

BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

Reconciling biodiversity and development: what role for aid agencies in conservation?

The 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Nagoya last year made a number of decisions that are relevant to development assistance agencies. Not least, agreeing the 2011–2020 Strategic Plan, which puts reducing poverty at the heart of its rationale and mission. And the indicators adopted as part of the Strategy for Resource Mobilisation make specific reference to aid flows and other forms of financial support.

The CBD clearly sees a role for development assistance agencies in achieving its objectives — but do these agencies see biodiversity conservation as part of their mission to combat global poverty? A recent policy document produced by the Agence Francaise de Developpement (AFD), *Reconciling Biodiversity and Development*, provides some insights.

France has signed the CBD and recognises the value of biodiversity as “the cornerstone of the economies of developing countries and a direct source of income for the poorest populations”. France thus links its international commitment to reduce biodiversity loss and preserve global public goods, with its international commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals — seeing the win-win potential of such an integrated approach.

AFD pursues its biodiversity objectives in three priority sectors — forests, fisheries and protected areas. The organisation sees the links between conserving biodiversity and reducing poverty, and understands biodiversity as a source of natural capital that, if maintained, can generate flows of goods and services that contribute to economic growth. AFD’s invests heavily in promoting sustainable local use of biodiversity. But it recognises that many activities eroding biodiversity lie beyond the control of local communities, so it also works to ensure that biodiversity concerns are integrated into all its own projects — whatever the sector — and supports the development of scientific, regulatory and partnership frameworks that foster sustainable use.

This all looks great on paper — but how tangible is AFD’s commitment to biodiversity given so many competing claims on limited aid funds? French development assistance passing through AFD amounted to more than 6 billion euros in 2009. In that same year its direct financial assistance for biodiversity was just less than 90 million euros (1.5 per cent of the total). According to OECD figures (albeit with the many caveats associated with the ‘Rio Markers’ method of identifying biodiversity-related aid) biodiversity assistance works out at roughly 2.5 per cent of total bilateral aid, but this ranges from highs of more than 10 per cent (Denmark) to lows of 0.1 per cent (United Kingdom and United States).

So France is pretty average on the financial front. Nevertheless, its clear articulation of biodiversity-development links marks it out as a policy leader at a time when donor countries are expected to really step up to the mark to honour the agreements made in the UN International Year of Biodiversity.

Dilys Roe, April 2011

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