

To the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity:

Response to the invitation for views on the preparation, scope and content of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework in response to CBD/SBI/REC/2/19 (NOTIFICATION No. 2018-063)

From EcoNexus

We are very grateful for the opportunity to respond to this call. We do so as a civil society organization and member of the CBD Alliance.

We all depend on biodiversity and resilient, biodiverse, healthy ecosystems for our lives and they are also vital if we are to have any hope of adapting to climate change.

However, we know we have made very little progress to date, for example, on the Aichi Targets. Now we are now talking about a new set of commitments and looking ahead to 2030 and even 2050. Yet the decisions made for 2010 and 2020 were good ones. So why have they failed? **Because of lack of political will.**

How do we create political will? Through the wide participation of society as expressed in **Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration in 1992**. This Principle on Environmental Democracy is spelt out as timely public information, effective participation in decision-making and affordable access to justice.

A second Principle of Rio, that has been largely neglected for the creation of political will, is the **Polluter-Pays Principle** which tells the potential polluter that they will have to carry the costs of the damage they have done. At present, the victims carry the costs of bad decisions automatically. It takes international legislation in a global market to make the polluter pay and carry the responsibility for their actions. The CBD has one example of such a legal tool, **The Subsidiary Protocol on Liability and redress to the Cartagena Protocol**.

Holding Parties to account

It is not only polluters but also Parties that need to be held to account regarding the commitments they have made.

Here we have a specific problem. The Environment Ministries are in charge of the CBD. Yet the drivers of biodiversity loss are not situated within their portfolios. There are other more powerful ministries in charge of Economy and Trade, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Business and Industry. Their decisions and land use practices are instrumental in the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity loss. The relatively weak environment ministries cannot undo that damage with their meagre resources. Preventing future damage is the only solution, combined with the necessary funds to restore damaged areas.

Parties must therefore look urgently into resource mobilisation and address perverse incentives while developing positive ones for the conservation of biodiversity. Without urgently addressing perverse incentives and the economic model that rewards the destruction of biodiversity, we have no hope of dealing with our collective crises.

We need bottom up processes, not top down

It is all too easy for the process of developing national reporting to become a top-down process, where in fact it must become a bottom up process, starting with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and small farmers with a clear focus on the role of women. A major challenge for the CBD is to try and develop such a process with Parties. This requires planning, dedicated personnel and financial resources, but above all the political will to carry it out and to accept and act on the conclusions of such a process.

Critical role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities

The role of indigenous peoples and local communities is especially important here, since ecosystems are essentially historically and locally contextualized and this clearly includes the links to the cultures and people who have learned to live with biodiversity. They hold knowledge vital for the future. The role of women is absolutely key, since they are often the farmers and the guardians of seed in their communities. Youth represent the future and should be central to discussions. We need commitments to ensure all these voices are heard and their recommendations acted upon. Resources are urgently required for the development of democratic and transparent processes of consultation, especially at local level. This is a major task for regional and national groups, who need support and finance to carry it out.

CBD should not try to emulate the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement

In attracting headlines Biodiversity may be less successful than climate change. But is attracting headlines the proper measure of importance or success? Is the UNFCCC really successful? Has it actually kept climate change to 1.5 or even 2 degrees. We do not agree with the idea that somehow the Paris Agreement on climate represents a major success and is something to emulate. In fact it commits the global community to nothing concrete and was described by James Hansen as 'wishful thinking'.¹ We feel strongly that the CBD should not try to emulate the UNFCCC or the Paris Agreement.

However, we clearly need to complement Climate Justice with Biodiversity Justice.

World Economic Forum at Bogis Bossey Dialogue 3

We also doubt whether the recommendations of the World Economic Forum at the Bogis Bossey Dialogue 3 to sequence all life and to embrace the fourth industrial revolution will help us. Stressing the need for biodiversity in industrial development has not so far led to its conservation, sustainable use and fair and equitable sharing of benefits. Industrial products, to date, replace ecosystems and make huge demands on land, be it for agricultural monocultures, food and biofuel monocultures such as oil palm plantations, mining or proposed demands for carbon capture and storage..

