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Enhancing synergies among MEAs and delivering the CBD Strategic Plan in Pan-Europe: the potential of PEBLDS

I. Introduction

Biological diversity underpins the provision of ecosystem services and thus forms the basis of all economic processes and activities. Thus the current rate of biodiversity loss, which affects genetic and species diversity, as well as ecosystems, does not only put a moral obligation on the society to protect biodiversity for its intrinsic values, but it also threatens human well being. As a response to biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services several responses have been given from local to global levels, and ambitious commitments were made in the beginning of the millennium to halt the loss of biodiversity¹ (or significantly reduce the rate thereof²) by 2010. As the 2010 target was not achieved, it is a crucial moment to steer future policies into the direction of sustainability, where the problem of biodiversity loss is tackled in its complexity and more holistic and effective responses are given from local to global levels. As the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 under the Convention on Biological Diversity defines it³, such responses also need to focus on the status of biodiversity, the direct pressures affecting it and the underlying causes (drivers), as well as on enhancing the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Effective responses to counteract biodiversity loss are able to build synergies among existing initiatives in order to be as efficient as possible. The responses should be holistic in order to effectively avoid the shifting of environmental pressures in space or time, e.g. move the resource extraction activities from the Global North to the Global South or transform the original land cover from rainforest to palm oil plantations for enhanced biofuels production. Furthermore, the holistic responses should be embedded in regulatory framework allowing country specific modifications if needed. This would be able to resolve or at least mitigate the conflicts between the different sectors and sets common objectives for using and safeguarding ecosystems at the same time.

While numerous multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) exist on regional and global levels aiming at the protection of biodiversity, its sustainable use and ensuring its benefits to society, their work and effects remain largely divided. In light of the previous efforts, successes and failures of biodiversity protection and our growing knowledge regarding the interconnectedness of environmental, social and economic issues, it would be an important step forward to enhance the synergies among various regional and international efforts and thus increase the efficiency of the responses. At the same time a socio-economic regulatory framework needs to be developed applying a holistic approach through joint efforts, which can provide an enabling environment for all the specific activities.

¹ Conclusions of the Gothenburg European Council in June 2001 and Ministerial Declaration of the 5th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in May 2003

² Decision VI/26 of the 6th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in April 2002

³ COP 10 Decision X/2 on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020

II. Synergies among MEAs and other commitments

Synergies among MEAs can be addressed at different levels from national through regional to international, and both within the policy development and implementation. Taking into account their thematic relevance to biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, those MEAs that are most relevant for Pan-European biodiversity conservation (Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar Convention, CITES, CMS, Bern, Alpine and Carpathian Conventions), the three Rio Conventions and relevant EU commitments are targeted within this paper.

At international level the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 of the CBD represents a useful flexible framework that is relevant to all biodiversity-related conventions⁴, where synergies among the various efforts for implementation could be enhanced and greater efficiency realised. Applying a holistic approach for all type of ecosystems, the pressures and the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss could address the policy gaps and incoherence among the various sectoral policies. The integration of environmental, social and economic issues in a coordinated manner, while considering the needs and responsibilities of both developed and developing countries could also contribute to the discussions and development of an enabling regulatory environment. Synergies should be used for finding ways to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, while also mobilising new financial resources for its conservation.

At national level synergies in implementation can be enhanced through integration into sustainable development policies and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), development of joint institutional and financing mechanisms, common reporting procedures, as well as through developing new national tools and mechanisms for the coherent implementation of MEAs applying a holistic approach. Synergies among MEAs and other EU and national commitments can be also used at project level in practical conservation activities (see Annex for an example from Slovakia).

III. Using PEBLDS as a platform for enhancing synergies

While efforts for enhancing synergies among MEAs have started on different levels and in different approaches from knowledge management to institutional cooperation mechanisms, further efforts are clearly needed to enhance not only efficiency and more coherence, but also to develop an enabling regulatory environment for the specific activities carried out under the various MEAs. The Pan-European region provides an ideal field for piloting such efforts, as it brings together countries with different background and capacities (donor and recipient countries, EU and non-EU countries).

