briefing

Look both ways: mainstreaming biodiversity and poverty reduction

The world's failure to meet its 2010 target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss demonstrates that conservation efforts have so far been insufficient. They are too often undermined by seemingly more pressing economic and poverty goals — despite the frequent correlation of high biodiversity with high incidence of poverty. But it shouldn't be a competition. Biodiversity and poverty reduction are intrinsically linked and demand an integrated approach. The Convention on Biological Diversity has long emphasised the need for integrating, or 'mainstreaming', biodiversity into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies, most recently in its new Strategic Plan. Lessons learnt from wider experience of environmental mainstreaming can help parties to the Convention achieve this target in practice — they point to a six-step plan for the task.

Policy pointers

- **Integrating, or** 'mainstreaming', biodiversity into development policy and action will likely be a key objective for developing countries over the next 10 years.

- **Lessons learnt from** broader environmental mainstreaming provide guiding principles and point to a six-step plan for the task.

- **Biodiversity and** poverty reduction are interdependent: achieving both sustainably requires integration in both directions — a process we call 'reciprocal mainstreaming'.

Linking biodiversity and poverty

With their entirely different institutions and actors, biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction can seem worlds apart. But in fact the two are intrinsically linked. Poor people often depend on biodiversity both for their livelihoods and as a safety net against deeper poverty.[1] Biodiversity also underpins a range of 'ecosystem services' — from providing food and water to regulating climate and disease outbreaks — that contribute to human well-being and support sustainable development.[2]

There can be trade-offs between biodiversity and poverty reduction, particularly if they are considered in isolation. Biodiversity-blind development intervention can cause the irreparable loss of biodiversity, which in turn can increase the vulnerability of poor people and reduce their options for development.[3] Equally, poverty-blind conservation measures can act as a poverty trap where poor people are condemned to making a living from small areas of land or resources with low productivity, or alternatively if elites ultimately control and benefit from the resource.

To manage such trade-offs, biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction must be tackled together by integrating relevant concerns into the decisions and institutions that drive policy, rules, plans, investment and action for both — a process known as 'mainstreaming'.

Mainstreaming promises

The need to link biodiversity and development strategies is increasingly recognised within the global policy frameworks that guide action towards their major goals. For example, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) acknowledges that "economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of developing countries". Its 2010 target — to achieve "a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and the benefit of all life on Earth" — was endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and, since 2006, also forms one of the targets within Millennium Development Goal 7, to ensure environmental sustainability. The Convention's post-2010 Strategic Plan re-emphasises the biodiversity–poverty link.

Biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction must be tackled together

There is at least a decade of experience in integrating biodiversity into national poverty reduction work — largely through efforts to prioritise biodiversity within Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which act as the principal framework for developing country governments' work in poverty reduction and guide associated development aid.[4]

A recent review[5] of PRSPs in 54 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean found that all but one make reference to biodiversity. PRSPs recognise biodiversity as a contributor to poverty alleviation in many different ways, from a resource for meeting local subsistence needs to one that contributes to GDP and foreign exchange earnings — reflecting a range of government and donor perceptions that economic development is in some way linked to natural capital.

But most PRSPs fail to give enough attention to the necessary conditions needed to generate meaningful benefits — although there are some good practice examples. For example, Kenya's strategy recognises the need for community-based wildlife management and identifies requirements to support associated enterprises, and Bolivia's recognises the need to reconcile protected areas management with indigenous land and resource rights.

Overcoming obstacles

Although the international and national scripts speak of policy consensus on integrating biodiversity and poverty reduction strategies, the evidence suggests that it is not working effectively on the ground. The world has missed the 2010 target for biodiversity conservation. The 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is rapidly approaching without assurance of success in many regions of the world. Despite progress, some conservation work continues to marginalise poor people. And development continues to degrade biodiversity, which has not been mainstreamed into development policy and institutions.

Mainstreaming is hampered by several constraints. These include the prevailing development paradigm, which treats biodiversity as an economic 'externality'; a lack of data, skills and institutional capacity to work on biodiversity–development links; and competing priorities for which there is either greater political will or a stronger institutional position.

If parties to the CBD are to successfully mainstream biodiversity they will have to improve their outreach and interaction with the development and economic communities. This includes more research to demonstrate the contribution of biodiversity either to widely used indicators of development, especially the MDGs, or to specific groups of poor people. This

would raise awareness in development circles of different components of biodiversity and their roles in poverty reduction, and generate momentum for integration.

Crucially, building the capacity for mainstreaming within all environment and development communities will be essential to realising their respective policy objectives in practice.

Entry points and drivers

A critical first step to mainstreaming is identifying national, sectoral or local level 'entry points' for getting relevant environmental concerns on the development agenda, and the associated 'drivers' — formal or informal advocates, funders or projects with the vision, incentives and resources to act.

