



# Integrating biodiversity into sustainable production and consumption activities

## The way forward for policy makers

*WG4- Working Group on Biodiversity Communication*

### Key messages

- Biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services are among the greatest systemic risks for the global economy and the health of people and the planet. Protecting and restoring biodiversity is vital to avoiding future pandemics while tackling other global environmental, social and economic challenges.
- Resource overuse driven by overconsumption is directly linked to environmental degradation. There is urgent need to re-think consumption and production and take action to protect and restore biodiversity. The benefits of strong and early action outweigh the costs.
- Policy makers must assume the leading role in tackling this issue. They are called upon to integrate protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem services into all policy agendas and strategies at all levels of government, focussing on the following core principles:
  - Increasing the visibility of biodiversity loss and ensuring integrated policies for sustainable consumption, biodiversity conservation and restoration and climate change mitigation.
  - Integrating protection, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity into the sustainable consumption policy agenda at all levels. Transparency and natural capital accounting must be considered in all cross-sectoral policies, including trade and sustainable finances.
  - Concentrating policy interventions on the sectors and hotspots with potentially enormous impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Promoting transparency and circularity in value chains and product lifecycles is key to achieve this.
  - Prioritising policy action for the transformation of food systems and agricultural production is imperative to reduce the loss of biodiversity. Regulatory and information instruments must be strengthened in this sector.
  - Developing policy measures that promote sufficiency-oriented behaviours and challenge the economic growth paradigm. For this purpose, policy actors need to identify and address key political, economic and cultural barriers that prevent the required shift from overconsumption to sufficiency.
  - Promoting a mix of policy instruments which includes information, regulatory and economic instruments, to discourage unsustainable and no longer environmentally acceptable economic activities, while promoting sustainable and biodiversity-friendly products and practices.

## The urgent need for mainstreaming biodiversity into sustainable consumption

Nature and its essential ecosystem services (ES) provide the basis for societal well-being as well as all current and future economic activities. At present, however, biodiversity is being lost at an alarming speed. It is estimated that 23 % of global land area is already degraded. Over 85 % of wetlands have disappeared since 1970 and 32 million hectares of primary forest or recovering forest in the tropics were lost between 2010 and 2015 and, according to IPBES, about 1 million species are threatened with extinction if no action is taken [4]. The current, unprecedented loss of biodiversity therefore presents one of the greatest systemic risks to the global economy and the health of people and the planet [16]. The irreversible decline of biodiversity and ES in recent decades as well as recent global developments such as the Covid-19 pandemic are evidence that our current economic activities are exceeding the planetary boundaries, i.e. the safe operating space for humanity [10, 12, 18]. The production or extraction of raw materials for consumer goods are linked to impacts which include the conversion of biodiverse ecosystems (e.g. large-scale deforestation) as well as the overexploitation and pollution of land and seas, among others [6]. The Dasgupta Report [2] highlights the need for far-reaching transformative change in society and policy to conserve the natural capital that our economy depends on. We must act now to halt the devastating impacts of our prevailing production and consumption patterns on biodiversity and ES worldwide while remembering that the benefits of strong and early action outweigh the short-term costs [2].

Despite comprehensive and compelling scientific evidence on the multiple links between business-as-usual production and consumption and biodiversity and ES loss, biodiversity conservation and restoration have not been sufficiently integrated into current policy strategies. However, due to the dramatic initial situation, it is imperative to place the necessary change towards sustainable production and consumption in the foreground of integrated policy strategies at all levels (global, regional and local). Possible effective approaches include promoting sufficiency-oriented lifestyles, reallocation of state subsidies to environmentally friendly forms of production, penalising business practices that are harmful to nature or enabling clear and transparent consumer information.

This policy brief provides a set of general recommendations and concrete entry points for action to integrate biodiversity protection and restoration into international and national policy processes for sustainable consumption. It furthermore provides examples of specific policy instruments and tools for the practical implementation of these recommendations at national and regional levels. Cooperation with relevant stakeholders and local communities is essential to ensure the success of concrete implementation [4, 5].

## Calls for action: Policy makers must lead the way forward!

### Recommendations for increasing visibility and building on international momentum

Policy actors are called upon to use their influence in international policy arenas to create awareness about the biodiversity impacts of consumption and to jointly pursue solutions. They can build on existing international momentum, for example referring to the respective commitments in the Leaders Pledge for Nature, one of the results of the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020<sup>1</sup>. Explicitly addressing biodiversity and ES in the international political dialogue, particularly in

<sup>1</sup> Leaders Pledge for Nature (2020): Leaders Pledge for Nature. United to Reverse Biodiversity Loss by 2030 for Sustainable Development, 27.09.2020.

connection to the strategies for sustainable consumption (SDG12), must become the rule and not the exception. Moreover, the interdependence between biodiversity and consumption targets requires the mainstreaming of coherent policies across all sectors. This includes alignment with climate and socio-economic policies, international agreements and resolutions.

