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**DEVELOPING INDICATORS FOR THE POST-2020 GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY
FRAMEWORK: LESSONS FROM THE BIODIVERSITY INDICATORS PARTNERSHIP***Note by the Executive Secretary***I. BACKGROUND**

1. In decision XIII/28 the Conference of the Parties welcomed an updated list of indicators for the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. In the same decision the Conference of the Parties also emphasized that the list of indicators provides a flexible framework for Parties to adapt, as appropriate, to their national priorities and circumstances, and decides that the list of indicators should be kept under review, enabling, inter alia, the future incorporation of other relevant indicators.

2. Subsequently, in its recommendation 2/19, the Subsidiary Body on Implementation developed a set of considerations for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. One of these considerations was the need to identify indicators for the elements of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the same time as the framework is being developed, building on existing indicators, including those listed in decision XIII/28, additional indicators identified by the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership and the indicators for targets under the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. In light of the above decision and recommendation, the Executive Secretary is circulating herewith for the information of participants in the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity an information document submitted by the Secretariat of the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership on developing indicators for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The report is being circulated in the form and language in which it was received by the Secretariat.

* CBD/COP/14/1.

Developing indicators for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: Lessons from the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership

Background

The Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP) is a global initiative to promote the development and delivery of biodiversity indicators. Its primary role is to serve the global biodiversity community by responding to the indicator requests of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other biodiversity-related Conventions, for the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), for reporting on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and for use by national and regional governments. Its secretariat is hosted by UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

The objectives of the BIP are to:

- support the development and use of indicators to measure progress in achieving all the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.
- support the development and use of biodiversity-related indicators in progress reporting of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), as well as to support statistical needs, intergovernmental processes and development processes, including IPBES and the SDGs.
- strengthen capacity at the national level for indicator development and use in implementation and reporting of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and the SDGs.

The mandate of the BIP is derived primarily from the CBD and decisions taken by its Conference of Parties (COP). By making a diverse range of indicators widely accessible, and clearly demonstrating their qualities and attributes, the BIP helps potential users to easily identify those indicators which meet their needs. The Partnership comprises: indicator producers (including NGOs and intergovernmental agencies), indicator users (including Secretariats of MEAs and National Governments), and indicator supporters (including funding agencies and networks promoting indicator development).

Purpose of this Information Document

The Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP) has over a decade of experience in developing and communicating indicators for international targets at a range of scales, in particular those indicators which support the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. Since 2015, the BIP, with support provided by the European Union, has worked on filling indicator gaps for measuring progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The BIP now brings together over 60 partners working on more than 60 indicators. In this document, the Partnership offers its extensive and diverse experience to share lessons learnt which could support development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Lessons learned from the experience of the BIP

Specific and measurable targets make indicator selection easier

- SMART targets (those that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**mbitious, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-bound) give a firm foundation for indicator development and use; some facet of the target at least needs to be measurable in order to assess progress in a meaningful way.
- As only a minority of targets in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 are SMART, this has resulted in challenges in effectively assessing progress at the global level. This challenge was

highlighted in the mid-term analysis of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets¹ which fed into the fourth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-4). For the majority of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, it was not possible to measure progress in terms of distance to a defined end point, and instead projected values in 2020 were compared against modelled 2010 values.

- Where targets are very general, the associated indicators are often poorly aligned with the target, either because the target wording is open to flexible interpretation, or because no clear target value is assigned.
- This reinforces the finding of a review of outputs, experiences and lessons from the BIP to 2010, which noted that “in order for progress to be tracked these targets must be measurable, which in turn depends on scientific capability to develop and deliver appropriate indicators. Thus, the development of targets and indicators is best undertaken in tandem through an iterative process, and building upon existing baselines.”²
- A recent study also found that, under the current Strategic Plan, progress has been greater towards the targets that are SMARTer than towards those that are less SMART. In particular, most important is that a target is specific and measurable (all Aichi Targets are time-bound); neither ambition nor realism showed significant relationships with progress, suggesting need for a careful balance between the two in target setting³.
- Based on extensive experience developing and using indicators at the global and national scales, the BIP promotes the use of the Biodiversity Indicator Development Framework. A key element of this framework is the iterative process of target and indicator development; rather than being sequential (developing targets then indicators), the process should go back and forth between the two to ensure targets are measurable and indicators are fit for purpose.