The entry points often correspond with key events or tasks in mainstream policy and planning cycles, particularly those concerning safeguards, prioritisation and investment choices — it's not just about getting biodiversity text into the PRSP. Indeed, the PRSP alone is often not the most effective force for change. In practice, PRSP objectives may be overruled by 'upstream' processes on key policy issues such as fiscal regimes or foreign investment policy, or 'downstream' decisions on specific investments. For example, even if a PRSP recommends action to conserve biodiversity, it could be ignored in the face of a need to support large-scale agriculture schemes or to build a large dam to meet water demands.

It is all too easy for institutions to be vague on environmental commitments but decisions do tend

Guiding principles for effective mainstreaming

■ **Leadership:** mobilise and encourage political will, engage with champions for biodiversity, development, finance and civil society.

■ **Integration:** integrate biodiversity and development approaches through 'demand-pull' rather than a one-way 'push'.

■ **Key sectors:** focus on economic sectors that manage substantial environmental assets and risks, and have significant resources to invest, such as mining, food, energy, tourism, water and energy.

■ **Dialogue:** use a wide range of means to make voices heard, 'exorcise demons' and learn others' perspectives on shared problems.

■ **Processes:** use existing mainstream frameworks and established analytical and planning processes where possible.

to be made around financial processes. For such reasons, some of the more effective drivers may come from within the mainstream itself, for example finance ministries that are obliged to agree the budget. Reference to the national constitution can also help to assure environmental considerations are made, as in Ecuador. But drivers can increasingly include specific NGO-, community- or donor-led initiatives aimed at better use of the environment; for example, payment schemes for environmental services, and multiple benefits from Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) projects.

Environmental institutions on their own are not often effective drivers. They tend to 'push' environment issues in ways that do not correspond to their targets' own incentives. More enduring results may be achieved from a 'demand-pull' by interested mainstream authorities — for example, budget directors investigating the value of environmental assets, potential revenue streams, associated costs and risks, and distributional implications.

The choice of driver should be based on a good, in-depth, assessment of all options, especially to uncover who is currently working for mainstreaming and their associated champions, entry points and tools. It is important to understand exactly how, when and by whom decisions are made.

Six steps to integration

Approaches to mainstreaming biodiversity into development will obviously differ between places, in time and context, and depending on the entry point and driver used. But IIED's review of effective environmental mainstreaming[6] suggests common principles to guide the process (see "Guiding principles for effective mainstreaming").

Although mainstreaming is not necessarily a standardised, technical process carried out in a neat sequence, experience to date shows that effective efforts can be characterised by a series of six steps.[6]

Step 1: **Start up.** Scoping the political economy and governance affecting biodiversity and poverty. This is key to identifying relevant stakeholders — an essential precursor to convening a multi-stakeholder group to steer the mainstreaming process.

Step 2: Assess and debate priorities. Once a steering group is in place, it should identify the positive and negative links between biodiversity and poverty, and who is affected by them. This will help to identify the stakeholders with whom to consult in order to propose and refine desirable and credible biodiversity–poverty outcomes — with the aim of reaching consensus.

Step 3: Plan and invest. The next phase plans how to achieve each of the biodiversity–poverty outcomes: identifying entry points for mainstreaming

in key decision-making processes, mapping institutional roles and responsibilities, and making the business case for including biodiversity in policy and practice.

Step 4: Implement. Putting the plan into action includes reflecting agreed changes in key mainstream policies, plans and budgets, and promoting key investments for biodiversity–poverty outcomes.

Step 5: Build capacity. Integrated institutional systems and associated capacities will need to be brought together and developed to support mainstreaming efforts.

Step 6: Monitor and evaluate. Once biodiversity–poverty integration begins to grow, joint indicators and accountability mechanisms will need to be installed to ensure monitoring and continuous improvement of the process.
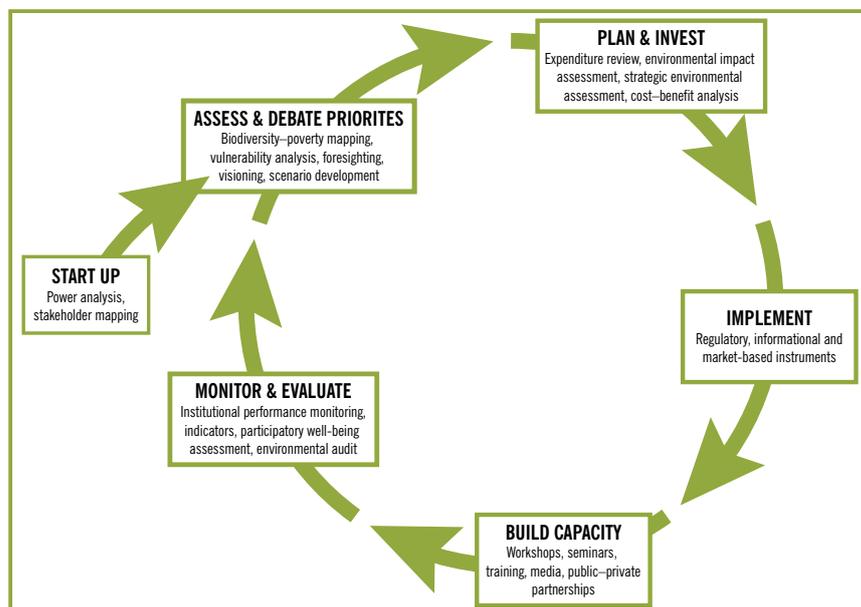
These steps do not provide a linear model for mainstreaming. Rather, they mark a cycle for continuous improvement to integrating biodiversity and poverty, where the results from monitoring and evaluation exercises can feed in to re-assessing and debating priorities over time (see Figure).

