

Sigmar Gabriel

“A Sustainable Coexistence of Mankind and Nature”



The adoption of Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro, 15 years ago prompted necessary changes in political reasoning and action. The world community has recognised that without this change of direction towards sustainable development, life would not be worth living for future generations. Agenda 21 was not the only programme adopted in 1992; the two most significant environmental conventions, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity were also agreed upon.

Thus, climate change and the loss of biodiversity were recognised, even then, as being the most urgent global environmental problems. Now the signs for on-going climate change are obvious; emissions of greenhouse gases have increased further, biodiversity has chalked up increasing losses and the red list of species threatened by extinction grows and grows. The demand is on politics worldwide to, at long last, take the necessary measures in order to stop these problems getting any worse. The German national climate protection programme and our strategy on biodiversity are two examples of how we can make a contribution with innovative and inter-departmental politics. At the end of the day however, sustainable development is dependent upon the contribution of all relevant stakeholders – agriculture and forestry, industry, trade and private households.

Increasingly extreme weather conditions have led to an increasingly large number of people being personally affected. This leads to the realisation that changes are necessary also in what we do as individuals. Awareness of the fact that effective climate protection is scarcely possible without functioning eco-systems is slowly being established. Thus we need more intact forests and moors, not only for storing carbon dioxide, but also to regulate the water supply.

The UNESCO research programme ‘Man and the Biosphere’ has, since the seventies, been dealing with the question of how the relationship of people to their environment should be managed, so that the biosphere is indeed preserved as a form of habitat. The Seville Strategy was adopted as a result of the conference in Rio; this has enabled the programme to develop substantially. Since then, biosphere reserves have been looked at as being model regions for sustainable development. In other words, in the world network of biosphere reserves right down to the local level, transferable models for comparable problems and strategies for coping with global environmental problems are being developed and tested. In these representative areas, findings on the function of specific ecosystems, the results of human interference and the success of certain measures for protection and development can be obtained and exchanged. UNESCO biosphere reserves are outdoor laboratories in the most positive sense with the objective of achieving a harmonious and sustainable coexistence between mankind and nature.

Germany’s Federal States, in charge of nature conservation in the German political system, have successfully applied for designation of 13 biosphere reserves by UNESCO. Thereby they also contribute to Germany’s engagement in finding solutions to these complex questions via these model regions. Thus they have paved the way by which Germany can do justice to its responsibility for future generations.

The Federal Government gives them all the support it can. One aspect is to support the cooperation of German biosphere reserves with those of other countries. Another is to convene the German MAB National Committee; a third is to financially support research and development projects for further developing the MAB programme in Germany.

Furthermore, a number of biosphere reserves profit from the Federal Programme for 'the installation and securing of parts of nature and landscapes with national significance' which has existed since 1979 and has, over the years, received more than 300 million Euros.

Germany will host the 9th conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2008. From my point of view, this conference is of outstanding importance for the politics of nature

conservation for the coming years, both nationally and internationally. We want to use this opportunity to make it clear to people that the wealth of nature is an indispensable foundation for development. I am convinced that biosphere reserves will also contribute to setting the course in this important endeavour.

Sigmar Gabriel

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UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Vessertal-Thüringen Forest

The 'Vessertal-Thüringen Forest' biosphere reserve is situated in the middle of the Thuringian Forest between Illmehausen, Schleusingen and Suhl. It is crossed by the famous hiking trail 'Rennsteig'. The valley of the Vesser brook was designated

by UNESCO in 1979, making it one of the oldest German biosphere reserves. Since then, the area has been extended twice to the 171 km² it spans today. The Vesser valley is now the largest core area in the region. The beech and spruce forests

typical of the Thuringian-Franconian low mountain range cover almost 90 percent of the area. Rare species such as the fire salamander and the black grouse are at home in the forests and meadows.

Tourism is traditional in the Vessertal and nowadays the main source of income in the region. 'Visitor guidance' is the name of a project, initiated in 1999, whose objective is to promote a sustainable tourist development. Tourism, forestry and nature conservation, together with local authorities, define common measures to bring the interests of nature conservation in line with those of the tourism branch, especially with regard to the target group, hiking tourists. They record and assess tourist activities with a 'visitor monitoring', using light barriers for counting and interviews. Public transport was improved and the route network revised. The administration of the biosphere reserve organised symposia to present the results of the project at the national and international level.

Further information:

<http://www.biosphaerenreservat-vessertal.de>



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