

Biodiversity criteria for evaluating development assistance projects: by the World Resources Institute

Biodiversity conservation and donor programs

Development assistance could play an important role in directly supporting conservation efforts. All too often, development aid has contributed to the destruction of habitats and ecosystems, the over-exploitation of species, and excessive genetic uniformity in agriculture. The loss of biodiversity brings about social disruption and a reduction in the resource base for people's livelihoods, thus undermining the objectives of development efforts. While development aid forms a relatively small percentage of overall economic activity in most developing countries, it has transformed certain areas and communities. Perhaps more important, institutions such as the World Bank dominate development policy, deeply influencing the decisions of developing-country policymakers.

If development-assistance institutions are to play a positive role in conserving biodiversity, they must follow two parallel tracks. First, development-assistance agencies must channel a greater proportion of their resources into projects that strengthen developing countries' capacity to save, study, and sustainably use biodiversity. Second, and more important, development assistance agencies must reorient their "mainstream" assistance to incorporate biodiversity conservation objectives.

To these ends, development assistance agencies should create guidelines for assessing projects' impacts on biodiversity, dedicate special funds to initiating biodiversity conservation programs, develop in-house expertise and strategy statements on biodiversity conservation, and ensure that all sectors include biodiversity conservation among their objectives.

Bilateral and multilateral development assistance agencies should support investment in the capacity to save, inventory, and analyze biodiversity and foster its wise use. They should not support projects that significantly contribute to the **loss of biodiversity**. Development agencies should evaluate the impacts on biodiversity of all development projects--whether ongoing, in the pipeline, or planned. Projects should not be financed through development assistance if they violate the following criteria.

Process criteria

- are planned for regions where basic surveys of plant and vertebrate taxa have been conducted, and for regions with an ecosystem classification system in place;
- involve local people, especially women, in the initial biodiversity inventory and project planning, as well as in review and implementation;
- provide ready access to biological survey information and planning documentation (in local languages) to local people;
- include Environmental Impact Assessments that explicitly address the impacts of projects on genetic, species, and ecosystem **diversity**;

- provide for a means of monitoring impacts on biodiversity and modifying project implementation based on that feedback;

Biological criteria

- do not destroy, degrade, or fragment habitat used by a species listed as globally threatened or endangered by the IUCN or listed on Appendix I of **CITES** and do not involve the harvest of such a species;
- do not involve any exploitation of resources or disturbance of habitat in strictly **protected areas** (IUCN Categories I to III), including the core zone of **Biosphere Reserves** and **World Heritage Sites**;
- do not take place in an ecosystem or biogeographic unit designated as a threatened site by IUCN or by the proposed International Panel on Biodiversity Conservation;
- do not result in the conversion or degradation of primary forests;
- do not engender the loss of **genetic diversity** of domesticated species without adequately supporting grassroots conservation groups financially and institutionally, or establishing national genebanks to ensure the *ex situ* preservation of that diversity;
- do not destroy or degrade the habitat of migratory species listed as globally threatened by IUCN or by any country in their migratory route;
- do not introduce species or varieties in violation of the IUCN **guidelines for translocations of living organisms**;
- are consistent with the country's National Conservation Strategy or other similar conservation planning document or with any international convention to which the state is party;

Social criteria

- do not increase landlessness or resource needs without provision of alternative suitable to the local people;
- provide a substantial share of any increased economic benefits from biodiversity (through, for instance, tourism or **exploration for pharmaceutical plants**) to local communities;
- do not degrade or encroach upon the ancestral domain of **indigenous groups** without their informed consent;
- ensure that any research on biodiversity or biological resources makes full use of local and national expertise, significantly strengthens local and national research capacity, and helps the host country acquire the technologies involved in the research;
- recognize and reward rights to traditional knowledge on biological resources and biodiversity;
- provide the option to maintain traditional lifestyles or traditional uses of biological resources; and,
- do not destroy or degrade the resources upon which women depend to maintain their families, nor increase their burdens inadvertently.