In the 1930s the geneticist Nicolai I. Vavilov pointed to the importance of biodiversity for modern industrialized man. E.O. Wilson, in the late 1980s, pointed to the importance of biodiversity for the upcoming bioeconomy. But none of these claims have resulted in actual conservation and sustainable use. To have an interest in biodiversity does not automatically mean knowing how to apply the ecosystem approach and conserve it *in situ*, not only in digital libraries. Contexts are lost in libraries and cannot be looked up later.

We have developed a tendency to believe that technology might yield some kind of magic

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/19/james-hansen-nasa-scientist-climate-change-warning>

trick to help us out of trouble, but experience suggests that this is an ill-founded expectation. The Precautionary Principle at the core of the Rio agreements has vital lessons for us here, which we should heed,² as the pressure increases to avoid real action by rushing into new technologies on the basis of preliminary untried promises. At the CBD, dedicated scientists know just how profoundly the extinction of a species or reduced populations of a species can impact on the health of an ecosystem and all those that depend upon it, but they cannot always get the attention of their governments.

Unequal experience of the impacts

There are serious asymmetries between those who cause damage to ecosystems and those who suffer the consequences of that damage. The 'GDP of the Poor'³ shows that the poor in many countries are the most reliant on direct and local ecosystem services. Thus ecosystem destruction hits them hardest:

Poverty, where it leads to degradation of natural capital to support needs, reduces the services generated by ecosystems which – with lack of investment resources – leads to more poverty and thus creates a vicious circle.

...

Natural resource degradation can thus aggravate loss of natural resources because of the poverty trap. It is essential to break the vicious circle and create a virtuous circle.

In The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, TEEB notes:

... there is a clear connection between livelihoods and ecosystems, which in the case of the poor is even more direct. Natural resources are a basic source of their income generation. Enhancing local ecosystem services can help reduce poverty and provide the basic needs of citizens. In rural areas the poor rely directly on ecosystems for food, water and fuel. Though less pronounced, the same holds true for many cities.⁴

Unfortunately the global community is becoming ever more polarised, as the gap between wealth and poverty increases. This needs to stop and that gap needs to be closed. The destruction of biodiversity caused by affluence may be greater than that due to poverty but tends to be less discussed – perhaps because those discussing it are usually the affluent. It is therefore incumbent on the global community and policy-makers to address both the extremes of wealth and of poverty, which is a huge task, but the alternatives are destruction and collapse of biodiversity and planetary life support systems.

Global north too slow to act

We recognise that Parties from those regions less obviously affected to date, which also often happen to be from the global north and be the countries that industrialised first and have to date had most impact on global ecosystems, are unwilling to take a lead or pledge the necessary commitments, both financial and political. An additional problem is that governments tend to think only in the short term, because they want to win the next election. But our various crises means that short-term thinking will no longer serve us and somehow has to be superseded.

² Late Lessons from Early Warnings: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/late-lessons-2>

³ TEEB for National Policy: TEEB-for-Policy-Makers_Website.pdf

⁴ http://www.teebweb.org/media/2010/09/TEEB_D2_Local_Policy-Makers_Report-Eng.pdf

Civil society must now properly hold Parties to account regarding their failure to act, especially those that first industrialised and developed systems highly dependent on massive consumption of 'natural resources' and fossil energy.

Ecology and Economics are fundamentally different

It is perhaps understandable that a terminology such as natural capital should have arisen in an attempt to adapt the measurement of the natural world to modern economics. In terms of historical success modern economics cannot compete with the remarkable long-term coevolution of ecosystems. Offsetting is also an economic term, which may be appropriate for goods, money or possibly even CO₂. It does not work for unique historically and locally contextualized ecosystems. One forest cannot replace another or be exchanged with another. They cannot be traded or valued in strictly monetary terms.

In that way, ecology is quite different from economics and there is no currency to reflect the value of biodiversity, even though some seem to hope that digital sequence information (DSI) can play this role. However, within an ecosystem it is the relationships between the different elements that are the key factor and neither economics nor DSI can express this.

