

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Convention on Biological Diversity and its Contribution to Sustainable Development

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Traveling back to 1965, Singapore was a polluter's paradise. A newborn country, just split from neighboring Malaysia, it harbored mucky rivers, polluted canals, and open sewage just ready to attract all kinds of diseases and epidemics. But Green City pioneer Lee Kuan Yew had one vision for the city-state, "Make Singapore a delightful place to live, where people can come and invest, 'A City in a Garden'." As a small, city-state it had the luxury of a centralized government and looking after its citizens' well-being and future, which co-relates now to the idea of sustainable development, to not compromise the needs and resources of the future generations. The project began with the decade-long cleaning of the Singapore River and still goes on today, where one can see plants crawling up the skyscrapers and parks and gardens in literally every corner of the city.

So, what does it do right? The answer is that the country never saw its future as an urban concrete jungle but as a place where the gap between sustainable living and a luxurious lifestyle could be bridged. Goal 15 of the UN SDGs is to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss. Singapore understood the co-relation between natural diversity and development very early on, even before the concept of sustainable development was widely starting to be promoted. Singapore and its citizens understand the delicate balance of the natural ecosystem and the role of each species and organism part of it. Today the city-state is home to more than 2,000 native plant species, 57 mammal species, 98 reptile species, and around 25 amphibian species.⁰ Singapore today is closer than ever to its pioneer generations' dream of a Garden City and a Haven for all Biodiversity. With careful planning, it has been able to increase the green cover over the area from 35.7 percent to 46.5 percent between 1986 and 2007. 10 percent of the land area is set aside for parks and nature reserves. The National Park Board and other active public-led organizations ensure the protection of these places and the idea of green space has further allowed the integration of natural ecosystems into urban living spaces.

Now the message is quite clear if Singapore can transform itself from a polluted backwater to a global green powerhouse, any city can. Proper utilization of an area's biggest asset can allow it to grow in a way that can improve the standard of living but at the same time does not exhaust resources. To Singapore, it was the population. Singapore believes that to safeguard an area's biodiversity, one of the earliest steps that can be taken is to start considering biodiversity issues in its policies and decision-making processes. The multi-sectoral use of Singapore's coastline and sea resources called the attention of integrated coastal management, which thus led to the setup of The Technical Committee of Coastal and Marine Environment which adopts a holistic approach to marine environment conservation and management. The citizens of the country also must understand the need for biodiversity conservation and thus the knowledge on the same topic must be improved. The Singapore Red Data Book and other methods of documenting its environmental diversity allow individuals to easily have access to the environmental wonders of its nation and allow them to appreciate its natural heritage. It is important to incorporate elements of biodiversity conservation into all levels of education through active volunteer and outreach programs.

In 2008 Singapore proposed a biodiversity index that works as a self-assessment tool for cities to evaluate and monitor the progress of their biodiversity conservation efforts against their baselines. It, still to date, remains relevant, credible, and flexible enough to be applied to broader frameworks. The Singapore Index has allowed various countries to have healthy competition and consciously keep track of their conservation efforts. In the upcoming years, Singapore aims to achieve all 17 SDGs under the UN Agenda 2030 and looks forward to working with like-minded partners to build a sustainable and resilient future for itself and all generations to come.