



MAnews

The Newsletter of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the Convention on Biological Diversity

The Challenge for 2004¹

Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity



The year 2004 will be critical for the Convention on Biological Diversity. The year begins a few days after the tenth anniversary of the Convention's entry into force. In February, at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Kuala Lumpur, Parties to the Convention will determine how they are to meet the target of achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity. The year 2004 will also be a busy one for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) process, as the first drafts are compiled and reviewed.

In this brief article, I would like to outline how I think that the Millennium Assessment can contribute to the Convention and, in particular, to efforts to meet the 2010 biodiversity target.

The 2010 target was adopted in 2002 by the Conference of the Parties at its sixth meeting in The Hague and endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development a few months later in Johannesburg.

The World Summit highlighted the critical role of biodiversity in overall sustainable development, poverty eradication, and human well-being and

reaffirmed the Convention as the key instrument for its conservation and sustainable use.

An Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Parties to the Convention was held in Montreal in March 2003 to consider the multi-year programme of work of the Convention in light of the World Summit. The Meeting emphasized the contribution that achieving the 2010 target would have to the Millennium Development Goals, especially the goals of eradicating hunger and poverty, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

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¹ This editorial/article is based on the opening remarks by Hamdallah Zedan, CBD Executive Secretary, at the Workshop on the Application of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Methods and Tools to the Issues of Relevance to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, November 2003. A similar workshop is planned prior to the seventh meeting of the CBD Conference to the Parties in Kuala Lumpur on 7th February 2004. The workshop is intended for national focal points and other delegates to COP interested in learning more about the MA and how it can be of use to the CBD and its Parties. Those interested in participating should contact habiba.gitay@anu.edu.au.

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THE MILLENNIUM ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The Millennium Assessment is designed to help us understand better the contribution of biodiversity and ecosystems to human well-being. The first MA report, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: A Framework for Assessment*, describes the approach and basic methods being used to assess status and trends in ecosystems, the multiple pressures or drivers causing changes in ecosystems and the services they provide, the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and options for response to alleviate the pressures. Copies of this report have been distributed to all focal points for the Convention and will also be available at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

The Framework for the Assessment helps us understand the dependence of human well-being on biodiversity and ecosystems, and how biodiversity and ecosystems are affected by human actions. Uniquely among assessments, it looks at several temporal and spatial scales at once, and the linkages between them. This, of course, leads to a certain amount of necessary complexity. One of the challenges we have—in the Millennium Assessment and in the Convention process itself—is to explain this complexity in as simple a way as possible.

I see the Framework for the Millennium Assessment essentially in terms of the application of the ecosystem approach. In fact, at its ninth meeting in November 2003, the Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) noted the relevance of this framework in supporting the implementation of the ecosystem approach.

THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF THE MA IN ACHIEVING THE 2010 TARGET

So, how will the Millennium Assessment contribute to the 2010 target?

Firstly, we expect the MA process will help us in assessing progress towards the 2010 target.

Most obviously, we expect that the Assessment will provide us with a comprehensive analysis of the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and that this will provide us with a useful baseline. It is envisaged that if the MA proves to be useful, components of it might be repeated at

5–10 year intervals. We would then have a means of assessing any progress in improving the status of ecosystem goods and services.

Whether or not this assessment is followed by periodic updates, the process will help us monitor progress towards the 2010 target by increasing the availability of data sets and accelerating their analysis; identifying suitable and reliable indicators; and, probably most importantly, improving the capacity for ecosystem analysis in the future.

But assessing progress is not enough. Indeed it is really only very useful if there is progress to assess.

How then will the MA contribute not just to assessing progress towards the 2010 target, but actually to achieving the target?

I think that, potentially, there are a number of ways.

The MA analysis of conditions and trends will improve the basis for decision making. Of course, and as acknowledged in the MA Framework Report, provision of information does not guarantee better decision-making. It does, however, have the potential to do so by highlighting the value of ecosystem goods and services and evaluating the trade-offs between various options.

By improving our understanding of the cost of biodiversity loss, the MA should help mobilize political will for necessary actions. And, by improving our understanding of the causes of biodiversity loss, the MA should help to identify effective response options.