Multiple indicators may be needed to provide a true picture of progress

- Indicators should be used together to support one another, and to produce integrated storylines which draw on multiple indicators, at global, regional and national levels.
- Where indicators of responses to the pressures on biodiversity are needed (as opposed to indicators of state and pressure), a balance between input, output, outcome and impact indicators is important to clearly demonstrate not only the responses that have been taken, but also their success.

Many global indicators are available but they need sustainable funding

- There has been a significant investment in the indicators brought together under the BIP to date; these indicators, as a result, often have long time series, and widespread use and uptake. The collection and collation of data, maintenance of databases and production of indicators is a resource-intensive process, requiring continual funding. Indicator providers often struggle to identify resources to keep indicators updated, as funders often prefer to support ‘novel’

¹ Tittensor D.P. *et al.* 2014 A mid-term analysis of progress toward international biodiversity targets. *Science* 346, 241–244. (doi:10.1126/science.1257484)

² 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. 2010. Biodiversity indicators and the 2010 Target: Experiences and lessons learnt from the 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. *Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montréal, Canada. Technical Series No. 53, 196 pages.*

³ Green, E. J., Buchanan, G. M., Butchart, S. H. M., Chandler, G. M., Burgess, N. D., Hill, S. L. & Gregory, R. D. (2018) Smarter biodiversity targets are associated with greater progress. *In prep*

approaches rather than sustain existing indicators. For example, indicators such as the IUCN Red List Index, and Protected Area Coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas, among others, was estimated to cost more than \$6.5 million USD annually, in a report in 2016⁴.

- Comprehensive and reliable indicators are underpinned by a reasonable quantity and quality of data. Key gaps in temporal, spatial and taxonomic coverage need to be addressed which would further strengthen the indicators available for flexibly tracking targets.

Be both realistic and ambitious with indicator identification

- In Decision XIII/28, COP welcomed an indicative list of indicators for the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020; 98 specific indicators were identified in the list, of which only 31 were considered 'available today', and 10 'under active development'. A number of other indicators were simply based on one-off studies or datasets, which, although relevant and with potential to serve as a baseline, were not expected to be updated to actually help track progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Target in question.
- It is critical that indicators are championed by an identified responsible organisation, which is committed to producing and contributing their indicator(s) into the future.
- However, it is important in the same instance that indicator identification is not limited solely to existing indicators that are available or those that can be easily operationalised. The new framework may contain novel and ambitious Targets for new biodiversity related themes and as such new and innovative indicators are required. The BIP has demonstrated through its European Union funded 'Mind the gap' project that it is possible subject to resources to develop new indicators for more challenging biodiversity-related subject areas.

Linking global and national indicators is challenging

- Indicators that work across different scales, from global to sub-national, are useful to provide a point of comparison and a deeper understanding of the indicator's storyline, such as where progress is being made towards a target and where progress is slower. They also can help identify conservation actions that are having a net positive impact. In addition, they represent a more efficient use of resources, for instance by developing just one methodology for data collection and calculation.
- For indicators to work across scales, targets also need to work across scales. It could therefore be helpful for the targets to clearly state expectations at global, regional, national and potentially even ecoregional scales.
- Global targets are often translated into very different targets at the national level, which can vary depending on country context and priorities; this can make the use of the same or similar indicators across different countries problematic.
- The tracking of global targets, via the Global Biodiversity Outlook reports, has represented an important means by which to repeatedly assess progress across the world on the targets. The

⁴ Juffe-Bignoli D, Brooks TM, Butchart SHM, Jenkins RB, Boe K, Hoffmann M, *et al.* (2016) Assessing the Cost of Global Biodiversity and Conservation Knowledge. PLoS ONE 11(8): e0160640. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0160640>

nature of the reporting process, however, ultimately means that it is accessing and using indicators with data from several years prior. There are opportunities to use new visualization platforms in combination with scenarios to make the tracking of global targets a more continual and forward looking process.

