



Importance of whole-of-society & multi-stakeholder processes in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

DISCUSSION PAPER

Summary

We are currently facing a global planetary emergency, with interrelated crises of biodiversity loss, inequality, climate change and pollution, in turn leading to raised risks to human wellbeing from zoonotic spillover and resulting pandemics. Addressing our planetary emergency will require all parts of society to work together towards the common goal of a nature-positive, carbon neutral and equitable world, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) must galvanize action for the protection, sustainable use and restoration of nature while addressing the drivers of nature loss. A whole-of-society approach can help ensure that implementation is effective and inclusive and recognizes the important contributions of all stakeholders and rights-holders across society.

Decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COPs) have invited and encouraged the participation of all sectors of society in implementing the Convention and contributing to the achievement of all three of its objectives.

Multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) are an important tool to put into practice the whole-of-society approach by providing platforms and mechanisms to strengthen local, national, and regional dialogues and shared solutions, and to develop and implement inclusive national, regional, and global sectoral plans of action for nature and people to thrive.

WWF recommendations for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

Due to the importance and benefits of taking a whole-of-society approach to addressing biodiversity loss, and given it is essential for the successful implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and other action on conservation, WWF believes that the whole-of-society approach and MSPs must be strongly promoted in the framework. In order to measure progress, the monitoring and reporting on utilization of MSPs will be important and need to be part of the entire package of the GBF adopted at COP15, for immediate implementation and monitoring of progress efforts. WWF recommends that:

1. **The post-2020 global biodiversity framework contains stronger and explicit language** on the need to have a whole-of-society approach (including in the Purpose and Theory of change). Please refer to [WWF's reaction to draft 1 of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#).
2. **The Enabling conditions section provides a clear articulation by Parties on how whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches can and should be implemented.** At the very beginning of implementation of the framework, Parties should set up or strengthen representative and inclusive **multi-stakeholder and**

multi-sectoral processes on biodiversity, and other such mechanisms, that bring together the public and private sectors and civil society and IPLCs, including women and youth. This would ensure: a) coordination, transparency and effectiveness for the implementation of the post-2020 GBF, and b) the full and effective participation of all right holders in biodiversity-related decision-making and implementation that affects their livelihoods and resources.

- 3. Parties report on and monitor the establishment or strengthening of representative, inclusive and effective multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral platforms on biodiversity**, including in the monitoring framework and through harmonized guidance to support NBSAPs and national reporting processes, which should be developed for immediate implementation at adoption of the post-2020 GBF at COP15.

1) Introduction

We are currently facing a global planetary emergency, with interrelated crises of biodiversity loss, inequality, climate change and pollution, in turn leading to raised risks to human wellbeing from zoonotic spillover and resulting pandemics. Addressing our planetary emergency will require all parts of society to work together towards the common goal of a nature-positive, carbon neutral and equitable world, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), currently being negotiated, is a once in a decade opportunity to agree on global commitment to action required to address biodiversity loss and achieve a nature-positive world and the future we want by 2030. The Theory of Change in the first draft of the GBF states that “a whole-of-government and society approach is necessary to make the changes needed over the next 10 years as a stepping stone towards the achievement of the 2050 Vision”.

It also identifies whole-of-society as an enabling condition for the GBF noting that:

It will require a participatory and inclusive whole-of-society approach that engages actors beyond national Governments, including subnational governments, cities and other local authorities (including through the Edinburgh Declaration), intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women’s groups, youth groups, the business and finance community, the scientific community, academia, faith-based organizations, representatives of sectors related to or dependent on biodiversity, citizens at large, and other stakeholders.

Noting the importance of a whole-of-government and society approach, government ministries in charge of sectors with an impact on biodiversity from finance to industry, planning, infrastructure, agriculture, mining, forestry, fisheries, trade, energy, tourism, health, and others are also key stakeholders.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to provide a rationale on how multi-stakeholder processes are a key mechanism to implement a whole-of-society approach and to provide recommendations for the post-2020 GBF, its implementation, monitoring and review.

2) Whole-of-society

Meaningful and informed engagement of all rights-holders, government sectors and stakeholders is an essential element to secure the support and cooperation required for the successful implementation of the post-2020 GBF. The need for a whole-of-society approach has also been discussed in relation to many other international processes and conventions, including the Sustainable Development Goals¹. In general, evidence supports the idea that broad participation can deliver better policies, strengthen democracy and build trust². During an exceptional year like 2020, several governments have increased their control and top-

¹ See: British Columbia Council for International Cooperation and Canadian Council for International Co-operation (2018) [A whole-of-society approach: Partnerships to realize the 2030 Agenda](#).

