



Social aspects of biodiversity: creating jobs and sustaining people

A new EU-commissioned report has investigated the social value of biodiversity conservation, particularly in terms of its links to employment. It estimates that 35% of jobs in developing countries and 7% of jobs in the EU are dependent on ecosystem services.

The value of biodiversity and its related ecosystems is becoming increasingly recognised in policy. Biodiversity is important in supporting vital ecosystem services (ES) such as provision of clean water, but can also provide social benefits, such as improved employment. The report focussed on the impact of biodiversity on employment and the value of biodiversity and the services provided for vulnerable rural people.

Jobs are linked to biodiversity directly through the employment of people to manage and conserve protected areas and also through employment in biodiversity sustained sectors, such as in fisheries, forestry and agriculture. There is also an indirect link to ES provision, such as water provision and purification, as more people are employed in water management and related industries.

The number of jobs attributed to biodiversity and ES actions is significant both in the EU and developing countries. However, developing countries are considerably more dependent on ES (927 million, or 35% of jobs) compared to the EU (14.6 million or 7% of jobs). In addition, the type of employment linked to biodiversity differs. In the EU, biodiversity-related employment is often highly skilled, whereas in developing countries, it tends to be low skilled and poorly paid, particularly in primary industries such as agriculture and fishing.

The combination of these two findings suggests that EU employment will be less vulnerable to impacts from changes in biodiversity. The report investigated this issue using vulnerability assessments that were based on the dependency of local economies on ES. The economies of the rural poor were found to be most directly dependent on ES, most vulnerable to natural hazards and more influenced by biodiversity degradation. Communities living in remote regions were particularly vulnerable.

In the EU (including Croatia, Norway and Switzerland in this study) the rural percentage of the population increases from 22% in high-income countries to 37% in low-income countries. The value of ES as a percentage of the country's GDP also demonstrates a general increase from high income to low income. In countries such as the UK, Denmark and Germany, the value of ES are less than 1% of GDP, whereas in countries such as Bulgaria and Croatia, the value of ES is over 25% of GDP, indicating a higher economic dependency on biodiversity. For all countries, forests and wetlands made the largest contributions to ES values, and coastal recreation made a small contribution.

On the basis of its findings the report made several recommendations to improve the integration of biodiversity and its social aspects into relevant policies. It suggested greater efforts to raise awareness among stakeholders and the wider public about the benefits of biodiversity and ES. Alongside this should be support for regional approaches to pay for ES and an integration of an ES based approach into development aid policies to ensure local involvement.

A time-horizon should be developed that maps out the phasing out of subsidies and incentives that are harmful to biodiversity and vulnerable groups. This should be accompanied by a monitoring process that highlights the effects of EU policies on the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. This process may highlight the effects of policies on natural resources and the rural poor in developing countries (e.g. trade, financial or agricultural policies). Lastly, current EU policies for conservation should be complemented with measures to improve the connectivity of protected areas and landscapes and integrate green infrastructures.

Source: Nunes, P.A.L.D., Ding, H., Boteler, B. *et al.* (2011) *The Social Dimension of Biodiversity Policy: Final Report*. For the European Commission, DG Environment under contract: ENV.G.1/FRA/2006/0073 – 2nd, pages vii-205, Venice/Brussels, February 2011. Download from: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/biodiversity/pdf/Social%20Dimension%20of%20Biodiversity.pdf>

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