PEBLDS, which has a long history in the field of biodiversity conservation in Pan-Europe, provides a flexible framework for cooperation among all Pan-European countries and can bring together actors from different levels (national governments, European Commission, global, regional MEA Secretariats). It also has a strong profile and rich history of multistakeholder involvement within the discussions and the implementation of activities. Within the recent reform process of PEBLDS it was decided to focus on the implementation of CBD COP decisions, while discussions also started on the possibilities to strengthen synergies among MEAs through this Pan-European platform.

Thus, PEBLDS has the capacity, responsibility and the potential to spearhead in delivering changes for more effective and holistic implementation of biodiversity commitments made on several levels.

IV. Enhancing synergies and delivering the new Strategic Plan of the CBD through coordinated Pan-European action

Rationale of the approach

The 2050 biodiversity vision, strategic goals and Aichi biodiversity targets under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 under the CBD requires coordinated action on national and international levels, where all biodiversity MEAs can play an important role. Applying a holistic and proactive approach the Strategic Plan builds on the DPSIR (drivers-pressures-state-impact-response) framework, where all aspects of biodiversity changes are taken into account. While all biodiversity

⁴ As recognised by CBD COP in its decision X/2

MEAs and all Rio Conventions are relevant in one aspect or another for delivering the strategic goals, most of their actions focus on improving the status of biodiversity (strategic goal C) and reducing the direct pressures (strategic goal B). However, the actions focusing on the pressures and status of biodiversity cannot deliver long lasting and significant results, if the drivers remain untouched and continue to regenerate the problems. Nevertheless, there are still significant gaps in international policy mechanisms to develop and introduce tools that can change the drivers on national and global levels.

Changing and eventually reducing, eliminating the drivers requires a holistic response from governments, as the underlying causes of biodiversity loss are closely linked to national leading to globalized consumption and production patterns and socio-economic regulatory frameworks. At the same time these responses focusing on the drivers need to be relevant for all biodiversity MEAs and Rio Conventions, where they all find their place through targeted actions.

In order to find common denominators among the various MEAs, the definition of environmental pressures by the European Environmental Agency could provide a useful basis. According to this pressures are "developments in release of substances (emissions), physical and biological agents, the use of resources and the use of land by human activities"⁵. Tackling these different types of pressures requires different types of policy tools (legal, economic), and many elements of these already exist under the different MEAs. Resource use and land use could be selected as overarching topics, where Pan-European cooperation for enhancing synergies among MEAs, and working on more holistic policies that also address the drivers behind the pressures could focus on. At the same time the growing pressure on and competition for resources and land does not only have negative consequences for biodiversity, but also for international relations, trade, poverty alleviation and security issues (e.g. through the dependence on external resources). Thus addressing these overarching issues in a holistic way would also have a great contribution to enhancing the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services (strategic goal D of the CBD SP).

Approaching the challenges of implementation of MEAs from the point of view of limited financial capacities, there is a need for mobilising financial resources for global biodiversity conservation as adopted at COP11, while also taking into account the needs and responsibilities of both developed and developing countries. Holistic resource and land use policies should provide the basis for significant increase of financial resources through innovative biodiversity financing mechanisms. The mobilisation of resources should not only provide additional funding for biodiversity conservation, but it should also reduce the environmental pressures through addressing the drivers at the same time.

Building on the potential of land use and resource use for building synergies among MEAs, developing holistic policies to address the drivers, as well as mobilising financial resources through innovative mechanisms, the two overarching topics of land use and resource use will be examined further as possible pilot areas for action.

There are several initiatives and processes related to resource and land use on various levels, which can greatly contribute to the delivery of the CBD SP and other environmental MEAs through creating synergies among them. However, the links among those initiatives are sometimes missing, which can lead to incoherent policies, weaker results and higher resource needs. Possibilities for enhancing synergies could include policy assessment identifying the policy gaps and redundancies, experience exchange and information transfer to enhance policy coherence and holistic approach, developing recommendations to fill in policy gaps and increase policy coherence through more holistic policies on resource use and land use, better implementation using available financial and human capacities more efficiently, etc.

