Biodiversity and health in the face of Climate change

Short Description:
Climate change presents significant challenges to human health and biodiversity. Increases in extreme climate events, such as heat waves, droughts or flooding, threaten human health and well-being. In addition, the prevalence of non-communicable diseases is rising, causing ill health and accelerating costs to the health sector.

Biodiversity and healthy natural ecosystems, including protected areas in and around cities, can provide ecosystem benefits and services that support human health and help communities to cope with climate change. The risk of floods can be reduced, air pollutants filtered, and supply of clean drinking water made more reliable. Ecosystem services can help to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases and respiratory disorders. Furthermore, access to nature offers many other direct health benefits, including opportunities for physical activity, reduction of developmental disorders and improved mental health. These benefits become increasingly important in a world facing increasing climate change and urbanisation. Economic valuations of green spaces have found that nature provides billions of dollars in cost savings for health services. Indeed, in some countries medical professionals are now prescribing time in nature as part of a patients’ treatment for chronic illnesses.

The growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity’s contribution to human health offers great potential for maximizing synergies between public health, climate change adaptation and nature conservation. Partnerships between conservationists, planners and health authorities are critical to maximize these synergies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an important global framework for such partnerships from global to local level. They offer an unprecedented opportunity to value and conserve nature, to work across sectors to achieve environmental objectives in the face of climate change, and contribute to furthering goals that are essential to economic and social development.