

SUMMARY

BIODIVERSITY AS AN ENABLER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Why is Safeguarding
Biodiversity Important in
the Finnish Development Policy?

Analysis of the Development Policy Committee, January 2021



DEVELOPMENT
POLICY COMMITTEE

Sustainable development goals build on biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the range of species and biotic communities on the planet, and to the genetic variation within species. The Convention on Biological Diversity, which was concluded in 1992, aims to ensure the conservation of biological diversity, to foster the sustainable use of its components, and to safeguard the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.

However, biodiversity is declining at an alarming pace, faster than ever before in the history of humankind. The number of species threatened with extinction is growing all the time. Today, as many as a million animal and plant species are at risk of becoming extinct.

Challenges arising from biodiversity, climate change and food security as well as links between these phenomena and interrelated matters are also central themes in the work of the Development Policy Committee. Its goal is to strengthen the global dimensions of sustainable development in Finnish decision-making and Finland's international influencing activities.

During its current term of office, the Development Policy Committee will publish three analyses related to environmental questions, of which the first examines biodiversity. A group of experts representing the members of the Development Policy Committee has participated in the preparation of the publication. The expert group was commissioned to conduct a knowledge-based review of the significance and role of biodiversity in Finland's development policy and to draw up recommendations for decision-making relating to sustainable development and development policy.

Continuing loss of biodiversity together with the progression of climate change, increasing inequality and the waste problem threaten to hamper the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda2030. All of the 17 SDGs are interrelated. For example, if attempts to stop the loss of biodiversity fail, the goals related to poverty reduction and zero hunger will not be reached in areas where people are very dependent on the services provided by ecosystems.

Diverse nature gives us all food, energy, pharmaceuticals and other essential goods. It also maintains a good air quality, wellbeing of forests, clean water and soil, and produces a viable climate. The loss of biodiversity is in many ways linked with various health threats, including the spread of zoonotic diseases.

Only a fraction of development finance is channelled to environmental issues

One of the four priority areas Finland's development policy emphasises adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and sustainable use of natural resources. However, development finance has not been allocated to environmental ends to any significant extent. Funding for biodiversity has been falling sharply since 2011. According to the OECD's DAC Peer Review in 2017, Finland channelled 17 per cent of its development finance to the environmental sector in 2015 when the corresponding figure in the OECD countries was 27 per cent on average. The OECD recommended Finland that apply the good practice of mainstreaming gender to improve how environment and climate change adaptation and mitigation are taken into account throughout Finland's development cooperation.

The majority of the funding allocated by Finland to biodiversity is multilateral funding channelled via international organisations, mainly to the Global Environment Fund (GEF). Civil society organisations' work is also supported. In bilateral cooperation, biodiversity has played a very small role in recent years.

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Strengthening biodiversity in development policy

Many SDGs, such as reducing poverty and hunger, improving health and wellbeing, having clean water and sustainable energy, and preventing the loss of biodiversity can be achieved together. This requires more effective implementation of existing policies and legislation and changes at system level.

Reducing consumption and waste and developing production methods are essential not only to achieve sustainability but also to reach social justice. Examples of actions needed to achieve the SDGs include reforming the food systems, mitigating the climate effects arising from land use, promoting a well-balanced population growth, using nature-based solutions, and reforming the global economic system, as well as protecting biodiversity. Protecting and increasing the number of nature reserves and restoring

habitats are among the other central actions that are needed.

According to the Development Policy Committee's group of experts, biodiversity should be among the key themes raised by Finland in international advocacy work in the same way as Finland emphasises the rights of women and girls and people with disabilities. Finland must also support developing countries in the implementation of agreements relating to biodiversity.

It is important that biodiversity and environmental protection be included in the next government report on development policy principles to be applied across government terms so that it is addressed both as a cross-cutting objective and as a key theme under the fourth priority area (climate change and natural resources). This is to safeguard biodiversity in all development cooperation.

Protecting biodiversity and its sustainable use are in many ways linked to the SDGs, including balanced population growth, food security, poverty reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Committee's group of experts notes that, in its international advocacy, Finland must promote identification of these links, because protecting biodiversity and healthy and well-functioning ecosystems also promote food security and poverty reduction goals and mitigate climate change and help to adapt to it.

In addition, Finland must raise the level of its direct funding to the environment sector and to the protection of diversity in various funding instruments and take note of the impacts of all development and climate finance on biodiversity.