Relevant initiatives related to land use in the Pan-European context include the Emerald and Pan-European Ecological Networks, the EU Natura 2000 network, the EU Green Infrastructure initiative, the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas, the Ramsar Convention and the World Heritage Convention, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions, national protected areas and spatial planning policies, etc.

⁵ An analysis of risks for biodiversity under the DPSIR framework, L. Maxim, J. H. Spangenberg, M. O'Connor, *Ecological Economics* 69 (2009) 12–23

Relevant initiatives related to resource use include the EU Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative (which covers fuels, minerals and metals but also food, soil, water, air, biomass and ecosystems), UNEP's International Resource Panel to provide policy relevant scientific assessments and review policy options, international discussions on green economy as the follow up of the Rio+20 Conference and on Sustainable Development Goals leading up to the post-MDG Agenda. The current political attention on resource use at different levels provides a chance to put biodiversity and ecosystems higher on the political agenda and draw the attention of economic decision makers to their essential role in economic processes.

Objectives of the approach

The main objective of the approach is the delivery of the CBD SP in Pan-Europe, through enhancing synergies among biodiversity MEAs, as well as the Rio Conventions and other relevant initiatives.

In order to achieve this objective, it is aimed to increase the understanding of decision makers and stakeholders on:

- The linkages among the different types of environmental pressures, and among the actions through which they are addressed under the different MEAs and relevant initiatives,
- The linkages of resource and land use to social and economic problems (poverty, security, trade, etc.),
- Policy gaps in the regulatory framework of land use and resource use, which lead to inefficient policies and implementation,
- The ways to prevent the shifting of environmental pressure between resource use, land use and pollution patterns in order to increase policy coherence among the MEAs,
- Financing needs and innovative financing mechanisms, which can improve the state of biodiversity and address the underlying drivers behind its loss at the same time,
- The policy options for holistic land use and resource policies through developing a holistic regulatory framework considering regional/national specialities, which can enable all the specific actions under the biodiversity MEAs, the Rio Conventions and other relevant initiatives.

Based on the increased understanding of the above issues it is aimed to:

- Increase cooperation among Pan-European countries on the implementation of the MEAs and the CBD SP,
- Provide input to international and regional processes related to MEA policy development and implementation and thus contribute to the implementation of the CBD SP,
- Provide input to national processes, such as to the development and review of the NBSAPs, and support their implementation,
- Initiate joint actions on (sub)regional level, which deliver direct or indirect impacts on biodiversity, as necessary,
- Review the Pan-European implementation of the CBD SP and provide input to the mid-term and final evaluation.

In order to realise these aims, the Pan-European cooperation would be largely based on existing initiatives, bringing together knowledge, expertise and different approaches, while focusing on the needs of biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration in a holistic way.

Ways of work

The delivery of the aims and objectives outlined above requires a flexible framework with broad stakeholder involvement. It is suggested that PEBLDS task forces are established on resource use and biodiversity and land use and biodiversity in order to prepare expert meetings. The two task forces would be established on the recommendation of the PEBLDS Council, and they would have the mandate until 2015.

Expert meetings on resource use and biodiversity and land use and biodiversity would be organised twice a year. Pan-European countries would be represented by regional groupings (for instance: WE, CEE, West-Balkan, EE, CCA), while partners (e.g. MEA Secretariats, European Commission, International Resource Panel), as well as other stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, land users, businesses) would be also represented in a limited number. External experts could be invited on an ad hoc basis.

The expert meetings would discuss relationships and policy tools related to land use and biodiversity and resource use and biodiversity in support of strategic goals of the CBD SP and it would also prepare recommendations for the newly prepared or updated NBSAPs. The expert groups could also provide additional help for the implementation of the NBSAPs. Already existing tools such as InforMEA and TEMATEA can be used for highlighting the linkages among the MEAs and enhancing synergies within the overarching topics. Expert meetings would also discuss and adopt expert recommendations as an input to the PEBLDS Council.

