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UNU and other experts are available for advance interviews.

Without Interlinkage, Millennium Development Goal on Environmental Sustainability Will Fall Short

*New UNU Report Links the Millennium Development Goals and the
2010 Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity*

As the World's leaders come together in New York on 25 September 2008 for a United Nations high-level event to renew their commitments and to assess progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), concerns are mounting as to whether the MDG targets and indicators are realistic in terms of measuring and monitoring concrete results without linkage to more advanced multilateral frameworks. In an effort to fill such a gap, a new report by the United Nations University uncovers critical links between the MDGs, especially Target 7 of ensuring environmental sustainability, and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 2010 Biodiversity Targets and indicators.

Environmental sustainability - especially through the preservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use, and the fair and equitable sharing of its benefits - directly impacts the success of all of the MDGs. The Millennium Assessment Report, identifies the loss of biodiversity as a major barrier to the achievement of poverty, hunger and disease reduction, as set out by the MDGs. For instance, the loss of crop and livestock diversity threatens food and income security; traditional medicines and foods are essential to the health of many rural communities; and the preservation of such traditional knowledge often relies on the empowerment of women and gender equality.

Reduction of the loss of biological diversity is the objective of the 2010 Biodiversity Targets of the CBD and was only later incorporated as Goal 7, Target 7b of the MDGs. However, as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) Report has demonstrated,



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the world is facing an unprecedented loss of biodiversity and it is very unlikely that the targets aimed at addressing threats to biodiversity can be achieved by 2010. According to the report, there are major gaps in terms of linking the 2010 Targets with MDG 7 (target 7B in particular) making it difficult for countries to report progress and assess the realization of MDG 7.

MDG 7 is supported by two indicators for monitoring progress, namely, the proportion of terrestrial and marine areas protected and the proportion of species threatened with extinction. However, according to country reports, the use of such simplified indicators has been very limited at the national level as there has been insufficient measurable reporting from countries. On the other hand, evaluation of the 2010 Biodiversity Target incorporates numerous indicators such as trends in abundance and distribution of selected species, biomes, ecosystems and habitats, nitrogen deposition, water quality, and the list is continuously expanding. Additionally, the indicators can be more flexibly applied and tested according to national requirements.

The report argues that “it is necessary to re-evaluate the use of MDG targets and indicators as rigid set of guidance to being opportunities for tailoring national level targets and indicators to measure local success” Challenges include the standardization of available data as well as a lack of specific and reliable national data, difficulty in results-based measurements without pressure and response indicators, and deficient guidance and support to countries on how to measure progress. Discussion must be renewed on the validity of the indicators, the need for cross-cutting references and analysis, and the need for reviewing and/or generating newer indicators. Furthermore, assessment of the MDGs can follow the programme of work under the CBD as an indicator of successful national implementation, not just for MDG 7, but for all MDGs.

For more information, see the UNU-IAS Report:

MDG on Reducing Biodiversity Loss and the CBD’s 2010 Target

Launch Date: 24th September 2008
Venue: DESA Conference Room, 23rd Floor, 2, UN Plaza, New York
Time: 17:30 – 19:00 hrs
URL: <http://www.ias.unu.edu/reports>

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