² OECD (2020) [Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions](#).

down practices which can negatively affect the effective participation and create additional challenges for civic space³.

Whole-of-society denotes an aspirational state whereby nature and biodiversity conservation are based on a broad support and engagement of all societal sectors and groups, following from the realization that *“the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind”*, as stated in the preamble of the CBD convention.

Decisions of the CBD COP invite and encourage the participation of all sectors of society in implementing the Convention, and contributing to the achievement of all three of its objectives.

Acknowledging that “nature is everybody’s business,” builds a shared commitment and ambition for urgent implementation of the post-2020 GBF and will help ensure that we protect our planet for future generations - *-We Do Not Inherit the Earth from Our Ancestors; We Borrow It from Our Children* (African proverb).

*“Only once we recognize that we are all in this together, and that conservation is not about ‘them’ but rather about ‘us,’ will we be able to fully transform the conservation narrative from ‘exclusion’ to ‘inclusion’ and from ‘conflict’ to ‘harmony’”*⁴ and achieve our vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050.

At the same time, whole-of-society also recognises the barriers to participation for some groups, and the need to uphold the rights of those most affected by nature loss and environmental degradation to participate in decision-making and other processes that impact upon them.

3) Putting Whole-of-society into practice⁵

Government-led multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral processes (MSPs)⁶ can become a conduit for a whole-of-society approach through strengthening local, national and regional dialogues and shared solutions. They can provide a space for dealing with different interests, knowledge and values, reaching common ground on the problems and the solutions, and dealing with the trade-offs through informed decision-making. Successful experiences of MSPs include all relevant public and private actors, at the right decision-making level. They can facilitate plans of action for transformative change in the finance, economy and industry, planning, infrastructure, agriculture, mining, forestry, fisheries, trade, energy, tourism, health, and other sectors impacting natural capital. In addition, in the context of the CBD, MSPs play an important role in government-led processes around the development, implementation, monitoring and review of NBSAPs, as well as national reports.

Case study: Multi-stakeholder management board for Imarisha Naivasha Initiative, Kenya

The Imarisha Naivasha Initiative in Kenya is structured around a multi-stakeholder management board that was officially created in May 2011 by the Government of Kenya to manage the coordination of the Lake Naivasha Catchment Restoration Programme. The Board is composed of representatives from various stakeholder groups, including national and local government officials, community-based natural resource management institutions, pastoralists, Lake Naivasha Riparian Association, Lake Naivasha Growers’ Group, local businesses, the tourism industry, and civil society organizations.

³ CIVICUS (2021) [State of Civil Society report](#).

⁴ Quote from Alice Ruhweza, WWF Africa Regional Director.

⁵ This section summarises key benefits and issues related to MSPs. There is extensive literature on MSPs with more in depth discussions. See e.g. IUCN (2012) [Collaboration and multi-stakeholder dialogue - A review of the literature](#).

⁶ Multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral processes may be referred to in a plethora of different ways, including for example: multi-stakeholder collaboration, multi-stakeholder partnerships, multi-stakeholder initiatives, multi-stakeholder platforms etc.

The objectives of the Imarisha Naivasha Management Board are, broadly, to coordinate the activities of the various stakeholders who are engaged in the conservation of the Basin; monitor compliance with laws and regulations; develop and enforce local codes of conduct; and develop and execute a trust to receive and manage financial resources for the conservation of the Basin⁷.

Criticisms about MSPs, and by extension the whole-of-society approach, refer to the power asymmetries amongst governments, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and other disadvantaged groups and the private sector. The most powerful actors control the process, undermining the full and effective inclusion of local voices and rights-holders, and thus further disenfranchising their participation in multi-stakeholder platforms. *“Corporates hold their power and fairness is not possible to talk about”* (from Interview with a representative of civil society). If this is not adequately addressed, MSPs can become counterproductive by legitimizing the status quo and policies that are not good for people and nature.

To overcome these challenges, mechanisms and support need to be in place to ensure that rights-holders, particularly those often at the margins of policy-making, like IPLCs, small-scale food producers, women and youth, are able to engage effectively. To ensure that more powerful actors do not have undue influence, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that processes are open, inclusive and transparent.

