

SUMMARY REPORT

BOOSTING BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH COOPERATION

A NetBiome Roadmap for European (sub)Tropical Overseas

6th April 2016

European Parliament, Brussels

Policy-makers, civil society, the scientific community, and policy-makers were brought together on 6 April by MEP Ricardo Serrão Santos and MEP Maurice Ponga to engage with the NetBiome partnership to discuss about the future of biodiversity research cooperation in Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) in support of their sustainable development.

Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP and Chair of the “Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” welcomed the participants by highlighting the richness of the EU Overseas in terms of species and genes and the importance of the work conducted by NetBiome-CSA.

Maurice Ponga MEP and Chair of the “Islands and Overseas Entities” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” provided a video message affirming his willingness to continue to defend and promote the ORs and OCTs in the European Parliament. It was also emphasised that NetBiome-CSA has become a label of quality, which must be maintained because of the high added-value it provides to these entities.

Pinto Francisco on behalf of Nelson Simões, president of the Regional Fund for Science and Technology (FRCT), underlined that the Azores Government has supported and been an important partner of the NetBiome network since it first began. It was explained that the Azores Government, through the Regional Fund for Science and Technology, took charge of the secretariat of the Joint Call launched by the NetBiome ERA-Net, whose funded projects have recently finished. The Azores Government also joined the efforts of advocating for the inclusion of a specific topic in the last FP7 Call for Environmental CSAs, and then took the lead in putting together a winning application: NetBiome-CSA. It was said that since May 2013 it has worked with a dedicated set of partners, expanding and strengthening the research cooperation on tropical and sub-tropical biodiversity. With the NetBiome-CSA now ending, it was underlined that this is the time to continue to build a common research base to study and manage the rich biodiversity and to support the sustainable development of EU overseas entities. It was noted that the Azores Government has joined several of its NetBiome partners in an “overseas” group within BiodivERSa 3. Funding a second NetBiome call with the support of BiodivERSa’s partners is an objective to which the Azores Government is firmly committed.

Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director “Natural Capital”, DG ENV, European Commission underlined that NetBiome-CSA provides us with a better understanding of the issues that are needed in order to address the challenges of biodiversity loss. The important link between biodiversity and climate change was raised also stressing the fragility of ORs and OCTs with regards to extreme weather, increased storm surges and sea level rise. It was said that the link between biodiversity and economy is harder to grasp compared to the perceived economic effects of climate change. Currently still too often the two leading global challenges, climate change and biodiversity loss, are considered in isolation in the EU and also elsewhere. However, this important link is easier to understand in the overseas entities, as many of them are islands and islands are hit harder and strongly feel the effects of climate change already now. It was said that Netbiome-CSA brings pivotal knowledge for the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of ecosystems in the EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories. The good collaboration with the BEST initiative, which aims to promote the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of ecosystem services including ecosystem based approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation in the ORs and OCTs and the contribution of the NETBIOME network to the Message of Guadeloupe were highlighted. It was underlined that the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement provide further momentum. The ORs and OCTs can become laboratories for sustainable development and showcase and deliver on such goals. Reference was made to the importance of EU overseas in the context of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. The awareness for the ecological importance of ORs and OCTs for conserving global biodiversity needs to be increased in the EU. It was concluded by emphasising that working with nature makes economic sense and is vital for combating climate change.

Birgit de Boissezon, Head of Unit “Sustainable Management of Natural Resources”, DG RTD, European Commission, underlined that this research community has obtained good results in terms of mapping of activities, improving and developing regional dialogue, and creating a toolbox for managing biodiversity and ecosystems. It has created visibility and momentum, which has already been recognised across Europe and is an important stepping stone for further integration in the larger research and innovation community for biodiversity and ecosystems. With regards to the priorities of Commissioner Moedas in charge of Research, Science and Innovation, promoting open innovation, open science and openness to the world, NetBiome was praised as exemplary in addressing these issues. It was said that NetBiome is based on collaboration among different actors in the field as well as providing the right tools and making these tools and corresponding results accessible. It was mentioned that within Horizon 2020 initiatives are being launched on nature-based solutions, which are solutions inspired and supported by nature while at the same time providing social, economic, and environmental benefits and building resilience. The importance of implementing such multi-purpose, multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder solutions was stressed in order to accelerate the transition to a sustainable society. Further, it was said that a larger public must also be convinced of the effectiveness and need for such solutions through a compelling evidence and knowledge base which research and innovation can bring about. It was pointed out that the results of NetBiome-CSA should be shared across Commission DGs in order for all relevant departments to learn from them.



