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The complex dependence of humans on nature is not adequately addressed by research and policy

Solutions must be radical, says new study presented at the global biodiversity summit in Nagoya, Japan

The conservation of functioning ecosystems is a prerequisite for long-term human well-being and the continued existence of civilization on Earth. Unfortunately, the dependence of humans on nature has become rather obscure to most people. A new book published by the Secretariat of the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity, which is launched at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties currently held in Nagoya, Japan, presents an analysis of the complex interrelationships of biodiversity and human development. Due to globalization of human activities and global environmental changes, these relationships have become ever more difficult to understand and study. Most researchers and policy-makers focus on rather isolated details without adequately dealing with the complex character of our world and the interrelated problems. For instance, any analysis of the distribution of human development and the status of nature falls far too short, if direct local cause-effect relationships are assumed. High export rates of natural resources coupled with increasing overexploitation of nature are driving down the provisioning of local ecosystem services. This in turn is affecting local and poor communities in developing countries the most.

The environmental costs for the high standards of living of more developed countries are in many cases externalized and shifted towards poorer countries with relatively high productive capacity of ecosystems. As a result of international trade, the more developed countries are saving their own resources. For example, Germany can maintain good forest coverage because it uses agricultural areas outside its territory and depends on ecosystems services provided by other countries. On the other hand, countries such as Madagascar, that cannot compensate the loss of local ecosystem services by trade and shifting environmental costs to other nations, have started to suffer severely from increasing natural poverty. Here, even political crisis is related to the loss of biological diversity.

The first editor of the book, Professor Pierre Ibisch from Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, Germany postulates: "Radical thinking and approaches are needed to meet the converging challenges of an exploding human population with ever rapidly growing needs and wants, *and* the run-away problems of global environmental change. Too often, conservation of biological diversity deals with treating single symptoms of something that is a complex disease".

Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity, in his foreword, seconds the authors of the study: "Our modern civilization experiences—due to increased urbanisation and compartmentalised knowledge—an increasing alienation from nature obscuring common understanding of our real dependence on biodiversity and ecosystems. The complex global economy interwoven with a worldwide financial architecture has obscured the fact that all these human systems remain nested as sub-systems in the broader Earth eco-system".

The authors of the study call for a much more radical approach to biodiversity conservation. Under a *Radical Ecosystem Approach*, biodiversity conservation should be strongly focused

on the root-causes of unsustainable development. Concrete elements for the implementation of this approach would include, amongst others, ecological economics and *econics*. Econics is proposed as a new discipline that promotes the mimicking of ecological system dynamics and functioning for improved ecosystem management and functioning of socio-economic systems. We must learn much more systematically from studying natural complex systems how sustainable development can be achieved, says the British author Dr. Peter Hobson from Writtle College.

This also implies an alternative science perspective that recognizes the cognitive limitations of humans and provides important insights for the management of pluralistic complex systems, which goes beyond the basis of 'hard' scientific evidence. A so-called post-normal approach to the conservation of nature and natural resources also embraces a better consideration of social, historical relationships and cultural practices which have "co-evolved" between human societies and nature. The co-editor of the study Thora Herrmann from Montreal University warns: "The bio-cultural diversity is under serious threat. The extinction crisis in nature comprises species and ecosystems, but also languages and diverse management practices of the hundreds of human cultures".

Study: Ibisch, P.L. & A. Vega E., T.M. Herrmann (eds.) 2010. *Interdependence of biodiversity and development under global change*. Technical Series No. 54. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal.

Hyperlink: <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-54-en.pdf>

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