Biodiversity research back on the agenda

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After the establishment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on the 21st April, the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS) releases two videos in which prominent biodiversity scientists describe the essential role of biodiversity research in addressing societal issues.

Johan Rockström, Executive Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre starts by emphasizing the scope of biodiversity: “Biodiversity is not only an environmental issue. Biodiversity is a security issue, a foreign policy issue, an economic issue. It is something that should be in the realm of the Ministries of Finance, the Heads of States.” The link between biodiversity and human well-being is stressed by Sir Robert Watson, Chair of the IPBES: “Ecosystems, and their services, are the very foundation of sustainable development, the very foundation of human well-being”.

To address the increasingly critical issues that our societies are facing (food, water and climate crisis), biodiversity experts demonstrate the need for a real mind shift, Johan Rockström states: “The mind shift is really to position the economy inside the biosphere and therefore forcing the economy to abide to, and respect the rules of the biosphere. The economy then becomes a subset of a functioning biosphere.”

Nature-based solutions have just started to be explored but might be a key to solve current and future crises: “Keeping a forest healthy will keep water-sheds healthy and supply water to cities. Beijing and New-York have done that, so let’s go for nature-based solutions whenever possible. If not possible, technological solutions are an option. But up until now, we haven’t really put nature-based solutions on the table” explains Ms. Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Executive Director of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

As the recent funding scheme for the European Union from 2014 to 2020 (Horizon 2020) plans on allocating a large part of the budget for research on technologies and innovation, biodiversity experts call for a more open view on innovation and warn that technological fixes can not be considered as substitutes for biodiversity and the services it provides to human beings. Dr Sandra Diaz from the DIVERSITAS Scientific Committee explains that: “Normally, technology is very good to solve one single problem at a time. For example, we may come up with an artificial tree. But this will give us only one of the multiple benefits that an ecosystem can give us. And we will have to find technologies for every little bit of the things that one functional ecosystem gives us altogether.”
Other scientists express that considering technology and innovation as the only solutions to tackling the very complex and multi-faceted crises we face simply is not realistic. As such, biodiversity experts call for integrative research (involvement of different disciplines to help understanding and solving societal issues) and innovation in its broader sense, including social processes and nature-based solutions. In addition, specific support should be ensured for biodiversity research especially with the start of the IPBES. Robert Watson points out that: “There are some very important scientific issues that need to be resolved. We need to understand, in the best way, what are the drivers of the loss of biodiversity and the change in the degradation of ecosystem services. To make sure that we link together issues such as, climate change-biodiversity; Biodiversity-food security; -water security; -energy security; -human security. All of these issues are totally inter-related.”

All these opinions can be found in the video: “Biodiversity research, a key to our future” available online at: http://vimeo.com/40622244

In a second video, biodiversity experts give concrete examples of how biodiversity research can help solve societal issues such as resources management, public health, climate change, species adaptation and poverty reduction. One of the key messages contained in this video is that, according to Dr Paul Leadley, Chair of DIVERSITAS bioDISCOVERY Scientific Committee “There is a real need to have integrative research in which we bring together people from all kinds of fields: agronomists, social scientists, climate scientists, evolutionary biologists, psychologists, etc. so that we can up with answers to societal questions in a way that makes these answers relevant for policy making and for people who manage natural resources.”

This second video is called: “Biodiversity research, an answer to societal issues” and is available online at: http://vimeo.com/41875844

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
These videos were produced in May 2012 by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform for the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS), a forum of natural and social scientists, policy makers and other stakeholders that identify and structure the research needed for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The interviews took place in London from 26 to 28 April 2012 during the DIVERSITAS Conference “Planet Under Pressure”. EPBRS mobilized the scientific community on this issue because of the decreased visibility of biodiversity, and the environment generally, as areas of research in plans for the European Research Framework Programme Horizon2020. The biodiversity scientific community would like to ensure that they remain at the top of European and national research agendas considering their importance in addressing current and future societal challenges.

For more information, please contact Estelle Balian, Science Officer for the Belgian Biodiversity Platform and Secretariat of the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (see contact details above).