

TEEB should mark the beginning of global economic reform

Today, the final report of the ground-breaking research on the economic value of biodiversity and ecosystems was presented to the meeting. TEEB stands for 'The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity'. The leader of the study, investment banker Pavan Sukhdev has almost become a 'guru' on the conservation scene. I hope it will receive similar attention to the Stern Report on Climate Change. For it is the economics of nature that should finally cause politicians to turn their heads and gaze more intently at biodiversity. With TEEB as a guide they should now understand the dire economic consequences of failing to value biodiversity. TEEB shows that it makes economic sense to protect and restore biodiversity. Sukhdev was clear in his assessment to those gathered today. Nature has invaluable assets that can not be expressed in euros or yen. 'Nature is not a supermarket!' He said there are also countless cases where nature provides us with free services, and which could and should appear on balance sheets in the future. The report presents 120 case studies showing the economics of nature. For example, the conservation of mangroves in Vietnam is far cheaper than the construction of artificial protective measures against floods - while the coastal forests serve as nurseries for fish, and thereby generate income for local people. Sukhdev urged governments to remember that there are first of all the world's poor that depend on intact nature, for drinking water or firewood for cooking. He said that poor management and over use of nature can affect the economic performance of poor countries by 40% to 90%. TEEB shows that the economics of nature need more wide use. First and foremost all governments need to treat nature conservation as a priority across Government departments. Failure to do so will affect all sectors of society and the world economy - by 2050 it could be as high as 7% of our gross domestic product. The corporate sector need to shoulder more of the environmental costs and take account of nature in their balance sheets. It needs change in systems - gross domestic product is not a good measure of the welfare of a nation if it doesn't include the state of its natural resources. Let's hope today's launch of TEEB is the beginning of true global economic reform! The hushed room of people present at the launch today were certainly very impressed.