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COP13 - “Mainstreaming” biodiversity into the economy

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Issues of the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Cancun, Mexico, 4-17 December 2016). The 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 13) will be marked by “mainstreaming”. Beyond the validation of indicators for monitoring the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Targets, and the discussions on marine biodiversity and the mobilization of financial resources, this will be the main innovation subject to discussion. This will

also be the most important feature of the proposed resolutions that are on the table for negotiation.^[1] This is also the essence of the message contained in the draft declaration of the "high-level" government representatives.

Mainstreaming is the idea that biodiversity, rather than being strictly confined to environmental policies, should be taken into account in all sectoral policies, regulations, incentives and monitoring mechanisms in: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, tourism, etc. In addition, it should also be included in climate and other inter-sectoral policies (poverty, health, etc.) and, more generally, throughout the sustainable development agenda. Such mainstreaming seems necessary, as it is difficult to stem the erosion of biodiversity. The only tangible progress today is the extension of terrestrial and marine protected areas.

These areas have allowed the conservation of some emblematic and rare species, for which the expected extinction curve has sometimes been reversed, such as the famous examples of the panda, certain whale species, vultures and the ibex. But beyond these limited successes for which mobilization has proved possible, there is more generally an accelerated simplification of ecosystems, an erosion of genetic heritage, and even a collapse of populations of so-called "ordinary" biodiversity. It is therefore logical to argue that biodiversity should be set free from the confined sphere of protected areas and targeted species, and that it should extend throughout all policies, that it is represented in all social and economic institutions.

The decisions that will be discussed at COP13 will thus call upon States Parties to

1. mainstream biodiversity issues into their commitments to other international processes, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals,
2. strengthen mechanisms of inter-sectoral coordination to ensure that biodiversity is taken into account in national agendas, and to develop green accounting tools; and
3. to implement a number of specific sectoral actions in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and tourism.

Nevertheless, while a wider mainstreaming of biodiversity appears necessary, it will face in part the same challenges as those it encounters today in protected areas and targeted conservation policies. In many cases, the absence of biodiversity mainstreaming into other sectoral policies is neither a coincidence nor a result of the ignorance of actors regarding the importance of biodiversity. Most economic activities have so far been organized without the mainstreaming of biodiversity, while some have even knowingly destroyed it, because other national priorities such as trade balance, fiscal resources or the fight against poverty have appeared to justify such an approach. It is thus difficult to justify the maintenance of less intensively exploited areas, which are considered as unexploited sources of economic growth. A better mainstreaming of biodiversity in all economic sectors can therefore only be achieved if its importance is demonstrated. In fact, this mainstreaming will involve questioning many social aspirations and their practical translation.

Consequently, behind the seemingly ideal and consensual issue of mainstreaming, is the question of the reformulation of action, the trade-offs and sacrifices to be made: what should be changed and distributed differently to make biodiversity a central concern for institutions, politics and companies? This year, therefore, COP13 refers to the way in which this objective can be translated into policy in terms of a reorganization of policies so that society and economics takes biodiversity into account. However, these are areas on which the UN Convention on Biological Diversity has little direct influence. A complementary approach may exist. For biodiversity to be effectively mainstreamed, it is necessary to encourage actors who utilize soils or oceans to curb their practices when they are harmful to biodiversity and, on the contrary, to encourage favourable practices. However, initiating these changes is not the exclusive prerogative of governments. Companies, through their procurement policies in particular, financial

institutions, which support the development of sectors, but also NGOs and consumers, through the pressures they exert, play a decisive role.

The transformation of supply chains (or value chains) is a possible way to change the behaviour of actors and to better integrate biodiversity across the economy and society. It is indeed the organization of value chains – which determines the types of producers encouraged, and the remuneration of practices, whether sustainable or not – which can guarantee a certain standard of living to rural populations without compromising biodiversity. It is essential to target and coordinate the role, the influence and action of actors on local and, especially, global markets. Win-win solutions are possible: business models can be linked to create business-biodiversity synergies. To this end, profound transformations still need to be made throughout the chain of the economic actors involved. Regulation and incentives must therefore be fundamentally rethought.

Nevertheless, there is a risk that aspiration on this issue may remain purely pious hope at the end of the COP 13. While parties will surely be *encouraged* to reform subsidies harmful to biodiversity in agriculture and to promote sustainable consumption and production, no operational timetable has yet been put in place. The issue of value chains, and therefore of actors and their influence in increasingly globalized markets, is not the subject of any particular attention. Business initiatives for “zero deforestation” supply chains are mentioned and governments have been called upon to support these initiatives. But beyond the underlined need for access to information provided by companies and their supply chains, regulatory approaches and links to international trade and regulation are not addressed. Instead of focusing on economic actors, future decisions remain limited to the institutional level of sectoral policies and their coordination. A huge leap forward is required.

The issue of “mainstreaming” of the CBD should not be considered solely as a question of the organization of the institutions and sectoral policies, which is the business of each government. It is as much, if not more, a subject for policies of economic development and especially development aid, for international markets, value chains and multinational companies. To avoid the formulation of purely pious hopes, it must be recognized that such mainstreaming involves difficult trade-offs between different economic activities and, more broadly, between different social projects. It is this appropriate formulation of the issues of mainstreaming that will have to be monitored during COP13 and it is one of the criteria against which to assess the scope of the work that will be carried out.

Report

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Read also

[Innovating for biodiversity conservation in african protected areas: funding and incentives](#)

Authors:

- [Renaud Lapeyre,](#)
- [Yann Laurans](#)

As part of COP13, Renaud Lapeyre and Yann Laurans (IDDRI) will present the results of their study "*Innovating for biodiversity conservation in african protected areas: funding and incentives. Insights from Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and South Africa*" in two side events, taking place on December 14 :

- [Innovative financial mechanisms for long-term biodiversity conservation: Insights from international cooperation experience - COP13](#)
 - [Promising trends in policies: Mainstreaming biodiversity within law, human rights and economic instruments - COP13](#)
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[\[1\]](#) Draft decisions for the thirteenth meeting of the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, III.-item 10 pp. 17-48.

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