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## Biodiversity 'fundamental' to economics



**VIEWPOINT**  
Sigmar Gabriel

**Germany has put biodiversity, alongside climate change, at the top the agenda for its G8 presidency. In this week's Green Room, Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel says failure to address the loss of species will make the world a poorer place - both naturally and economically.**

“Some might ask why biodiversity should be an issue on the G8+5 agenda.

Well, there is a clear answer.

The G8 nations, together with the five major emerging economies of China, India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, use almost three-quarters of the Earth's biocapacity - the capacity of the world's ecosystems to produce natural resources and to reduce harmful substances.



“ **Global biodiversity policy is therefore a fundamental component of global economic policy** ”

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The loss of global biological diversity is advancing at an unprecedented pace. Up to 150 species are becoming extinct every day.

As well as their uniqueness and beauty, their specific functions within ecosystems are also irrecoverably lost. The web of life that sustains our global society is getting weaker and weaker.

That is why Germany has chosen both biodiversity and climate change as top priorities for this year's environment ministers' G8+5 meeting.

### 'Dramatic decline'

The participating countries have the capabilities needed to move a step closer to solutions to these two fundamental issues, which are so vital to a sustainable global future.

Biological diversity constitutes the indispensable foundation for our lives and for global economic development.

The production of natural resources in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, stable natural hydrological cycles, fertile soils, a balanced climate and numerous other vital ecosystem services can only be permanently secured through the protection and sustainable use of biological diversity.

Two-thirds of these ecosystem services are already in decline, some dramatically.

We are gradually becoming aware of the fundamental importance of biological diversity for the global economy.

“ **The 'biodiversity treasure trove' provides the global economy with an invaluable and extensive potential for innovative products and processes** ”

For instance, the annual value of trade in oceanic fisheries is valued at \$5.9bn (4.5bn euros; £3.1bn) - a six-fold increase

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from 1976 levels. However, catch rates are in continuous decline, and almost 75% of the world's fish stocks are already fished up to or beyond their sustainable limit.

Without sound conservation and management measures, fisheries will quickly become depleted and a basic component of global food security will be lost.

The global value of plant-derived pharmaceutical products is more than \$500bn (380bn euros; £260bn) in industrialised countries. Of the medicines currently available, 40-50% are derived from natural products.

For oncology and anti-infective medicines, it amounts to 70-80%. With every species we lose, we may be losing a remedy for global health problems.

### **'Treasure trove'**

An estimated 40% of world trade is based on biological products or processes.

Biological diversity provides the world's population, particularly the poor, with foodstuffs, medicines, building materials, bioenergy and protection against natural disasters.

The "biodiversity treasure trove" provides the global economy with an invaluable and extensive potential for innovative products and processes that is still widely untapped.

But our globalised and steadily growing economy is using up

this irreplaceable natural asset at a terrific speed. The rate of loss of species and habitats is proceeding relentlessly at up to 1,000 times the speed of natural processes.

Global biodiversity policy is therefore a fundamental component of global economic policy. We need a greening of globalisation.

To achieve this we need a comprehensive mix of policies that includes regulatory measures, economic incentives and voluntary measures and integrates governments, the private sector and consumers.



Biodiversity loss could pave the way to the road to ruin, Mr Gabriel says

We need to address some basic questions:

How can we enhance trade in products which are produced sustainably - can we agree on a facilitated market access for such products in the global trade regime?

- How can we control the trade in illegally harvested timber and in wildlife?
- Can we bring companies, the stock markets and the credit sector to adopt effective codes of conduct and criteria for investment?
- How can we support the certification of products to guide consumer decisions?
- Can we create economic incentives - for instance through the transformation of subsidies?
- How can we ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources?

Besides the crucial role of direct conservation policies such as protected area systems and sustainable production methods, mainstreaming biodiversity into all relevant sectors such as trade, development, financing and transport is essential.

We are also increasingly becoming aware of the close link between biodiversity and climate.

Habitats like forests, bogs and coral reefs contain massive carbon reservoirs, which significantly contribute to regulating the global climate.

Equally, the climate has a direct influence on the state of biodiversity. Estimates predict the loss of up to 30% of species by 2050 if climate change continues at its current pace.

We therefore need integrated solutions to global environmental problems. If biofuels are produced on land obtained through deforestation, their use is ineffective for climate change mitigation and has substantial negative effects on biodiversity.

### **Clear signals**

We need to support certification of biofuels to secure sustainable production - an issue which will be addressed during the German G8 presidency.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, the heads of state and government agreed to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010.

With time against us, the G8 nations are under a particular obligation. With their



**Biofuels: The next generation**

production and consumption patterns, they are accountable for a vast majority of pressures and threats.

They are also the countries with the greatest economic power and as the largest consumers of biological resources in terms of per capita consumption.

During next week's meeting of environment ministers in Potsdam (15-17 March) we will discuss ways and means to enhance global biodiversity policies.

The aim of the meeting is to agree on common initiatives and to find concrete areas of enhanced co-operation in order to meet the 2010 target.

This meeting will send a clear signal to June's G8 summit of heads of state and government on the crucial importance of biodiversity for the global economy and the need to integrate biodiversity into all relevant policy sectors. ”

*Sigmar Gabriel is the German Federal Environment Minister and will head next week's G8 environment ministers' meeting in Potsdam*

*The Green Room is a series of opinion pieces on environmental topics running weekly on the BBC News website*

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