

Trees are for life, not just for carbon

**A practical approach to
building biodiversity into
your business**

Introduction

Biodiversity as a concept is not widely understood and as a result is easy to ignore. Do this at your peril! The life systems that exist in our world are inter-dependent and as such ignoring the impacts could result in exhaustion of the supply that could have been managed in a sustainable way.

Here is an example.

Everyone by now has at least heard the word deforestation, whether they fully understand it or not. On the surface it sounds plain and simple. You take away the trees and you have fertile land to grow crops.

The reality is very different. The trees were the containers which held all the nutrients. The soil from which they grow is surprisingly deficient in anything useful to the farmer. So the farmer merrily plants his crops, the first few grow and he is happy. But gradually the crops begin to fail. What went wrong? It seemed like such a simple plan.

When a tree grows it uses its leaves to capture the sunlight and convert the energy to food. Yes, you probably remember photosynthesis from school. From time to time the leaves are shed and the nutrients within them are released to the soil. Take away the leaves and you also take away the nutrients that replenished the soil. But it doesn't end there. The trees also served as big old strainers, catching the rainfall and slowing it down, enabling other plants and animals to benefit from it and live among the canopy.

Take away the tree and you take away the strainer, the home for the wildlife, the food that it relied on and you also expose the land.

The rain, however, still falls.

With the trees gone it washes away the top soil that the farmer was relying on and the crops fail. The soil degrades, the landscape changes, the rivers swell from the extra water that reaches them at a much faster rate and all the good stuff and bad stuff in the soil ends up in the river.

So we've lost the trees, now we've lost the fields, guess what's going to happen to the river? The silt collects as the flow drops it off, the nutrients build up in the river and suddenly the aquatic life is affected. Now we are starting to affect the fisheries. Salmon are just one example, they swim upstream to spawn and their offspring go back downstream, out to the sea and hopefully return again. In the process they feed the bears and have their own impacts on the environment. But now the nutrients have started to reduce the amount of oxygen in the water. The fish start to struggle and spawning fails.

That's the trees, the fields and the river all damaged because the farmer wanted to grow his crop. By now you've got the picture, it's a chain of events all triggered by one action and over time thousands of individuals, that's flora and fauna as well, are affected.

Meanwhile the farmer has gone to chop down some more trees.

I know, you're probably thinking 'It's not my problem, I don't do business in the Amazon.' I have two answers for you.

- 1 You probably use a product which contains palm oil somewhere in your business, even if it's just biscuits for meetings. Most of us do. The palm oil industry has been one of the biggest contributors to deforestation.
- 2 Actually, the same process occurs in the UK. It just isn't as obvious and it affects different species.

Have I convinced you yet? Well, read on. I intend to make this book an approachable tool with the absolute minimum amount of jargon, and what I have to use will be explained in layman's terms so anyone from any business can use it.

I want you to care enough to act within your organisation and buck the trend.

I want you to understand that trees are for life, not just for carbon.

About TEEB

TEEB is the report on The Economics of Ecology and Biodiversity, launched in September 2010 and attempts to analyse how business is supported by Ecosystem Services. In other words, it assesses what the world provides to help us to do business. It is a simple fact of life that resources are limited and we are using them in an unsustainable way. TEEB sets out the need to put a value on these resources and then ensure that businesses pay for them to:

- a) protect the resources themselves
- b) protect the communities that depend on them
- c) protect the biodiversity that relies on them
- d) ultimately to also protect their business by ensuring that supply is able to continue wherever possible

Let's face it, businesses are doing what they do to make money, which if you're reading this book, probably includes you. Whatever happens they will continue to do so but in the modern world Corporate Social Responsibility has become a requirement not just a 'nice to have'. Protecting biodiversity is just one small aspect of the CSR agenda and it is no longer acceptable to simply strip out the resources without a second thought.

You can read more about TEEB at their website www.teebweb.org