

Session report: Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Development Cooperation

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows commitment for mainstreaming biodiversity

On February 22, The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) and Wageningen University and Research (WUR) presented their reports on mainstreaming biodiversity in development cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to over 35 representatives from MFA working in climate, water and food security, from The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), and from the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, both in-person and online. The Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) was requested to facilitate the meeting.

Understanding the interplay between development goals, climate, and biodiversity underscores the urgency to address this issue holistically. Biodiversity cannot exist as an isolated policy. This as many other domains and economic sectors are both drivers for biodiversity loss and opportunities for biodiversity to thrive. Hence, over the past couple of years, mainstreaming biodiversity has received increasing attention on the agenda at MFA. While the internal discussions were going on, PBL and WUR conducted two studies on mainstreaming biodiversity in development cooperation to contribute to these developments.

To kick off the meeting René van Hell, director of the department of Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) of MFA, took the attendees along this journey of the past couple of years. He connected the urgency of Biodiversity to the mainstreaming of Climate Change. According to him: *“Fighting climate change, development cooperation and preserving biodiversity is a trinity that makes no sense to act on separately.”* He reflected on the achievements thus far. In part due to support from the top and the momentum that was generated around the Global Biodiversity Framework, there has been a substantial increase in biodiversity-related development finance. Mr. van Hell indicated that there is more work to be done. The road will not be easy: mainstreaming biodiversity is inherently complex given trade-offs with other important goals.

In order to explain how mainstreaming Biodiversity in development cooperation can be done, Katie Minderhoud, Researcher Landscape and Biodiversity at PBL and Thirze Hermans, PhD, Project lead Nature-Positive and Climate Resilient food systems at Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, presented the key insights from their reports.

In short, the Policy brief by PBL, "[Biodiversity: From Neglect to Integration](#)," commissioned under the DGIS-PBL covenant, uncovers a spectrum of perspectives on mainstreaming and what it entails for BHOS policies and practice: from a technical to a transformative view. The brief also highlights lessons learnt and conditions for success based on experiences from

other donors in their efforts towards mainstreaming biodiversity. The image of a weaver bird was presented as a metaphor for biodiversity mainstreaming, to exemplify the intricate connections of species and ecosystems and the process of weaving MFA's commitment into its operations.

The WUR report, "[Mainstreaming, monitoring and measuring biodiversity in Dutch development cooperation](#)", commissioned and financed by the Netherlands Food Partnership within the context of the Knowledge Base programme 'Biodiversity in a nature inclusive society', sheds light on how biodiversity can be integrated and mainstreamed in the Netherlands funded ODA. The report presents a model which connects the direct and indirect drivers for biodiversity loss to ODA themes, such as food security and poverty alleviation. The direct (e.g. land use change, climate change, exploitation) and indirect (e.g. population growth, institutional set-up) drivers of biodiversity loss provide key entry points for policymakers to integrate biodiversity considerations in their work. Finally, practical principles to operationalise the mainstreaming of biodiversity at project and programme level were presented (e.g. landscape approach), emphasising a balance between technical and process focused actions.

The conversations in the meeting focused on how mainstreaming biodiversity is a process which can and should identify opportunities to improve interventions in specific geographies and landscapes. For this to happen, capacity and expertise are a prerequisite. Not just within the MFA and its embassies, but also with partners on a local level. This effort requires sensitivity to different knowledge systems and plural values of nature, based on diversity of interests, culture and worldviews. Finally, the call was made to further clarify the ambition of mainstreaming biodiversity. This to match this ambition with an organisational approach that motivates and supports action that goes beyond adding biodiversity as a financial marker or an indicator in programming. For some of the participants, how to address biodiversity in ongoing activities was a question that first needed to be answered. To bring these different needs together, it was mentioned that mainstreaming requires action at multiple levels. Policymakers need to understand how biodiversity connects to their policy domain, while simultaneously learning from practical examples and projects on how to best integrate biodiversity in a meaningful way.

Jock Geselschap, head of the Climate cluster within IGG, provided his reflections on the presentations and open conversation. Experience has taught officials that an incremental process to mainstreaming is more realistic than a transformational change due to their limited capacity. But, as an example of dedication and ambition, Mr. Geselschap was happy to announce that Ivo Walsmit will join IGG in April to further strengthen biodiversity relevance of the Netherlands funded ODA. The ownership of this task is, however, for everyone working in development cooperation and we should partner up to accomplish it.

The results of these reports and this session are worth celebrating, but there is still more to be done to increase the quality and quantity of biodiversity-related work. Let us all get to work as diligently as the weaver bird!