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Panel 1: Assets and achievements of overseas research cooperation moderated by Colin Hindmarch, Independent Consultant

Josiane Irissin-Mangata, General Council of the Reunion Region underlined that ORs and OCTs biodiversity is exceptional while at the same time their environments are more fragile and threatened by global changes such as biodiversity loss and climate change than continental Europe. It was also stressed that biodiversity is fundamental for the social, cultural, and economic development of these entities. It was explained that NetBiome is a science-based action plan adapted to the high specificity and distinct questions of these entities. It is a research programme based on the opportunities and unique assets of EU Overseas. It was underlined that various bottom-up initiatives have since 2002 taken place and deemed very successful such as *“Biodiversity: Science and Governance”* in 2002, and *“ORs and Research”* in 2005. It was explained that when the ERANet tool call was launched this was used to continue the coordination of policies for biodiversity in regions and at national level. It was explained that this is where NetBiome began *“NETworking tropical and subtropical Biodiversity research of Outermost regions and territories of Europe in support of sustainable development”*. It has gathered actors from different cultures, countries, and regions towards research for biodiversity management in support of sustainable development. It was underlined that it has been a challenge to mobilise bottom-up expertise on local research needs and promoting science-policy interactions. However, a great deal has been achieved and NetBiome-CSA is a unique example of a research network built by and for the Overseas.

António Abreu, NetBiome Advisory Board emphasized that biodiversity in OCTs and ORs is a global issue, underlining that these ecosystems are included in a larger system, connected with people and their activities. It was pointed out that islands include a range of priority areas such as forests, mountains, coastal, marine, and alien species, which should be addressed in close connection with socioeconomic activities. It was underlined that biodiversity is strongly and directly linked with local governments and communities and a common understanding of the main challenges are vital at a local scale. It was pointed out that because of the tractable size the analysis can be adjusted to the level required. Other important assets of NetBiome-CSA are the diversity of policy and management regimes, existing models and experiences, and locally adapted practices of using and managing biodiversity. It was said that ORs and OCTs can also be important for pilot studies and demonstration projects. It was stated that there are many opportunities with regards to biotechnology, but there is still a gap to be filled not only on regulations but on the return and compensation of bringing benefits to local communities and the use of biodiversity. It was concluded by emphasising the importance of research being conducted over a network.

Claudine Ah-Peng, University of the Reunion and Pierre-Yves Teycheney, CIRAD, researchers of the NetBiome ERANet joint call underlined that European ORs and OCTs are hotspots for marine and terrestrial biodiversity, which make them open laboratories and provide a unique opportunity to research ecological systems and the impact of climate change. It was emphasised that the programme funded applied science projects, which provided solutions to environmental issues. It was also said that the project has been successful in promoting women in science, for instance, 4 of the 7 funded projects were coordinated by women as principal investigators. It was stressed that involving local stakeholders at all stages of the projects has been a vital part of the process and success. NetBiome-CSA has also helped build a transoceanic



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and transregional network of partners with complementary skills and expertise, while at the same time strengthened the links between mainland European and Overseas research. With regards to the future of collaborative research programmes it was said that it is essential for Europe to support synergistic research between ORs and OCTs by designing specific biodiversity indicators, creating integrated management approaches for biodiversity, contributing to the smart specialisation such as blue/green bioeconomy, and increasing the local human capital. It was concluded by stressing that the EU Overseas hold the answers to some of the global challenges faced today.

The discussion with the audience highlighted that NetBiome-CSA has been successful in producing good science along with solutions to environmental issues also highlighting new research in many areas such as birds and crops. The importance of investigating long-term impacts of global challenges on islands ecosystems was stressed. The importance of fisheries management was raised and the management of human activities on marine biodiversity. It was pointed out that one of the priorities within Horizon 2020 will be to create a framework for management where the specification and regionalisation is taken into account also mentioning the need to fill in the gaps on biodiversity knowledge. It was also said that a study will be launched next year on the ecological limits of deep-sea mining aligned with one of the priorities identified by NetBiome-CSA. It was also said that the Commission has launched a call for proposals covering important aspects of blue growth involving blue careers in order to further develop skills to deal with the blue economy as well as blue technology. The importance of regional cooperation between ORs and OCTs was stressed highlighting that communication and identifying common issues are pivotal in order to help to streamline instruments between ORs and OCTs.

Prior to the second panel the **NetBiome-CSA video** was screened, which can be viewed [here](#).

Panel 2 “Towards a roadmap for the NetBiome partnership”, moderated by Carole Martinez, IUCN Senior Programme Coordinator

Keighley McFarland, Ecologic Institute underlined that there are a lot of valuation resources available but there has up until now been a gap between policy and impact. It was explained that the research produced is based on two reports: *“The value of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU’s Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories”* and *“Uptake of ecosystem valuations in policymaking in Europe’s overseas entities”*. With regards to the first report it was underlined that it shows that there is a reasonable amount of valuation data from ORs and OCTs available and it can play a potential role in decision-making. The report also found that early stakeholder involvement plays an important role in determining whether the data would be applied. The timing of research is also important, stressing the need to take advantage of windows of opportunity in the political agenda. Coordination of ongoing and planned research efforts could also create synergies. The second report, based on stakeholder interviews, found that common barriers to ecosystem valuation include mismatches between available data and stakeholders’ needs and the lack of action from policy-makers. It was stressed that stakeholder involvement, local champions, and appropriate tool design can enable implementation. It was recommended to continuously engage policy-makers and stakeholders as well as integrate research into existing processes. Building on insights from the research, the valuation resources in the NetBiome Biodiversity Toolbox



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<http://www.netbiomedata.org/biodiversity-valuation>) support improved application of existing resources.

