



INITIATIVE FOR GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY IMPACT INDICATORS
FOR COMMODITY PRODUCTION

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Problem and Rationale

The impacts of global commodity production on biodiversity are manifold and vast. Among all commodities, particularly agricultural and forestry commodity production threaten biodiversity.¹ Humanity currently uses 40 percent of the land on the planet to produce food. At this point, food commodity production has the largest environmental impact of any human activity. It is the single largest cause of the loss of habitat and biodiversity as well as deforestation. If incomes and consumption increase as projected, there will be a need to roughly double food commodity production by 2050, which is - given the arable land available- simply not possible using the current “business as usual” model.²

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that while agriculture is the leading driver for the loss of biodiversity, it is also the provider of a key basic of life - food - and is therefore an essential economic sector.

In order to combat the negative trends, more sustainable practices must be developed to reduce impacts. This essentially means that production must be sustainably intensified, while using less input and causing less externalities. This can be accomplished by a combination of activities (i.e. increasing the productivity of farmed land, using inputs more efficiently, reducing waste and changing consumption patterns).

Agriculture accounts for 70 percent of the projected loss of terrestrial biodiversity. Addressing trends in food systems is therefore crucial in determining whether the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 will succeed. Solutions for achieving sustainable farming and food systems include sustainable productivity increases by restoring ecosystem services in agricultural landscapes, reducing waste and losses in supply chains, and addressing shifts in consumption patterns.³

2. Current Programs

Over the past 30 years, a large number of programs have been developed to address the impacts of food and other commodity production through the development of voluntary, third-party certified

¹ United Nations Development Programme, “Protecting biodiversity in production landscapes: A guide to working with agribusiness supply chains towards conserving biodiversity” (2011) at 7

² WWF

³ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2014) Global Biodiversity Outlook 4. Montréal



standards for specific goods. The most credible of these programs are science-based and involve multi-stakeholder groups, generally with a focus on a single commodity (e.g. the various commodity roundtables). These groups build consensus about the impacts of the various commodities – both what is known and agreed upon, as well as where there is conflicting or insufficient information. Each group strives to reach consensus regarding the impacts of a given commodity and how these can be addressed to achieve more sustainable production methods. The groups also develop principles, criteria and indicators to address the key commodity impacts. They can then act to build awareness and ultimately help to create the business case for making positive changes. In the end, these groups act as effective catalysts to accelerate the positive changes that are required for long-term sustainability by building consensus and helping to reduce impacts. In addition, these initiatives can make producers more efficient, hence creating new and innovative business opportunities. As markets accept the new standards that are created by these groups, companies and supply chains will be more willing to adopt them.

However, a problem with this is that this one by one approach is simply not fast enough to deal with the global problems being faced due to the multiple impacts of the hundreds of major commodities being produced. There also tends to be a great deal of variability across different standards and certification schemes for the various commodities, but little benchmarking between them. Additionally, approaches focusing on single commodity lines can miss larger holistic issues and cumulative impacts.

Another issue is that these types of processes often only reach those stakeholders that are already committed to the idea of undertaking sustainable actions. There remains a vast number of companies and producers that are not involved (or even aware) of these efforts. In order to be truly effective, there must be a concerted effort made to engage with those actors that are not yet involved in these processes. It is important to ensure that these companies and producers are made aware of their impacts and encouraged to undertake actions that allow their businesses to have a reduced impact upon biodiversity. Reaching out to these entities can be facilitated by developing a basic set of global impact indicators and guidance for sustainable agricultural commodity production.

3. Initiative for Global Commodity Impact Indicators

This initiative is convened by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD). It will consist of a multi-stakeholder informal advisory committee - which will include the SCBD as well as representatives from partner organisations such as WWF, UNEP-WCMC, UNDP, and others - that will guide and support the initiative.

The purpose of the initiative is to compile the major cross-cutting impacts on biodiversity caused by agricultural commodity production and to develop a set of generic impact indicators as well as guidance for better practice. Defining commonalities in impacts of different commodities is a unique approach. It is hoped to allow the integration and mainstreaming of biodiversity criteria into agricultural commodity production on a wide scale.



From the work to date by existing programmes, it is known that there are a relatively small number of key impacts that cut across most agricultural commodities and that represent the majority of negative impacts (i.e. biodiversity loss, incl. deforestation, soil health, water uptake and effluent, input use efficiency, toxicity, etc). These represent 70 percent or more of the impacts of producing any agricultural commodity⁴. These key impacts will be identified and then translated into a set of global agricultural commodity impact indicators.

In order to halt or minimize the footprint of food production, we need to be aware of the biggest impacts on biodiversity by commodity production (those impacts that occur in most commodity production processes and that are most harmful to biodiversity). More sustainable commodity production can likely be triggered by focusing on only the most fundamental biodiversity impacts - instead of all possible impacts in all the different commodities.