Hopefully, the Assessment will provide objective information to policy-makers about the importance of maintaining the capacity of our linked natural and human systems to adapt to change and the important role of biodiversity in the process.

The report on scenarios will, we expect, provide decision-makers and the public at large with a better appreciation of the consequences of alternative policies and actions. By setting out more clearly and convincingly the likely consequences of various scenarios, decision-makers may be galvanized to consider responses that did not previously seem feasible.

And the report on response options should help us identify the necessary actions to promote ecosystem health and human well-being. In particular, it should help us identify which actions are likely to have the largest effects on ecosystem health.

Together, these global reports should help us to implement the 2010 target.

In addition, I believe that the sub-global assessments have an enormous potential to provide the

basis of information and understanding in specific ecosystems to identify the necessary action. It will be easier in these targeted assessments to identify responses tailored to particular situations.

CHALLENGES FOR 2004

There are a number of challenges ahead.

Aside from the daunting challenge of completing the assessment itself, a major challenge that I believe all of us share is to do what we can to ensure that the MA is used to its full potential.

That means we must ensure the full engagement of users.

We have a shared responsibility, I believe, to make sure that:

- The MA is going to deliver what the Convention process needs;
- That the Convention's national focal points and Governments are fully engaged in the process; and
- We have a strategy for communicating the results and promoting the use of the assessment in decision making processes.

The Conference of the Parties has welcomed the contribution of the Millennium Assessment to the Convention. Further, SBSTTA has invited the Millennium Assessment to address various topics related to the biodiversity of forests, inland waters, and marine and coastal areas and the interrelationship between biodiversity and climate change, and has agreed to review the results of the Assessment.

The main reports of the MA will undergo two rounds of peer-review this year. Governments and experts will be invited to first consider the scope of the Assessment reports, and second, to comment on their content. Letters explaining the review process signed by the MA Co-Chairs, and the executive heads of the various conventions, including myself, were recently sent to national focal points. I encourage all to actively participate in this review. SBSTTA has recommended that the Conference of the Parties urge all Parties to do the same.

In addition, a separate synthesis report on biodiversity will be prepared by the Millennium Assessment specifically for this Convention. This synthesis report will be available for review by SBSTTA early in 2005, and SBSTTA will have the opportunity to endorse the findings of the Assessment.

In closing, I believe that we all should consider how best we can promote awareness of the findings of the Assessment and encourage action through the decision-making processes in our countries and organizations.

Updates

FIRST ROUND OF MA REVIEW PROCESS BEGINS

The first round of the peer review process of the Assessment Reports began January 12, 2004. All comments for the first round must be submitted by March 19, 2004. Chapter authors will meet in Montreal in April 2004 to address the review comments from the first round, and ready the reports for the next round. The second round of peer review will be June-August 2004. The chapter authors will meet in September to begin finalizing the Assessment Reports based on the second round of review comments.

Government review of the Assessment will be especially important. Focal points for the conventions (Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Migratory Species, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) received a letter in late November 2003, signed by the MA Board Co-Chairs and the Executives of each convention, requesting their involvement in the review process. The MA Secretariat also distributed another letter to focal points announcing the upcoming review and requesting their feedback on the format for distribution of the review drafts.

More information on the review process will be available on the MA website. The MA review process is open to review by any interested individual. Please register for participation in the review process by sending a request to review@millenniumassessment.org providing your full contact information (name, institution, address, phone, fax, e-mail) and area of expertise.

MA LAUNCHES FIRST REPORT

On September 24, 2003, a group of distinguished panelists launched the first publication of the MA, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: A Framework for Assessment*, at the World Bank in Washington, DC.

The 245-page report lays out the approaches, assumptions, processes, and parameters scientists are using in the assessment. The approach used in the MA can help to implement the ecosystem approach and in particular it offers decision-makers a mechanism to identify options that can better achieve core human development and sustainability goals and better understand the trade-offs in decisions about development and the environment.

