

Resources for conservation and sustainable development in ORs and OCTs.

Which integration in European strategies for Conservation and Research ?

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Biodiversity in Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) is exceptional but most exposed to climate change, natural hazards and pressures of human activities. Biodiversity is a fundamental asset for economy in all ORs and OCTs. Nevertheless, this reality remains poorly known and understood, despite the visible importance and richness of ecosystems. For example, the French ORs and OCTs have 26 times more endemic plant species, 60 times more endemic birds, and over 100 times more endemic fishes than continental France. But ORs and OCTs also have to answer the immediate needs of a growing population, which means building infrastructure, increasing urbanization, strengthening economic activity. This situation leads to enormous challenges in terms of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Financial support to ORs and OCTs include regional, national or European funding and numerous fiscal advantages. Amounts and rules differ depending on the different statutes, but in most cases these financial tools have a major impact on development choices - and biodiversity. It is of crucial importance to take biodiversity into consideration in all development tools and projects, and that specific long term regional, national and European means can be identified for biodiversity conservation. A complete analysis of these issues in the French ORs and OCTs has been published in September 2006 by IUCN French national Committee, showing which proportion of funding is devoted to biodiversity conservation and the impacts of development policies and projects.

Networking research in ORs and OCTs is also fundamental to address the numerous questions and problems linked to biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. Biodiversity policies in the EU are highly fragmented within and between the Member States. This situation is amplified in ORs and OCTs. Several critical barriers hinder cooperation of the overseas regions and territories between themselves, with continental Europe and with third countries, among which very long distances, isolation and time differences between these regions spread over the world, deficiency of resources and critical mass, lack of timely access to facilities, lack of awareness and difficult access to information.

A first initiative has been proposed at the European level to support the cooperation and coordination for research on biodiversity and sustainable development between all ORs and OCTs. This project called Net-Biome, intends to use the ERA-NET Scheme, which is a tool of the European Framework Programme allowing funding for Coordination Actions. This project is currently under preparation after a first positive evaluation during the Sixth Framework Programme. By substantially improving the knowledge and coherence of funding of both basic and applied research, Net-Biome aims at making an important contribution to improve RTD efforts across European ORs and OCTs and to support long-term perspectives in European research policies to address the need to prevent, avoid and remedy the serious impacts of climate change and anthropic pressures on tropical and subtropical biodiversity.

Finally, a coherent framework could be initiated on sustainable management of biodiversity, with adequate tools and means. It is important for ORs and OCTs to build it together, with the active support of the European Commission. Such framework could take the shape of a "European initiative for ORs and OCTs biodiversity".

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