The aim of the CBD initiative is to produce a set of generic biodiversity impact indicators for agriculture. Such a set of indicators, which cuts across agricultural commodities, is a new approach to addressing biodiversity impact from agriculture. The intention is that this core set of indicators can be used by public and private sector organizations as well as standards and certification bodies to integrate biodiversity impact monitoring into their work. This work will thus feed into other initiatives by providing a core set of indicators for biodiversity impacts from agricultural commodity production that is applicable across commodities and addresses the most important and harmful impacts on biodiversity. The work is intended to fill the gap of the commodity by commodity type approach used so far to address sustainability in commodity production.

Once a core set of impact indicators has been identified, the initiative will formulate guidance on sustainable practice for producers, applicable across different agricultural sectors and regions of the world. The guidance will be basic and universal such that it can be applied easily by those that are not already committed to sustainable actions. The guidance shall serve as a first step or entry point for sustainable business actions. It should help companies to identify their impacts and create practices to make them more sustainable. It can serve as a minimum biodiversity performance that would be required by commodity producers.

The impact indicators and corresponding guidance for better practice will be disseminated to various audiences:

- Initially, Governments will be the main target of this initiative. Governments (including sub-national and local governments) will be encouraged to reach out to commodity producers in their jurisdictions as well as to use legislative and regulatory tools to mandate sustainable practices pertaining to agricultural commodity production. Through the process of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Governments can be encouraged to adopt the guidance, integrate it into their own practices (e.g. public procurement), as well as to promote the application of such guidance by other standard bodies and commodity producers.

⁴ WWF



- Companies will be encouraged to make use of the guidance in order to reduce their impact on biodiversity either through sustainable practices;
- Standard and certification bodies that can use the impact indicators and guidance to integrate biodiversity criteria into standards and certificates;
- International bodies and forums including the CBD COP process but also to the various commodity roundtables and other organizations working in this area;
- Other stakeholders that can assist in the dissemination and uptake of the outcome.

3.1. Purpose

The purpose of the initiative is to firstly identify common types of impact on biodiversity caused by global agricultural commodity production. Secondly, a set of commodity impact indicators for agricultural commodity production will be drawn from this and, ultimately, corresponding guidance practices to help reduce the key impacts of key agricultural commodities on biodiversity will be developed. The purpose is further to use this output to integrate biodiversity criteria into standards and certificates as well as into policies and legislation aimed at advancing sustainable agricultural practices.

The output of this process - a set of impact indicators and corresponding guidance on how to reduce impacts on biodiversity - will ideally be adopted by commodity producing companies as well as (national) governments and standard bodies such that biodiversity-related criteria may be mainstreamed into policies and standard sets.

The intention of developing biodiversity impact indicators for agricultural commodity production is to particularly reach out to and engage those commodity producers that are not yet aware of - or committed to - sustainable business actions and are not yet involved in any kind of process to reduce their environmental impacts. The set of guidance will therefore be basic and common such that commodity producers and other stakeholders that are not aware of their biodiversity impacts and of how to reduce them, will be enabled to do so.

3.2. Mandate

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD) is pursuing a comprehensive strategy designed to more deeply engage the business community with the Convention. The business engagement decision adopted at COP12 (XII/10) in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, significantly strengthens the mandate on business engagement, particularly with regard to promoting 'cooperation and synergies with other forums regarding issues that are relevant for biodiversity and business engagement with respect to, inter alia, commodity indicators' (XII/10/3e). This Initiative will help to fulfill the business engagement strategy through the development of a mechanism that will help businesses to adopt solutions for assessing impacts on biodiversity and implementing better practices to reduce these impacts.



Formal business engagement decisions were further previously taken at COP 10 (X/21/3) in Nagoya, Japan in 2010 and at COP 11 (XI/7/5) in Hyderabad, India in 2012, which gave rise to convening the initiative in order to fulfill these mandates:

Decision X/21/3

(c) *To encourage the development and application of tools and mechanisms that can further facilitate the engagement of businesses in integrating biodiversity concerns into their work, such as, consistent and in harmony with the Convention and other relevant international obligations, certification, verification, the valuation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, incentive measures, biodiversity offsets, etc.;*

(d) *To also encourage monitoring of the effects of tools and mechanisms applied in accordance with paragraph 3 (c) above;*

Decision XI/7/5

(b) *Compile information on best practices that incorporates all three objectives of the Convention and those of its two Protocols, and facilitate the engagement of businesses, governments and other stakeholders in adopting such practices through various means, (...);*

(c) *Continue to work with partners to further refine the analysis of the various tools and mechanisms, and thereby help businesses (including small and medium-sized enterprises) understand, assess and adopt solutions for managing biodiversity risk that are cost-effective, credible and effective.*

3.3. Structure

The process of developing a global set of commodity impact indicators for biodiversity will be done in cooperation with various stakeholders in order to ensure broad based consent.