The PEBLDS Council would consider for endorsement the recommendations of the expert meetings and would also set the frame and tasks for the next period. In 2015 the PEBLDS Council could provide Pan-European input on the mid-term evaluation of the implementation of CBD SP and adopt recommendations for the next Efe Conference.

The implementation of the recommendations on national and international levels would be ensured through integrating them into the ongoing work under the various initiatives as well as through starting activities under PEBLDS, in case there are clear implementation gaps.

In this way PEBLDS would at the same time focus on the implementation of CBD and enhancing synergies among MEAs in a holistic approach and it would become a regional pilot for the other UN regions.

The added value of this approach in relation to the existing initiatives

There is a niche in addressing the drivers behind biodiversity loss on international policy level, and through that for delivering the CBD SP. Even though economic and trade issues are addressed in many other platforms and processes, it is very difficult to mainstream biodiversity into them. This process could offer a unique opportunity to discuss these problems in detail on expert level, where biodiversity considerations (ecosystem services, carrying capacity) are in the focus.

As different environmental problems are discussed in rather isolated policy processes (separate efforts to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, habitat loss, soil degradation, species extinction, to maintain traditional knowledge on sustainable use, restore ecosystems, etc.) on international level, the responses emerging from these processes also remain segregated and most often apply end-of-pipe solutions. Currently there are no policy processes, which would provide forums for the holistic consideration of environmental problems and environmental pressures, and which could target the common drivers behind them. Thus there is a need to link different biodiversity and environmental issues together in a holistic way through the two main environmental pressures of resource and land use, while also putting it into the context of poverty, financing and international security.

The Pan-European field would also provide unique opportunity to exchange information and views on land use and resource policies between EU and non-EU countries, which contributes to the EU accession process in biodiversity field and to the development and implementation of EU Neighbourhood Policy. The outcomes of the discussions and the identified fields of action could be channelled into the funding policies of donor countries.

While there are several opportunities to discuss different issues on an ad hoc basis, regular and open exchange of views within a process, which could benefit from similar processes on other levels provides an added value for policy development.

Possible outcomes

This Pan-European process would greatly contribute to the increased understanding of the relationships between resource use, land use and the changes of biodiversity and ecosystems. This increased understanding underpins the development of holistic policy responses and the using the potential of synergies among MEAs and other initiatives.

Based on the outcomes of the Pan-European expert meetings, the PEBLDS Council could adopt recommendations or conclusions on resource use and land use policies to be taken up by the various countries and stakeholders. The outcomes of the PEBLDS Council meetings could be channelled into the development and review of NBSAPs as well as other national policies (on sustainable development, spatial planning, etc.). As the discussions on the overarching topics are ultimately built on the commitments and requirements under the different MEAs, the outcomes of the process can greatly contribute to enhancing the synergies among MEAs on national level. Among others they can

contribute to developing joint objectives, policy tools, data management system and reporting, financing schemes on national level.

On the other hand the outcomes of the process could also impact EU policy development based on Pan-European dialogue. They can also serve as guidance for developing positions for MEA COPs, and discussions within the Marrakech Process and the preparation and follow up of the Rio+20 Conference among others.

This approach would also facilitate the understanding and cooperation between the donor and recipient countries and channel financial support towards activities that are based on holistic approach and can deliver more MEAs at the same time. On the longer term it would also enhance the cooperation and understanding in the region with a positive effect on environment and security questions related to resource and land use.

The way forward

It is suggested that such a possible initiative is endorsed by the Pan-European countries as members of the PEBLDS Council in order to create ownership of the process, as the countries are the ones responsible for delivering the commitments within the MEAs and the CBD SP. After agreeing on the direction for such Pan-European cooperation a smaller group of countries and experts should further elaborate the framework of implementation. It should be ensured that this approach does not create any parallel processes, but build on the ongoing ones to increase synergies.

