

Conserving biodiversity together for a sustainable future

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Biodiversity is a prerequisite for our existence, but is rarely top of our daily list of priorities. The EU recognises the value of biodiversity; it's funded NetBiome-CSA to support life on earth, including yours.

Without the millions of unique living organisms that inhabit the Earth, we would not be able to breathe, drink or eat. Climate change, the loss of species and dysfunctional ecosystems threaten us all and we can only overcome these challenges through a unified effort.

Joining forces across six countries, including remote islands

EU-funded [NetBiome-CSA](#) [2] has mobilised 13 entities from seven regions and territories across the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic oceans. Project participants are moving in the same direction for the smart and sustainable management of tropical and subtropical biodiversity in the EU's outermost regions (ORs) and overseas countries and territories (OCTs). These are well-known hotspots of terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity.

Biology Professor José Azevedo, who coordinates NetBiome-CSA from Portugal says, "The first task in the NetBiome-CSA project was to increase the number and range of stakeholders working together. We have mobilised 130 stakeholders, including researchers, policy makers, business people and members of civil society, to think about the challenges to biodiversity research in support of sustainable development."

Demonstrating the economic value of biodiversity

Many people in business and government have traditionally viewed biodiversity initiatives as a challenge to development. But, "Biodiversity is an asset, not an obstacle," reports Azevedo.

“NetBiome-CSA is changing mind-sets; an increasing number of people understand that biodiversity may be a barrier to some economic activities, such as cutting down trees for timber, but that it is not a barrier to sustainable development, such as eco-tourism.”

NetBiome-CSA has reviewed studies on the socio-economic value of biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystem services. This review was able to identify cases where results were taken up by policy-makers. These cases have been presented in a report, which concludes that the economic valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services can provide arguments for the integration of biodiversity aspects into other policy domains, such as agriculture and tourism. An organic chocolate factory may create more jobs and generate more revenue for longer than the addition of a large truck to a potato farm, explains Azevedo by way of example.

Finding solutions to a global challenge step-by-step

NetBiome-CSA’s first conference, held in May 2014 in the Canary Islands, was a key project milestone. Forty participants explored biodiversity challenges across EU overseas entities. They identified the following focus areas:

- *Agriculture and forestry*: developing more sustainable practices;
- *Oceans and islands*: managing fisheries and respecting biodiversity;
- *Territories*: conducting spatial and land planning;
- *Biodiversity conservation*: developing biodiversity indicators to measure the health of specific ecosystems (eg. coral reefs).

Following the conference, stakeholders engaged in a series of interdisciplinary workshops and research initiatives to develop work programmes that would address those challenges.

Project participants continue to refine research priorities and policy recommendations that will be published before the end of 2015. “The need to increase European overseas capacity for biodiversity research is critical. This is because we can only protect ecosystems if we understand them and are able to define priorities for conservation,” explains Azevedo.

“We need EU tools that enable overseas biodiversity researchers to obtain funding with less bureaucracy,” adds Azevedo. These tools include ERA-Net partnerships and the BEST (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas) initiative. “The NetBiome partnership is a landmark in overseas cooperation; it demonstrates how the EU can contribute to the preservation of the extraordinary biodiversity it is responsible for in territories scattered around the globe.”

Environmentalists, researchers, policy makers and members of government have a unified voice through NetBiome-CSA. In early 2016, NetBiome-CSA will present a sustainability plan so that the work achieved during the project will continue to have positive effects on biodiversity and sustainable development beyond the project’s official completion date.

NetBiome-CSA Stakeholder Meeting



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