Relevant intergovernmental bodies such as the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the UN Committee on World Food Security, the United Nations Environment Assembly as well as G7, G20, UNGA and WTO must commit to intensify their actions for the conservation and restoration of biodiversity and ES.

In addition, integrated policy making needs to take place in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the upcoming post-2020 global biodiversity framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to effectively advance biodiversity protection and restoration through measures for sustainable production practices and consumption patterns. The resulting National Sustainable Development Strategies and National Biodiversity Action Plans shall necessarily enhance coordination and consider the synergies and trade-offs between targets for sustainable consumption and biodiversity protection and restoration [7].

*Further information, resources, guidelines and inspiring examples for communication on the impacts of consumption on nature can be found in the One Planet network's Biodiversity Communication Toolkit [here](#).<sup>2</sup>*

### **Entry points for Integrating biodiversity and ecosystem services into national policies**

It is not enough to address biodiversity in nature conservation policies alone. Hence, policy makers are called upon to explicitly embed biodiversity protection in all other policies related to sustainable consumption and production at all levels. This also includes policies concerning trade and finance which are key to accompany the required transition in our socio-ecological systems, as well as sectoral policies like agricultural policy.

Integrating biodiversity and ES into the global agenda for sustainable consumption also requires promoting a shift in the attitude of policy makers and society towards the evaluation of economy performance in general. For example, indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are unable to account for the environmental impacts that are driven in economic activities like agriculture and mining. Policy actors should therefore advocate for the inclusion of natural capital accounting and external costs along value chains and product lifecycles in political decision making.

The development and implementation of other ongoing cross-sectoral policy processes at regional and national levels, such as those related to consumer initiatives, food systems or circular economy, must include concrete measures to enhance their potential contributions to biodiversity protection. Policy action should focus on the hot topics with high potential impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services. In this regard, transparency must be urgently demanded in value chains involving mining and minerals [6] as well as all kinds of agricultural commodities [1]. Better regulations on recycling must be enforced to increase circularity, in particular for ICT products and textiles [8, 11]. Moreover, eco-design and business models for durable and long-lasting products shall be promoted and properly incentivised in all sectors. Policies on right to repair and product lifetime extension are good examples to advance in this direction.

*Further information and resources about product lifetime extension can be accessed [here](#).<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/consumer-information-scp/biodiversity>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/consumer-information-scp/product-lifetime-extension>

### Recommendations for action in food systems

The agricultural and food sector accounts for 40 % of quantified biodiversity losses in most countries and regions [1, 14] and therefore requires urgent political action. A transition towards more sustainable food products and agricultural systems must be of top priority in policy action for sustainable consumption. To create policy coherence, biodiversity protection and restoration must be integrated into all agricultural and food policies, including those cross-sectoral policies involving the trade of global commodities.

In order to address biodiversity impacts related to conventional agricultural production, it is necessary to set limits for the use of agrochemicals and to enforce regulations to avoid social and environmental impacts related to land use change such as deforestation. Supporting certification programmes and strengthening environmental control bodies are two ways in which policy makers can contribute in this regard. Finally, in shifting consumption behaviours, policy actors shall focus on measures to lower the demand of animal products and reduce food waste of all types.

It is essential to adopt a food systems approach to ensure that all supply chain actors from farm to fork are considered. Trade-offs regarding biodiversity protection must be identified and effectively addressed in the decision-making process. Moreover, by engaging policy and practice communities such as food policy councils as well as citizens assemblies at local, regional, and national level, policy makers can foster inclusive and participatory approaches for the transformation of food systems.

WWF has developed concrete objectives and action priorities for the transformation of our food systems in preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit, which took place in September 2021 [17].

### Policy measures, instruments and incentives for biodiversity-friendly consumption at regional and national level

Achieving change in consumption patterns is best done through a combination of different policy instruments and tools aligned towards biodiversity-friendly consumption.

#### Information instruments

Information instruments can contribute to increasing transparency along value chains and educating consumers for better decision making and should therefore be promoted. An example of these are voluntary certification schemes and eco-labelling [13] for products which go far beyond minimum requirements. Even so, biodiversity criteria are so far often insufficiently addressed. Policy actors must demand and support stronger integration of biodiversity protection into these instruments.

Campaigns and education are also important information instruments. While raising awareness is important, policy makers also have a larger responsibility to shift the policy framework for production and consumption towards sustainability. Changes in consumption patterns cannot effectively be achieved by consumers alone.