Island Press, the United Nations Foundation and the World Resources Institute (WRI) coordinated the launch. MA Board Co-Chair Robert Watson, Assessment Panel Co-Chair Hal Mooney, WRI President and MA Board Member Jonathan Lash, and United Nations Foundation President and former U.S. Senator Timothy Wirth participated in this event, which the World Bank hosted. More than 100 people attended the launch.

The MA has been characterized as the most extensive study ever of the linkages between the world's ecosystems and human well-being. "The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment brings together state of the art natural and social science to bear on the needs of decision-makers concerning the links between ecosystems, human development, and sustainability," said Dr. Robert Watson, Chief Scientist of The World Bank. "It will help them understand the multiple effects on an ecosystem of any management or policy change."

Media inquiries should be directed to Adlai Amor, aamor@wri.org.

MA IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY¹

In commemorating the launch of the first report of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, it seems important to remember why the Assessment is being undertaken.

The MA represents an extraordinary contribution to scientific knowledge and understanding and -we all hope- to global knowledge and understanding of the processes that support everything needed for all human well-being, and for all life on Earth.

The MA is, in its essence, a 21st century process. It is totally international and multi-sectoral. It includes participation of individuals from every part of society and every sector of the global economy. The Assessment is extraordinarily collaborative, unlike almost anything being undertaken by the official sector around the world. It is self-organizing, including people from all regions who share goals and want to find ways to achieve them together. It is driven by voluntary contributions of some of the most distinguished scientists in the world. These people are participating because they understand the urgency of the issues at hand and the potential to make a difference. They also understand that the MA will make

a difference only if the final product enters the process of real decision-making.

And the MA must influence decisions if all that these people are doing is going to matter. All the contributions of the visionary institutions supporting this process will make a difference only if the information is used. Of course, some of those decisions are going to be made by the World Bank, and other big grey buildings in Washington, DC and in over 200 other capital cities around the world. That's the traditional process, and those are the usual targets. Some of those decisions will also be made in corporate headquarters around the world. These are critical investment decisions that can drive huge increases in well-being, or huge diminution in the capacity of ecosystems to provide for human well-being in the long term. The chances of any of these decisions being good ones are vastly enhanced by improvements in the scientific basis for making those decisions, and improvements in the understanding of the incredibly complex ecosystem interactions that enable the provision of important services for human well-being.

The MA would dearly like to influence decision-makers and their decisions. But to do so, we will have to reach the millions of civil society organizations who are increasingly, if there is change in the world, driving that change. The opportunity to provide information that directly affects the lives and well-being of people, and to empower them to use this kind of information to change the nature of the decisions being made, is a tremendous opportunity and a large responsibility for those of us involved in the MA. We must make that possible. We have to make this more than an assessment; we have to make this a platform for change.

The information produced by the MA scientists can shake loose the status quo, like so many cases of dynamite, if the science is put it in a form that people can use. And that is what I will be looking for as a result of the MA, and why I remain closely involved and invested in the process.

¹ Excerpts of the remarks from Jonathan Lash, President of World Resources Institute and member of the MA Board, on the occasion of the launch of the first report.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNICATING THE MA

Over the last six months, we have been working hard to develop the foundation of the communications strategy that will deliver the MA findings to our user audiences. The challenge facing communication of the MA is that the scientists are conducting the MA at a time when the interest of many key decision-makers in the topic of sustainable development seems to be declining. The MA has the potential to energize the environmental sustainability community and provide a new framework for the sustainability debate by connecting nature and human well-being. It was this idea that attracted many renowned communi-

cators from around the world to a discussion about communicating the MA.

On September 23, 2003, MA Board member Dr. David Suzuki chaired a "brainstorming" meeting on Communications and the MA in Washington, DC. The United Nations Foundation hosted the meeting, timed to coincide with the launch of the first MA report. The participants at this meeting generated invaluable advice, ideas, and opportunities for communicating the results of the MA.

