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## Post-2015: How to properly address biodiversity?

By Paul L. Lucas, José A. González and  
Carmen Richerzhagen

# The Current Column

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## Post-2015: How to properly address biodiversity?

Bonn, 3 February 2014. With the first round of stocktaking meetings of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) coming to a close, discussions about the post-2015 development agenda can begin to address the goals' architecture and the themes that should be included as a goal or target. There is no doubt that many issues that are currently addressed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – such as poverty, education, hunger, drinking water and sanitation – will also be included in the new agenda. But it might not properly address biodiversity and ecosystem services. Biodiversity underpins most ecosystem services that are essential for human wellbeing and poverty eradication, including the provision of food and water and increasing people's resilience to the impacts of climate change. Especially the poorest people directly depend on properly functioning ecosystems to meet their basic needs. It is therefore of utmost importance that biodiversity and ecosystem services are properly addressed in the post-2015 development agenda. How should this be done?

### Three possible approaches

At a recent multi-stakeholder dialogue in Medellín, Colombia, three distinct approaches to integrating environmental issues – including biodiversity and ecosystem services – into the post-2015 development agenda were discussed: 1) maintaining the original set of MDGs, which included “ensure environmental sustainability” under goal 7, but increasing the level of ambition and extending the target year to 2030 ('MDG+'); 2) adding other relevant issues to the MDGs, such as new standalone goals on biodiversity and ecosystem services, planetary biophysical limits and/or climate change ('SDG Classic'); and 3) highlighting the cross-cutting character of environmental issues by integrating specific environmental targets into other development goals ('SDG integrated').

### A comprehensive proposal

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. To properly address biodiversity and ecosystem services, the post-2015 development agenda should combine all three. Such a comprehensive approach builds on the success of the MDGs (MDG+), includes a standalone goal on earth system functioning and/or environmental limits (SDG classic), and integrates goals on poverty eradication and envi-

ronmental sustainability (SDG integrated).

In order to build on the success of the MDGs, conserving a large part of its goals and targets is important for many countries that have integrated them in national policies (MDG+). This includes many goals and targets related to poverty eradication – poverty, education, health, nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, etc. However, the level of ambition ('getting to zero') and the timeframe (2030/2050) of the goals and targets must be revised. Although biodiversity was addressed in the MDGs, it was only one of many targets, fully isolated from other related issues. The target attracted only little attention and was not met. The post-2015 development agenda must include issues that are now acknowledged as relevant, but were inadequately, or not at all, addressed by the MDGs (SDG classic). Ecosystem services were not directly addressed in the MDGs, yet are crucial for sustainable poverty eradication. Furthermore, since the separate goal on environmental sustainability did not lead to an integrated approach to poverty eradication and environmental sustainability, biodiversity and ecosystem services must be mainstreamed in the relevant goals and targets (SDG integrated).

### Integrated goals and environmental limits

An integrated approach aligns ecosystem service-related targets with other goals and targets. For example, a goal related to food security also needs specific targets on provisioning services such as water supply, and on regulating services such as controlling erosion or maintaining soil fertility. Integrated goals create joint responsibilities for ministries (for example, agriculture, food and the environment) and thereby promote coordinated policies. They thus allow for addressing trade-offs and promoting win-win solutions within the policy process.

Finally, to achieve global sustainability, some biophysical limits should be established to safeguard essential ecosystem services and biological diversity and to define a safe operating space for humanity. Since such limits are difficult to integrate with goals on poverty eradication, and are potentially left out in an MDG+- or SDG integrated approach, they should be addressed in a standalone goal or be a key part of a goal on life-support systems and environmental or resource limits.