECOMMEND...

Millennium Development Goals could be a powerful tool to combat the poverty and nature depletion. It represents one of the major international consensus in human development. Involves more than 150 leaders and governments committing to a common action plan. Although, the complete achievement of the targets is not realistic I think that just to put the world leaders working together and looking for a consensus, supposes a big step forward and maybe the starting point to develop a new plan.

This experience should help us to identify the weaknesses and barriers of our system to improve it. If we start from the development of the Goals, from my point of view I agree with those that think that is erroneously set out. We have to make a definition exercise in all the concepts related to the MDGs and give to each feature the right weigh. The biodiversity permits the sustainability of our existence and it is going to be necessary to invest more money and time to protect it.

There are several recommendations that I would like to suggest to advance in the process:

- **More action is needed.** Governments and public institutions community should put more effort on nature conservation. Efforts, translated as: well defined action plans and investments to achieve a sustainable management and protection of the natural resources. Uncertainty should not be an excuse for no action, they have to trust the available scientific knowledge and be able to adapt it for their own. Biodiversity conservation have to be a priority in the political agenda. (D. Sachs and Mc Arthur., 2005)

- **Scientific knowledge.** Most of the times, the absence of research in some themes it is related to the lack of investments or interest on it. It is necessary to search a consensus to deal with uncertainties and engage new multidisciplinary backgrounds to the research teams.

- **Communication.** Scientific information, data and findings should be treated beforehand and transformed into clear messages well explained to be well received by the different audiences.
- **Technology transference** is essential to ensure the capability building of the poorest countries and their sustainable development. Therefore, developed countries are going to play an important role to bring information and communication technologies to promote the knowledge.
- Some **Goals** need a **revision** of the targets and indicators. Focusing in the 7th Goal, more qualitative indicators should be added.

To conclude I will like to pay attention to the urgency of the issue. New global conservation efforts are needed, we have to be able to build new mechanisms to ensure the sustainable maintenance of the biological diversity. We should see the ecosystems as global goods, and the protection of those goods as a shared work.

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