Annex

Conserving wetlands through using the potential of various MEAs and EU legislation – an example from Slovakia

The Záhorie Lowland (west Slovakia) has been designated as an important wetland according to Ramsar Convention (Rudava River) and as an Important Bird Area, and it has been included in the Natura 2000 network (Site of Community Importance and Special Protection Area). The area hosts many important species, including migratory species (birds and bats) protected under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Bern Convention.

Wetlands of Zahorie Lowland are unique due to their location (border area with Austria and the Czech Republic) and biodiversity. There have been strong efforts and interests of experts and environmentalists to preserve the area for the future. It resulted in the designation of the Landscape Protected Area of Zahorie in 1988, including these important wetlands. However, there was a gap in communication between different sectors and low level of understanding of importance of the area by locals. Designation of alluvium of the Rudava River as a Ramsar site in 1998 was the missing trigger to improve understanding and involvement of all relevant institutions including conservationists, water managers, foresters, farmers and local communities in the conservation of the area. Recognition of the area at the global level significantly helped NGOs and experts to push through environmental projects and gain attention and interest of stakeholders and local communities. After the designation of the Natura 2000 network started in 2002 even more attention was given to the area due to its biodiversity and occurrence of several species and habitats listed on the Habitats and Birds Directives (HD and BD).

In line with the CBD, biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources as well as international cooperation are the strategic goals of the National Strategy for Biodiversity Conservation (NSBC) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) of Slovakia. When NGOs initiated a Life+ Nature project with EU and national support, special emphasis was given to implement actions that contribute to all these strategic goals. Prior to submitting the project discussions with locals and relevant institutions (agriculture, forest and water management) were organized to gain their support and ensure their active involvement. Contribution of the project to the implementation of the CBD and the strategies was an important argument to persuade partners about its importance and its benefits for the future. Reasonable use of water resources along with conservation of water ecosystems have convinced responsible bodies including ministries to sit around a table and identify measures to achieve it. It was clear that there are no sufficient financial sources to move focus from business issues towards environment. Therefore the NGO initiative to implement a joint project with financial support from the state and EU was very much welcomed and supported.

Restoration of wetlands in this area is a win-win situation for both the water management and environmental sector. Water management in Slovakia is based on the implementation of strategic documents, mainly the Water Plan for Slovakia (WP SK) based on the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). One of the strategic environmental goals of the WP SK is to "secure sustainable water management in the country for ground and underground waters as well as for protected sites depending on water (wetlands)". Commitment of water bodies to fulfill WP SK and WFD resulted in development and successful implementation of the joint project of water managers and environmentalists. Presence of aquatic species of the European importance also significantly helped to achieve cooperation between environmental NGOs and Slovak Water Management Enterprise. Important result is for instance the construction of a fish by-pass on the Rudava River near the village of Velke Levare, supporting species of the European importance and hence implementation of HD and BD. It also supports achievement of the main goals of the CMS, in particular that the Parties "shall endeavour to provide immediate protection for migratory species...".

Added value of the various international commitments

The abovedescribed actions and experiences show that international commitments and conventions along with national legislation all play a crucial role in the development and implementation of environmental policies. Usually there are significantly different priorities of sectors, in this case the environmental and water management sector. While the environmental sector focuses on sustainable use of natural resources and protection of ecosystems, the latter has its priorities based on commercial use of water resources (e.g. energy production, transport) and flood control. However, both sides need to follow the relevant legislation and implement strategic documents. Therefore it is very important the legislation and documents are linked with international conventions and commitments and with each other and support mutual objectives. The WETREST project is a good example of the importance of synergies between these documents and cooperation between bodies responsible for their implementation. Successful implementation of the project proved that this way of communication as well as the recognized importance of the site at national and even more at international level is a crucial factor. Last, but not least it also helped to get financial support (small grants) from different donors, including state institutions and business sector.

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CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.