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It's all about the green stuff: finance gap threatening biodiversity

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Bonn, 22 May 2015. The year 2015 offers a unique opportunity to pool and reinvigorate global efforts to conserve biodiversity. This year sees the negotiation of new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the United Nations. One of the SDGs is expected to address the conservation of biodiversity, an issue which is currently discussed primarily in environmental forums, most notably in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Such limited discussion fails to do justice to the significance of biodiversity and to ensure that sufficient investment is made in its conservation.

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, forms the basis for sustainable development. The G7's recently released "Elmau Progress Report: Biodiversity – A vital foundation for sustainable development", shows that biodiversity plays a key role in human well-being, poverty reduction, food security, water supply, human health, carbon storage and climate change adaptation. Over 40% of all cancer medication is based on plant genetic resources. Locally adapted plants guarantee local food security and provide the international seed industry with raw materials for developing resistant crops. Mangrove forests protect coastal areas from flooding, while properly functioning forest ecosystems help to store and filter water. The list of vital services provided by biodiversity is long.

Despite the manifold efforts of the CBD, biodiversity continues to be lost at an alarming rate globally. In recent years, the G7 has made repeated calls for action to counteract these losses and invested in biodiversity conservation work. Despite this, improvements have only been made in a very small number of areas. The amount of conservation areas has increased, but so has the destruction of precious habitats, leaving a growing number of species facing the threat of extinction. Biodiversity is mostly found in developing countries and emerging economies, with the world's biodiversity hotspots located primarily in the tropical rainforests. Poor people are most affected by the loss of biodiversity, as it provides the basis for their economic, social and cultural existence.

One reason for the rather modest progress in the area of biodiversity conservation is the fact that the loss of biodiversity is often seen "merely" as an

environmental issue. As a result, insufficient financial resources are provided for conservation work. Existing patterns of consumption and production are also contributing to the loss of biodiversity. For example, palm oil is the main vegetable oil produced worldwide and is found in many chocolate and cosmetics items. In order to find land for growing oil palms, tropical rainforest is being cleared.

The only way to ensure the effective protection of biodiversity is to make it a key component of sustainable development. So far, 17 global Sustainable Development Goals have been proposed to replace the Millennium Development Goals. In addition to the biodiversity goal, the list of proposed SDGs includes goals on reducing poverty, improving health, providing universal access to energy, and altering patterns of consumption and production. All of these topics are directly linked to biodiversity.

A biodiversity goal that goes beyond existing agreements and is adopted as an SDG has the potential to bring the United States back on board. Current international agreements on biodiversity conservation goals do not apply to the United States, as the country has not ratified the CBD and is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future.

However, the situation is so dramatic that simply giving biodiversity a prominent place within the SDGs is not enough. It is necessary to mobilise financial resources for financing the measures needed to achieve this goal. According to the *European Report on Development 2015*, there is a finance gap. Of the estimated USD 53 billion available annually, just USD 21 billion is invested in developing countries. Most of this finance is used for conservation programmes in industrialised nations, despite the fact that there is very little biodiversity left in these countries. But even USD 53 billion is insufficient. It will take six to eight times as much finance to truly prevent the further loss of biodiversity.

If it proves possible to integrate biodiversity into the new SDGs in all its facets and to mobilise financial resources at the same time, then this year will be decisive in terms of pushing ahead with biodiversity conservation efforts.