Some of the main messages that resulted from the session:

- **Identify the Audience.** Everyone agreed that the identification of the right audience was the

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2003 Outreach Activities for the MA Conceptual Framework

September 8–17	World Parks Congress (S. Africa)
Sept 11	8th Indonesian National Science Conference
September 16–18	WBCSD Delegate Meeting (Portugal)
September 22	MA Communications Advisory Group
September 23	Ecosystems and Human Well-being Book Launch
October	Peru, Ecuador
October 1	Japan
October 6	UNESCO Governing Council (France)
October 13	MA Seminar for European Journalists (Czech Republic)
October 13	Coordination meeting with press officers of MA partner organizations (Czech Republic)
October 14	TWAS Annual Meeting (China)
October 15	Czech Republic Briefing
October 15	International Council on Mining and Metals Annual Meeting (UK)
October 16	International Human Dimensions of Global Change Open Science Conference (Canada)
October	Arab regional meeting on the MA (Bahrain)
November	Conceptual Framework Report distribution
November	MA Brochure distribution
November 20–24	The West Africa Regional Forum Praia+9 on Land Tenure and Natural Resources (Mali)
November 10–14	CBD SBSTTA (Canada)
November 20	All convention focal points contacted alerting them to the start of the review process on January 12
December 2	IGBP Land Project Open Science Conference
December 4	Interacademy Panel Annual Meeting (Mexico)
December	CBD Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8j (Canada)
December	Indian Society for Ecological Economics
December 3–8	User Forum Workshops: Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Santiago (Brazil, Argentina, Chile)

imperative that would shape the message and the communications strategy. Participants felt that the audience for MA information could be very broad and that there are multiple targets, but that the MA itself should focus on making partnerships with organizations with proven success in implementing broader outreach strategies. They also agreed that the MA should focus its resources on decision-makers and its identified user groups, and concentrate upon management of a larger communications effort that relies upon partnerships.

- **Focus on Credibility.** The credibility and political acceptance of the information produced by the MA are as important as the information itself, and this information will help support the broader sustainability agenda. However, many participants cautioned that even the highly credible MA messages would be ineffective unless distilled to the smallest relevant pieces.
- **Work with Partners.** Above all, creation and strengthening of partnerships was seen to be the best way to get the MA messages and findings to a larger public. Partnerships with nongovernmental organizations were widely supported.

The MA Secretariat invites all those who want to share their communication ideas or join forces to disseminate the substance of the MA around the world to contact us:

info@millenniumassessment.org.

PROVIDING MA LESSONS AND TOOLS TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Even before the release of the MA findings, opportunities exist for governments and other users to benefit from the MA process and to strengthen their capacity to undertake integrated ecosystem assessments. To that end, the United Nations University has provided support for two workshops for delegates to international conventions, with plans for additional workshops in 2004. The MA Secretariat coordinated these workshops at the Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), in Havana Cuba in August and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) in November. These workshops provided an opportunity for

SCIENTIFIC OPPORTUNITIES

A NEW ONE-YEAR MASTER'S PROGRAMME* AT STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY

GLOBALISATION, GOVERNANCE & NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

August 2004 - May 2005

The course has a transdisciplinary and problem driven approach to the study of sustainability. Participants will perform in-depth case study analyses and discuss the complex relationships of social-ecological systems.

More information:

Website: www.ctm.su.se/globalisation or Course Assistant: Ms. Sara Borgstroem

E-mail: sara@ctm.su.se; Phone: +46-8-16 17 77

RESEARCH POSITIONS OPEN

New opportunities at the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI: <http://iri.columbia.edu>) at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University in Palisades, NY, just 20 miles from New York City, New York, USA. Our mission is to enhance society's capability to understand, anticipate and manage the impacts of seasonal climate fluctuations in order to improve human welfare and the environment, especially in developing countries. In this context, we undertake fundamental research that is informed and advanced with problem focused projects in South and South East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America, partnering with appropriate experts for the problem and region. Posts being advertised include:

- Associate Research Scientist - Climate Impacts Research*
- Associate Research Scientist - Economics of Public Policy*
- Associate Research Scientist - Economic Modeling and Climate Risk*
- Associate Research Scientist - Climate Impacts Research*
- Postdoctoral Research Scientist - Climate Related Losses and Risks*
- Associate Research Scientist - Satellite Derived Environmental Proxies*
- Research Scientist - Program Leader for the Americas*
- Senior Staff Associate for Projects in the Americas*
- Senior Staff Associate - Asia Program Coordination*

Instructions on how to apply will be stated in each job link. Columbia University is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer. Women and Minorities are encouraged to apply.