- A review of the experience of the BIP to 2010 echoed this, and found that Biodiversity indicators need to be developed primarily to address national biodiversity and development priorities; international targets and commitments are a secondary priority⁵.
- The use of global indicators at the national scale is often met with wariness (e.g. due to reticence to use non-national data, lack of mechanisms to fit national data into global indicators or lack of capacity to access and use indicators). Some indicators within the BIP are built directly from national level data, and therefore are easily scalable. However, many of the global indicators included within the BIP are scientifically valid, but are not scalable to the national level in a scientifically robust way, and could even be misleading if used at this scale. Therefore, communication about indicators' potential use and scalability needs to be improved. Efforts to streamline access to these indicators would also help increase their use.
- The use of global indicators at the national scale is also sometimes hampered by an inability of the national user to flexibly scale the underlying data to the unit of measurement that is most relevant to them. Renewed efforts to establish national and regional biodiversity observation networks are required.
- Of the 98 specific indicators in the indicative list of indicators for the Strategic Plan, 35 are highlighted as having potential for disaggregation to the national level. However, uptake of these indicators by countries has been limited to date.
- New resources on the BIP website, such as national indicator pages and the BIP Dashboard, an indicator visualization platform that allows downloadable, scaling of indicators at national and sub-national levels, have recently become available to make access to national level data easier for those wanting to use them in developing their Sixth National Report to the CBD. The Dashboard has been designed to help streamline national reporting by improving discovery and access to indicators that can be scaled at national and even sub-national levels. A large number of other freely available data sources exist, that could support countries in reporting on progress; these data sources should be widely promoted to Parties.⁶

Recommendations for the post-2020 process based on lessons learned

- Post-2020 targets or some facets of the targets should be as SMART as possible to allow for the identification of clear and useful indicators.

⁵ 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. 2010. Biodiversity indicators and the 2010 Target: Experiences and lessons learnt from the 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. *Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montréal, Canada. Technical Series No. 53, 196 pages.*

⁶E.g. UNEP-WCMC (2018) Compendium of guidance on key global databases related to biodiversity-related conventions *Accessible at: https://www.unep-wcmc.org/system/comfy/cms/files/files/000/001/265/original/Compendium_of_guidance_on_databases_final.pdf*

- As per the experience of the BIP using the Biodiversity Indicator Development Framework at sub-national, national and global scales, the development of targets and indicators should be an iterative process, with the identification of indicators helping to refine the target wording to ensure it is truly SMART. This is consistent with the recommendation from SBI-2 to develop targets and indicators in parallel⁷.
- While it is important to build on what already exists, the lack of a known existing indicator should not limit target development. From the experience of the BIP secretariat, it is still possible to identify datasets and indicators that are previously unknown, and there is often ongoing work that, with minimal support, could provide a new and innovative indicator ready for use. The EU-funded Mind the Gap project identified three new indicators ready for global use, and 39 indicators either under active development or requiring further development before being ready for global use. Under the same project, three new indicators were developed to fill Aichi Target gaps in the existing indicator framework.
- Any voluntary national biodiversity commitments to be developed under the CBD should be developed by countries making use of an agreed common framework (such as that under the existing strategic plan), to facilitate and enable informed and effective conservation action, monitoring, and reporting.
- The BIP dashboard will be a valuable tool for supporting the availability and visualisation of global and national indicators.
- New technologies should be employed to track and communicate progress on the targets more dynamically and continually, using indicator visualization platforms and model-based scenarios to support an adaptive management approach that allows for continual improvements and feedback to actions to meet the targets.
- A review of the use of indicators by Parties in their 6th National Reports would help to reinforce use of indicators at the national level in the post-2020 period

⁷ SBI-2/REC/2/19