Rules and terms of engagement must enable the meaningful participation of civil society and rights-holders. All participants should be able to enjoy fair conditions for the exercise of rights to information, opinion and participation. Governments play a fundamental role and must commit to supporting and enabling MSPs, including through devolving decision-making, priority-setting and potentially implementation to MSPs. MSPs should inform government action at the highest level while catalyzing collective action and monitoring by government, civil society and the private sector.

While MSPs require time and resources, the alternative could be risk of conflict and unsuccessful implementation.

MSPs can and should be adapted to different contexts and circumstances. Most MSPs provide support for CSOs to come together to develop their proposals and strategies. For example, through the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)⁸ there is a financial mechanism in place to support civil society engagement into the CFS. Often the number of CSO representatives in multi-stakeholder platform is higher than those in other sectors (the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism, which organizes CSOs participation and engagement in the CFS, has 5 times more spokespersons than the Private Sector Mechanism) and in some cases only CSOs and representatives from various ministries are involved.

Case study: The Kanan Kay Alliance⁹ (“guardian of the fish” in Mayan) is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder collaborative network formed by 40+ organizations (fishing cooperatives, government, non-governmental organizations, researchers, and philanthropic foundations). The alliance established a shared vision and collaborative work plan focused on the establishment of fish refuges (no-take zones) within territorial use rights in fisheries (TURFs) across the Mexican Caribbean.

⁷ Case study from: EcoAgriculture Partners and IDH, the Sustainable Trade Initiative (2017) “[Public-private-civic partnerships for sustainable landscapes: A Practical Guide for Conveners](#)”.

⁸ The CFS is a UN intergovernmental body, including 124 Member States, and is seen as one of the most inclusive bodies of UN system. Governments, CSOs and private sector organizations as well as international organizations fully participate in all its processes and bodies.

⁹ Moreno et al (2017) “[Fostering fisheries management efficiency through collaboration networks: the case of the Kanan Kay Alliance in the Mexican Caribbean](#)”, Bulletin of Marine Science -Miami- 93(1):233-2477.

The alliance strongly represents the interests of artisanal fishers because they are key to the implementation, viability, and sustainability of the fish refuges, and it empowers and supports the fishermen to lead the process. A key to success in collective decision-making has been to promote an open and facilitated dialog while providing the alliance members with the information needed to give an informed opinion during the twice-yearly assemblies (the main decision-making arena) and other meetings. Assemblies are professionally designed, democratic and highly participatory sessions, with decisions based on approximation to consensus with open voting.

Along with its successes, the alliance has also faced challenges, such as limited funding and capacity, and the need to review its operational structure (as a voluntary collaboration platform with no legal authority). Another challenge has been bringing new players to the table, including representatives from the tourism industry, small-scale buyers and chefs, in order to explore commercialization opportunities and alternative livelihoods for the fishers.

4) Conditions and terms of engagement for successful MSPs

In order to successfully support implementation of the post-2020 GBF, while taking local differences and complexities into account, MSPs need to:

- Ensure appropriate **representation** of all relevant constituencies in the design, development, implementation of national and regional biodiversity policies.
- Ensure full **involvement of all rights-holders¹⁰ and stakeholders** across sectors critical for biodiversity. Particular attention should be given to vulnerable groups, grassroots-based social organizations, women and youth, including through specific mechanisms to facilitate their participation.
- **Allow the time to seek convergence.** This kind of dialogue can take a long time of “muddling through” differences and “separate visions” to seek points of convergence and build trust. Negotiations will undoubtedly require long and iterative sessions, but the chances to establish more effective and equitable solutions are much higher.
- Ensure **gender equity** in MSPs. Seek measures to ensure women’s participation in multi-stakeholder policy dialogues to further their strategic interests.
- Secure **adequate financial support** that would also enable collaboration/participation of the most disadvantaged.
- Create **appropriate institutional arrangements/governance structures** or strengthen existing ones to support the functioning of MSPs.
- Agree on a **clear mandate and scope of the MSP** and its link to other representational mechanisms (e.g. the parliament, different levels of government). MSPs should inform government action while catalyzing collective action and monitoring by government, civil society and the private sector.
- Obtain a clear **commitment by all participants** to adhere to collective decisions made by the MSP.
- Involve **a combination of political and technical leads from government** that have the capacity, influence and time to dedicate to making MSPs functional and effective. To have the time, a mandate given from the highest level can create the space.