Rob Hendrix, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Netherlands presented the Biodiversity Management Toolbox, which is an online information and communication system and one of the major achievements of NetBiome-CSA. It includes a stakeholder database with over 160 people registered, which helps identify partners and experts. It also includes a list of good practices, case studies, methodologies, and training and communication materials. Further, it entails a communication forum that allows for stakeholder exchange and promotes collaboration on research projects and calls. It was underlined that the toolbox will be maintained following the finalisation of NetBiome-CSA and will be hosted by the Netherlands as part of its OCTs biodiversity database. Further, all stakeholders that have not yet registered were encouraged to do so.

Pablo Chavance, ADECAL-Technopole, explained that a co-design process took place mobilising key players such as civil society, enterprises, governments, and knowledge institutions, to capture the high interdependency that exist between biodiversity and local economies and build bridges across geographic regions. This bottom-up process has identified a number of policy recommendations in order to effectively address the common challenges on biodiversity management in support to sustainable development. Firstly, a more coherent approach to spatial planning must be adopted, to better cope with the long-term dimension of biodiversity and climate change issues together with short term social and economic expectations. Secondly, adapting international legislation to national/regional context was stressed mentioning the need to take into account context-specific needs and practices. Thirdly, promoting more efficient and sustainable usage of natural resources is pivotal. It was highlighted that local genetic diversity and ecological interactions must be enhanced essential assets for the shift toward more sustainable production system and circular economies. Fourthly, it was advocated to put ecosystem-based management principles into practice. Finally, the need to establish biodiversity indicators and monitoring program specific for EU overseas was underlined. Research priorities which will be invaluable in informing and supporting the implementation of the policy recommendations, have also been identified: improve tools and approach that would enable genuine and active involvement of stakeholder in action research and decision making, predict effects of climate change on natural resource uses, increase the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystem services in environmental assessment and valuation methods, and map ecological limits to extractive activities. It was underlined that in order to put the recommendations into actions the use of existing funding mechanisms must be put to use such as though the overseas component of BiodivERsA3. It was also said that brainstorming and maintaining the network is pivotal in order to continue to involve Overseas on such subjects and ensure exchange of practice and experience.

José Azevedo, Regional Fund for Science and Technology (FRCT), underlined that NetBiome was formally created ten years ago but the work started even prior to that. One of the main goals of the network was to support biodiversity research from and for ORs and OCTs. It was stressed that decision-making must be evidence-based, underlining the close relationship between biodiversity and human actions. It was emphasised that support for decision-making needs to be connected with sustainability with both development and biodiversity going hand in hand. One of the core goals was to support biodiversity research that led to the



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strengthening of human capital through a participatory approach. NetBiome materialized the support to networking biodiversity research in tropical and subtropical regions, and is currently participating in BiodivERsA3 to continue integrating research programmes and addressing biodiversity conservation issues. ORs and OCTs face common challenges and it was underlined that a common voice is needed in order to improve European development policies. The willingness of the partners to maintain the NetBiome network was underscored, and the Stakeholders Forum in NetBiome's Biodiversity Toolbox presented as one tool for this purpose. Another important issue is to reinforce Europe's cooperation in key geographic regions. It was stated that NetBiome has an important role in connecting with neighbouring countries for joint research calls and catalysing synergies with existing regional and international initiatives.

The discussion with the audience underlined the importance of the continuation of NetBiome's network, also highlighting the need to find funding resources and to increase political support, eventually through a memorandum of understanding. It was also highlighted that BiodivERsA is preparing its roadmap, gathering inputs from partners, the advisory board, stakeholders, the scientific community, and policy-makers. Strong collaboration and coordination was urged between BiodivERsA and NetBiome, which will provide added value for both and consolidate the biodiversity research landscape. Future funding opportunities were also explored, with the Commission underlining that there are synergies to be found between the several funding opportunities. It was mentioned that it is in the pipeline a specific collaborative research action under the Belmont Forum and related Horizon 2020 activities on biodiversity scenarios and global challenges, which could be an opportunity for the NetBiome network to mobilize the participation of ORs and OCTs. The Horizon 2020 calls for nature-based solutions are also opportunities to Europe's overseas entities. Other components funded under Horizon 2020 include capacity-building, training, and infrastructure may be of interest as may the structural funds or the development cooperation funds. It was also mentioned that the results of NetBiome feed in well with the BEST initiative and further synergies should be found.

Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP reiterated the importance of ORs and OCTs for EU biodiversity with the NetBiome project confirming that components of biodiversity and ecosystem services provided are critical for these entities. It was also said that their economies are particular vulnerable while at the same time providing major economic importance. It was said that the opportunities within NetBiome are great stressing the importance of continuing to engage in dialogue and exchange of practices. The need to comply with the precautionary principles was pointed out stressing the need for the Commission to integrate it more strongly in order to ensure healthy ecosystems. It was said that more and more programmes are based on cost effectiveness and other economic principles, but the value of biodiversity in itself must also be defended. It was stressed that the biosphere does not belong to us, but we belong to it, underlining that this is a major societal issues with many gaps that need to be filled.

NetBiome-CSA project partners:



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