In order to achieve this goal a multi-step process will be put in place to

- assess what sorts of standards and impact indicators are already in existence for commodity production;
- identify common impact indicators on biodiversity;
- create corresponding guidance for better practices based on these common impact indicators;
- identify the potential users of impact indicators; and
- compile and disseminate this guidance.

This initiative is convened by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD). It will consist of a multi-stakeholder informal advisory committee - which will include the SCBD as well as representatives from partner organisations such as WWF, UNEP-WCMC, UNDP, and others - that will guide and support the initiative. In total, the committee will consist of up to ten members.



A wider group of stakeholders to be involved at a later point in the process will include representatives from:

- Governments
- Multi-lateral organizations
- Sector/Commodity Roundtables
- Businesses and Business Associations
- Civil Society (consumer groups, environmental NGOs)
- Standards bodies

3.4. Timeline

A. Initial meeting of the informal advisory committee

The initial meeting will take place in the afternoon of 12 October 2014, parallel to the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea. This will be a moderated roundtable discussion. Participants will discuss expectations regarding the initiative and examine the process, projected outcomes, and agree on the way forward. Immediately prior to this informal advisory committee meeting, a larger open session will introduce the concept and seek inputs from a wider variety of stakeholders.

The initiative will be officially launched during COP 12.

B. Phase 1:

What: Identification of the common impacts, identification of gaps in existing work, and determination of the best approaches for measurement, verification, etc.

Who: Consultant to carry out research work; verification by informal advisory committee

How: According to the scope agreed on during the initial meeting on 12 October 2014, a comprehensive overview on the biodiversity-related impact indicators of existing standards and identification of common impacts will be compiled. This includes identification of relevant standards, impact indicators, gaps and commonalities.

This work will lead up to a second meeting of the informal advisory committee.

Output: A report on the major impacts on biodiversity from agricultural commodity production, incl. information on the types and scale of impacts. The report will include an initial set of common impact indicators on biodiversity from agricultural commodity production.



C. Workshop to develop draft guidance, including participation of informal advisory committee

The workshop will produce a list of core indicators for biodiversity impacts from agricultural commodity production. This core set will represent the most important (in terms of impact) and cross-cutting impacts on biodiversity. The indicator set will be used to gather feedback from a wider set of potential users (standard bodies, commodity roundtables, etc.) in terms of usability and applicability.

Based on this, draft guidance on reducing biodiversity impacts from agricultural commodity production will be developed by the initiative.

Workshop will be held on 13 October 2015 in Helsinki, Finland.

Output: Summary report and draft outline for guidance document to be drafted by SCBD

D. Phase 2:

What: Circulation of draft guidance document

The draft outline for a guidance document (outcome document of the workshop) will be distributed to the informal advisory committee for review and verification. The draft guidance will be distributed to further stakeholders - as identified by the committee - as commodity roundtables, commodity producers, business federations and associations (on a geographic and/or sectoral basis), standard and certification bodies, and governments to ensure that the views and concerns of all participants are being adequately reflected. Along those discussions, the initial results will be further refined and adjusted according to inputs from a wider set of stakeholders.

Who: Coordinated by SCBD; feedback from informal advisory committee and other stakeholders

How: Primarily through email and conference calls; may also require a number of regional and sectoral meetings with the groups specified above

Output: A set of commodity impact indicators and corresponding guidance for better practice to reduce biodiversity impacts from agricultural commodity production

E. Third meeting of informal advisory committee

At this meeting the committee will discuss and finalize the guidance on reducing impacts on



biodiversity from commodity production. In addition, this meeting will seek to determine the best types of information materials and target stakeholders to begin implementation.

F. Phase 3:

What: Preparation of COP 13 document(s)

Who: SCBD

How: This will be done by the CBD Secretariat with inputs as necessary from the informal advisory committee

Output: Publication of final guidance and launching at COP 13

G. Phase 4:

What: Dissemination of the biodiversity impact indicators and guidance

Who: SCBD with members of informal advisory committee according to availability for webinars, meetings, etc., as well as with potential users of the output (companies, governments, other entities, etc.)

How: Roll-out of the guidance at various local meetings (ideally utilizing existing fora). This will be done on a virtual basis (databases, webinars) as well as through workshops (geographic and/or sector based) and dissemination at various international events. The roll-out will be a dynamic process, allowing for feedback and ongoing refinement of the impact indicators and guidance (particularly as additional sectors and/or clusters are considered). Target groups are in particular round tables, business associations (commodity producers and agri-businesses), standard and certification bodies, governments, and other international forums.

Output: Dissemination material, webinars, workshops