¹⁰ Reference to the participation of rights-holders in MSPs does not replace the special status and need to recognise the rights of IPLC, women and youth to fully and effectively participate in the CBD and the implementation of the post-2020 GBF.

Balancing the role of the private sector in MSPs

Managing the role of the private sector within MSPs remains a particular challenge for governments and other stakeholders. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have placed an emphasis on the role played by the private sector – “The question now is not whether business should engage in sustainable development, but how”. There is concern about how the private sector, which is incentivized by profits, can make a meaningful contribution to development, and reversing the trend on biodiversity loss. Experiences, insights and lessons learnt underscore the importance of ‘values’ (i.e. principles, ethical standards) when looking at private sector engagement¹¹.

While an important issue relates to the role of some business and private-sector players in perpetuating destruction of biodiversity through actions, policies and investments, any stakeholder group engaging in national MSPs has the potential for a conflict of interest. Therefore, due diligence around conflicts of interest and the dynamics between partners in the MSP is essential, through putting in place robust mechanisms to prevent and manage conflicts of interest¹².

Balancing the role of the private sector in MSPs must be underpinned by strong, enforced, government regulations for the private sector in line with the global biodiversity framework and NBSAPs. Responsibility also rests with the government to establish and manage transparent frameworks for the engagement through MSPs of all actors, including the private sector, in the development and implementation of NBSAPs.

Key aspects to overcoming power asymmetries:

- Promote and practice a transparent and inclusive culture and form of communication.
- Avoid and manage conflicts of interests¹³ and ensure conflict-resolution mechanisms are in place and easy to access and use.
- Treat all participants with equal respect.
- Respect cultural differences of participants.
- Develop a shared understanding of the key issues to be addressed, taking into account long-term outcomes.
- Create a space for understanding different conditions and needs and provide information and knowledge: Rights-holders like IPLCs might not always have the knowledge and information beyond the local context and beyond their space. Similarly, regional and international actors might not be aware of local conditions and needs.
- Utilize participatory tools for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating. It is critical that, when needed, action, including affirmative action, is taken to address power asymmetries.
- Provide freedom to access information, including country strategies and program plans.
- Provide access to documentation in the languages of different participants.

¹¹ Refer to Annex 1 of the [Strategic Review of the Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Movement, 2019–2020](#).

¹² For more information on preventing and managing conflicts of interest, see: <https://scalingupnutrition.org/share-learn/multistakeholder-engagement/preventing-and-managing-conflicts-of-interest/> and the [Strategic Review of the Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Movement, 2019–2020](#).

¹³ A number of these elements are derived from the 2011 [Siem Reap CSO Consensus on the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness Framework](#).

Conclusion

Successful processes with multi-stakeholders from business, government, private sector, civil society and IPLC depend on strong frameworks but also on the capacity, opportunity, and confidence of the diverse stakeholders and rights-holders to communicate among themselves. Conditions of trust and open communication can help the discussion and development of norms to support productive and fair engagement and meaningful participation. While a one-size-fits-all model for MSPs does not exist (collaboration should be context specific, locally-owned and aligned with country goals), multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement is vital for the transformation needed to live in harmony with nature by 2050.

WWF recommendations for implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework based on whole-of-society approach

Because they are essential for the successful implementation of the post-2020 GBF and action on conservation, WWF believes that the whole-of-society approach much by strongly promoted in the framework.

In order to measure progress, monitoring and reporting on application of MSPs will be important. MSPs therefore need to be part of the GBF adopted at COP15. WWF recommends that:

1. **The global biodiversity framework has stronger and explicit language** on the need to have a whole-of-society approach (including in the purpose and theory of change). *Please refer to WWF's reaction to draft 1 of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.*
2. **The enabling conditions section provides a clear articulation by Parties on how whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches can and should be implemented.** At the very beginning of implementation of the framework, Parties should set up or strengthen representative and inclusive **multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral processes on biodiversity**, and other such mechanisms, that bring together the public and private sectors and civil society and IPLC, including women and youth. This would ensure: a) coordination, transparency and effectiveness for the implementation of the post-2020 GBF, and b) the full and effective participation of all right holders in biodiversity-related decision-making and implementation that affects their livelihoods and resources.
3. **Parties report on and monitor the establishment or strengthening of representative, inclusive and effective multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral platforms on biodiversity**, including in the monitoring framework and through harmonised guidance to support NBSAPs and national reporting processes, which should be developed for immediate implementation at adoption of the post-2020 GBF at COP15.

For more information and full paper

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