## Regulatory instruments

Regulatory instruments must also be applied to address the issue of consumption and biodiversity loss. These instruments can be used to penalise environmentally harmful business models and promote those which operate in an environmentally friendly manner. Policy makers can promote transparency through due diligence regulations and mandatory reporting, establishing extended producer responsibility laws or setting mandatory eco-design standards including the ban of toxic chemicals for different product groups.

## Economic instruments

Considering the scale and urgency of the challenge, economic instruments must also be adapted and scaled up in order to promote biodiversity protection in consumption policy. Calls for action in this category include enforcing and expanding the polluter pays principle, pricing harmful production and sourcing practices as well as implementing environmental tax reforms. In this respect, subsidies which encourage biodiversity-harmful production and consumption behaviours must be removed [9], [19] and taxation must be shifted from labour to resources. Simultaneously, economic incentives to promote sustainable products and consumption patterns shall be implemented in cooperation with companies and civil society. Taxing environmentally intensive products and services such as meat and air transportation are examples in this category.

At governmental level, sustainable public procurement (SPP) should be applied as a lever to promote better consumption and production practices. Protection of biodiversity and ES should be integrated into procurement criteria. National, regional, and municipal procurement stakeholders can encourage tenderers to deliver higher levels of environmental performance including biodiversity protection, restoration and sustainable use.

### Infobox: Sufficiency and transformative change

The current growth model of the global markets is built upon incentives for continuously expanding the economy, which requires increasing resource consumption. Under this framework, economic and societal structures run counter to the goals of biodiversity, i.e. conservation and restoration. In combination with a policy landscape that promotes sustainable consumption and production, transformative changes in our socio-ecological system resulting in decreasing resource consumption are urgently required.

Sufficiency is defined by Fischer et al. (2013) as the modification of consumption patterns that help to respect the Earth's ecological limits, while modifying aspects of consumer benefit. The efficiency and consistency strategies are failing to deliver an economy that can operate within planetary boundaries. The notion of 'sufficiency' challenges the economic growth paradigm by suggesting a shift in consumption patterns – away from overconsumption – to reduce environmental impacts. Given the urgency of the systemic risks posed by the crisis in the context of biodiversity decline, policy actors are encouraged to focus on increasing the acceptance of this transformation pathway. To avoid societal conflicts in this process, a mix of deliberative, inclusive and participatory mechanisms involving consumer organisations and innovative business models is required.

## Measures for transformative environmental policy

The promotion of sufficiency-oriented lifestyles [3] is especially critical given its great potential in protecting biodiversity. The design of lifestyles is related to the supply systems of society, in other words, how food, mobility and the supply of goods, energy or housing are organised. Transformative

environmental policy focuses on the transformation of these systems. In this way, environmentally compatible action should become the norm rather than the voluntary effort of individuals. Therefore, measures for transformative environmental policy [15] should aim at removing barriers to sufficiency transitions.

This often requires profound change. New infrastructures have to be built up, new practices have to be adopted. Economic sectors and unsustainable practices must be phased out. The energy or mobility transition are examples of that. Politically, this requires a mix of instruments: enabling through infrastructures, enabling through information and education, incentivising through ecological cost truth, guiding through rules and justifying through convincing communication.

Policy makers are also called upon to fund research and support programmes for the necessary and urgent transformative changes. Research and development play a central role in transforming current socio-economic systems. In order to achieve more sustainable production and consumption patterns, alternative materials, production and recycling technologies as well as social innovations need to be promoted with sufficient resources.

### Concluding remarks: The way forward

Considering the dependence of all future economic activities on a healthy natural environment, policy actors are called to take urgent and radical action in tackling the issue of biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services. Building on the increasing international awareness around this issue, all policy agendas must take the conservation and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem services into account.

In the face of current global challenges such as the climate crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and the alarming state of biodiversity loss, there has never been a more pressing moment to act. Business-as-usual economic activities cannot continue to operate while planetary boundaries are exceeded. For that, a socio-economic transformation is needed, and policy makers are compelled to lead the way and advocate for transformative environmental policy which considers the synergies and trade-offs between all policy agendas.

The course of action is clear. In this policy brief a series of concrete actions to connect sustainable consumption to biodiversity protection are described. Policy actors are compelled to remember that failing to act now will cause high costs from damage, and loss of value. A mix of policy instruments must be applied to achieve changes both in production and consumption patterns as well as transformations in society and the economy to shift the paradigm of economic growth.

*More detailed information about current state and future requirements in information, communication and international cooperation for biodiversity-friendly consumption, including good practice examples, can be found [here](#)<sup>4</sup>.*

<sup>4</sup> Teufel et al. (2021): Sustainable consumption for biodiversity and ecosystem services – current state and future requirements in information, communication and international cooperation. <https://tinyurl.com/communication-biodiv>

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## Imprint

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