Sustainable use

DEFINITION

Sustainable use means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992[1] Article 2

KEY POINTS

- The concept of sustainability was defined and popularised following publication of the Brundtland report (Our Common Future) in 1987. The report's key contribution is to recognize that environmental limits exist to economic growth.
- 'Sustainable development', 'sustainable growth', and 'sustainable use' are commonly and yet inaccurately used interchangeably. Sustainable use is a cornerstone of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and is enshrined in the second objective of the Convention.
- The Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines consider how sustainable use can be integrated into policies, laws and institutions at various levels from a community to international scale and give specific guidance on adaptive management and education.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of human development incorporates both economic and social progress[2] and it is recognised that our use of resources is involved in both of these aspects[3]. However the relationship between sustainable resource use and development is more complex. Short term economic development can be achieved via unsustainable resource use, an issue recognised by the United Nations Development Programme, who argue that long term sustainable development can only be achieved via sustainable resource use[4]. Sustainable resource use is key to conservation of biodiversity because overexploitation is a significant threat to species.[5, 6, 7, 8]

CONCEPT: USE OF TERM

The definition of sustainable use follows a similar framework to the definition of sustainable development. However, these terms should not be used interchangeably as they have different meanings. The 1991 “Strategy for Sustainable Living” produced by UNEP, IUCN and WWF highlight the differences: “Sustainable development, sustainable growth, and sustainable use have been used interchangeably, as if their meanings were the same. They are not. Sustainable growth is a contradiction in terms: nothing physical can grow indefinitely. Sustainable use, is only applicable to renewable resources and means using them at rates within their capacity for renewal. Sustainable development, in this Strategy, means improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems” [9].

Popularising Sustainability & the Brundtland Report

Our Common Future, The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, published in 1987 [10] (also known as the Brundtland Report, see sustainable development) is regarded as a key text in defining and popularising the concept of sustainability [11]. The report discusses several aspects of sustainable use and highlights that while the classic goal of economic growth does not set limits on the use of resources, there are certainly natural limits which will become apparent. It further points out that exceeding resource limits may not cause ecological catastrophe, but is more likely to be result in rising costs and a reduction in efficiency of resource production compared to the effort entailed in accessing or collecting them. Different resources will have different associated use limits which will depend on the speed of natural regeneration and growth of the stock. The Brundtland Report also emphasizes that sustainable resource use is affected by poverty. Poverty reduces people’s capacity to use resources in a sustainable manner. The Brundtland Report set the pathway for the 1992 Rio Earth Summit at which the Convention on Biological Diversity was opened for signature.

MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Sustainable use is one of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity [1]. The three objectives are:

1. The conservation of biological diversity;
2. The sustainable use of its components; and
3. The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and to technologies, and by appropriate funding.

Sustainable use is therefore a cornerstone of the CBD processes and is addressed in Article 10 of the Convention which places a requirement on Contracting Parties to include considerations of sustainable resource use within national decision making; protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional practices that are complementary with conservation or sustainable use requirements; and minimize adverse impacts and remediate degraded areas. It also encourages cooperation between government and the private sector for developing sustainable use methods.

Sustainable use is recognised as a cross cutting issue by parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity [12]. As such, the CBD Conference of the Parties 7 (in 2004) adopted the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for putting the principles of sustainable use into action [13, 14]. These guidelines consider broad issues on how sustainable use can be integrated into policies, laws and institutions at various

levels from a community to international scale. They also give specific guidance for practices such as adaptive management and education. These guidelines include fourteen principles that should be considered together although the relevance of each to a particular situation will vary. The principles take into account legal, economic and social processes.

Within the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, Aichi Target 3 includes the concept of sustainable use. It highlights that positive incentives for the sustainable use of biodiversity should be developed.

CONVENTION ON TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA & CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

Sustainable resource use is also an important theme in other Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and The Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). This relationship has been identified by the Biodiversity-related Conventions Liaison Group who work with the seven global biodiversity-related conventions. This group has produced resources explaining the relevance of the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines to each convention [15].

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Key terms: In depth

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Page last updated 17 December 2019