For more information: Madeleine Thomson, Director, Climate Impacts Research International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI)

The Earth Institute of Columbia University
127 Monell Bldg., 61 Route 9W, Lamont Campus
Palisades, New York 10964-8000
Area code 845. Tel 680 4413, Fax 680 4864, e-mail mthomson@iri.columbia.edu
See website <http://iri.columbia.edu>, for programs, news, forecasts, data.

delegates to learn about the framework, methods and approaches being used and developed in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and to explore how those approaches can be applied to the issues of relevance to the two conventions. Through the discussions, the MA also received guidance concerning topics of greatest relevance to the delegates that should be emphasized in the assessment. An additional workshop for the CBD is scheduled for February 2004, during CBD COP-7 in Malaysia. A similar activity is being planned in 2004 for the members of the Scientific and Technological Review Panel of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

MILLENNIUM ASSESSMENT IN PRAGUE

MA Secretariat and Combined Working Group Meeting October 10-17

Some 200 Coordinating Lead Authors of assessment chapters, along with the entire MA Secretariat and Assessment Panel, and almost all of the MA Fellows met in Prague, Czech Republic, last October 10-17. This meeting served as the last opportunity for authors and Assessment Panel members to discuss problems and progress, prior to the deadlines for first drafts of the reports. The goals for this meeting were to advance zero-order drafts for each report, work on integrating the recommendations of the cross-cutting meetings into the various chapters, and deal with other issues of consistency across the assessment. The authors attending the meeting also agreed upon the deadlines for first drafts and start of the review process. Because of the success of the "Combined" meeting, the next working group meetings for Conditions, Scenarios and Responses will also be held jointly (April 25-30, 2004 in Montreal, Canada).

In addition to the Working Group meeting goals, the MA Secretariat also wanted to use the meeting as an opportunity to bring together various media and press contacts for a briefing on the MA. During the Prague meeting, the MA Secretariat and the European Union Science Journalists Association organized a seminar to provide European journalists with background information on the Assessment. The MA Secretariat also invited several Media and Information Officers representing several of the institutional partner organizations in order to begin discussions of press outreach for the final reports. The MA Secretariat will convene this group often in 2004 to coordinate joint outreach activities for the Assessment findings.

The MA publishes this online newsletter every quarter. If you would like to be added to the e-mail distribution list, please send your contact information to info@millenniumassessment.org.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

JANUARY 15

RAMSAR Standing Committee
IUCN/Ramsar Headquarters, Switzerland
- Presentation by Walt Reid on MA linkages with Ramsar

JANUARY–MARCH

National Review Workshops
(multiple locations)
- Seek workshops to review MA material in “Lead Countries” including:
Mexico, Czech Republic, The Netherlands, Germany, France, Malaysia, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Trinidad, Canada, South Africa, China, India, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia

FEBRUARY

US Government briefing (jointly with Heinz Center)
Washington DC

FEBRUARY 7-20

CBDCOP-7
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Workshop for delegates on MA Conceptual Framework and review drafts of Assessment Reports (with UNU and CBD Secretariat)
- Side event
- Ministerial Segment presentation by Walt Reid on scientific assessments

MARCH 9

Dialogue with Permanent UNEP Government Representatives on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
UNEP Headquarters, Kenya

MARCH 10–11

MA Board Meeting
UNEP Headquarters, Kenya

MARCH 17–20

MA Bridging Scales and Epistemologies Conference
Alexandria, Egypt

MARCH 21–24

MA Sub-Global Assessment Working Group Meeting
Alexandria, Egypt

MARCH 29–31

UNEP Global Ministerial Environment Forum
Jenju, South Korea
- MA will be included in UNEP report on state of scientific assessments

MARCH 31–APRIL 2

Convention on Migratory Species Scientific Committee Meeting
Edinburgh, Scotland
- MA briefing

APRIL 25–30

MA Combined Working Group Meeting
Montreal, Canada