There are many tools available to support each step, some of which are highlighted in the Figure.[7]

Two-way mainstreaming

Biodiversity mainstreaming discussions to date have largely emphasised integrating biodiversity into poverty and development policy. But the inverse — mainstreaming poverty reduction objectives into biodiversity policy — is equally important to ensure that efforts are coherent and mutually supportive. Biodiversity actors need to know more about the forces

Figure. Some of the tools available for mainstreaming biodiversity

ASSESS & DEBATE PRIORITES
Biodiversity–poverty mapping, vulnerability analysis, foresighting, visioning, scenario development

PLAN & INVEST
Expenditure review, environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment, cost–benefit analysis

START UP
Power analysis, stakeholder mapping

IMPLEMENT
Regulatory, informational and market-based instruments

MONITOR & EVALUATE
Institutional performance monitoring, indicators, participatory well-being assessment, environmental audit

BUILD CAPACITY
Workshops, seminars, training, media, public–private partnerships

facing poor people and development actors, and about how good development happens. They need to speak the 'dominant language' of development and economics, and not expect everyone else to speak their own 'minority language'.

There has been some progress in this direction. For example, an analysis by the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) of poverty issues within the CBD's biome-specific Programmes of Work[8] found that articulation of the linkages between biodiversity or ecosystem services and poverty reduction or sustainable livelihoods has become more sophisticated over time. 'Newer' programmes, such as the one on Island Biodiversity, contain more explicit pro-poor thinking than 'older' ones on, for example, Agricultural Biodiversity. But even where these have strong thematic links to poverty reduction, UNEP-WCMC found that they are unevenly interpreted in practice.

A recent review[9] of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) by the United Nations University reveals a huge variation in the attention given to development issues — from very general statements to thorough analysis to detailed actions. The review found that the few NBSAPs that explicitly mention poverty reduction — for example those of Laos and Burkina Faso — are not necessarily linked, synchronised with, or referenced to relevant PRSPs or development policies. At the same time, some countries with only limited consideration of poverty issues in their NBSAP — such as Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia — emphasise biodiversity issues in their PRSP.

The international community has failed to meet the 2010 biodiversity target, biodiversity conservation efforts being insufficient when carried out alone. They are far too often undermined by their apparent lack of congruence with seemingly more important economic, development and poverty reduction objectives. The fact that conservation is not pursued with vigour is one thing; that powerful 'mainstream' investment and behaviour is uninformed by biodiversity is perhaps the bigger issue.

In the long term, biodiversity will be critical to achieving those objectives, just as sustainable development and poverty reduction will be critical to achieving biodiversity goals. Efforts to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity must be integrated into broader development and poverty reduction planning and practice — and vice versa. Such 'reciprocal mainstreaming' will be one of the next great challenges in implementing the CBD.

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Further reading

■ The Poverty and Conservation Learning Group: www.povertyandconservation.info ■ Environment Inside: www.environmental-mainstreaming.org ■ CBD Strategic Plan: www.cbd.int/sp ■ CBD Programmes of Work: www.cbd.int/programmes ■ National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans: www.cbd.int/nbsap

Notes

■ [1] Roe, D., Walpole, M., Elliott, J. 2010. *Linking Biodiversity Conservation and Poverty Reduction: What, where and how?* Summary report of a symposium held at the Zoological Society of London 28–29 April 2010. See http://povertyandconservation.info/docs/20100901_ZSL_Symposium_Report.pdf ■ [2] Millennium Assessment. 2005. *Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*. World Resources Institute, Washington DC. ■ [3] UN. 2010. *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*. United Nations, New York. ■ [4] PRSPs are not uniform documents: they include socio-economic development plans, growth and development strategies, or they can be routine national development plans adapted to incorporate poverty reduction issues in response to World Bank lending requirements. They are intended to be rolling documents that respond to changing national conditions and priorities. PRSPs have been published by 67 countries. ■ [5] Roe, D. 2010. Whither biodiversity in development? The integration of biodiversity in international and national poverty reduction policy. *Biodiversity* **11**(1–2) 13–18. ■ [6] Dalal-Clayton, B., Bass, S. 2009. *The Challenges of Environmental Mainstreaming.* IIED, London. ■ [7] For a more detailed list of tools used in environmental mainstreaming, and examples of how these are used, see www.environmental-mainstreaming.org. ■ [8] Jones, J. *et al*. 2010. Linking the thematic programmes of work of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to poverty reduction. In: *Biodiversity for Development: New approaches for national biodiversity strategies.* CBD Secretariat, Montreal. ■ [9] Prip, C. *et al*. 2010. *Biodiversity Planning: An assessment of national biodiversity strategies and action plans.* United Nations University–Institute of Advanced Studies, Yokohama, Japan.

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