Conflicting goals

The interests of the business and industry group are quite distinct and often in contradiction with those of the other major groups and this needs to be more widely acknowledged and reflected upon. The main obligation of business is to achieve and increase returns for its shareholders. The raw materials of industry are often derived from biodiversity or else their extraction has impacts on biodiversity. We need to redefine economics and challenge the ideas of perpetual 'economic growth' and growth in consumption and what it actually means for biodiversity and climate. Business must adapt its practices to a world of limits, circular economies, and the absence of waste generation.

The signals are clear. We are living in a period of climate and biodiversity turbulence and also political, philosophical and scientific turbulence. This is understandable because even if we have not admitted this to ourselves, we are now pressing hard on planetary boundaries in self-destructive mode.

Agriculture, forests and fisheries and biodiversity

Land use policies are biodiversity policies and need to be seen in this light, otherwise they readily becomes destructive of biodiversity. One example is agriculture, where we urgently need to shift from industrial monocultures that depend on synthetic fertilisers and toxic pesticides to systems where we work with the soil food web and water within the local ecosystem and climate. Industrial agriculture is a major cause of accelerated climate change and biodiversity loss, yet it clearly depends on Holocene climate conditions and healthy ecosystems. At the same time we are constantly told that we must increase food production massively to feed a growing human population, even though we produce enough to feed billions more and also waste huge amounts of food.

So-called precision agriculture reliant on computers and robots is not the answer; but non-monoculture farming cultures have always applied agro-ecological precision. We need to learn from the small farmers who currently produce 70% of our food. They must be central to our conversations about the future of our food and the agricultural biodiversity that

underpins it.⁵ This agricultural biodiversity will become ever more important as climate change and ecosystem change necessitate adaptation to new conditions and the selection of new varieties.

The same applies to Indigenous Peoples and local communities and their relationships with the forests and fisheries they care for.

Pollinators as an example of the importance of biodiversity conservation

We wish here to highlight the discussion on pollinators by IPBES and the CBD and very much welcome the work done at SBSTTA22, notably CBD/SBSTTA/REC/22/9 on the conservation and sustainable use of pollinators. Pollinators illustrate our biodiversity crisis very well: the work of animal pollinators, managed and wild, is fundamental to our food supply, yet wild pollinators are declining in the US and Europe. As IPBES notes, we need action based on indigenous and local knowledge, coupled with alternatives to the application of pesticides.

Mainstreaming biodiversity must not result in ‘biodiversity-washing’ of destructive projects.

Unfortunately this term has come to mean the opposite of prioritising biodiversity. Instead it currently seems to mean asking that major infrastructure projects, mining, road-building etc, include some minor concessions to the biodiversity they are fragmenting, for example, green bridges or tunnels over and under new roads, or proposals for offsetting the loss of one area of forest by promising to protect another. Few projects with a serious impact on biodiversity are cancelled altogether because of that. As noted above, two forests can never be seen as equivalent or swappable because each is unique. Fragmentation of biodiversity and ecosystems is often the beginning of their outright degradation and destruction, which can rapidly follow. This has been mapped in relation, eg: to roads and forests in Brazil and shows the impacts to be greater than previously thought due to improved technologies for observation.⁶

Yet plans for new infrastructure are huge – take just China’s Belt and Road initiative. New roads are being planned in many parts of the planet – and welcomed by many populations. And now we have the possibility of mining in the deep sea – ostensibly to avoid similar mines on land, but such proposals risk the destruction of ecosystems about which we currently know almost nothing, all in the interest of access to minerals essential for our mobile phones and even our renewable energy plans.

The CBD has an obligation to define ‘mainstreaming’ biodiversity to express what we actually need and reflect this in its recommendations to Parties.

Rebuild trust and make commitments

Finally, it is urgent to rebuild trust at international level between different groups of countries, currently all too often locked into adversarial mode. The best way to begin such a process would be for those rich developed nations with high relative levels of prosperity to commit themselves unconditionally to reducing consumption and destruction of resources and follow that up rapidly with real action, something that has been significantly lacking to

⁵http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Coping_with_food_and_agriculture_challenge_Smallholder_s_agenda_Final.pdf ; <https://viacampesina.org/en/>

⁶ <https://news.mongabay.com/wildtech/2018/01/new-satellite-detects-amazon-deforestation/>

date. Otherwise other countries will naturally demand the same energy and resource intensive lifestyle for themselves.

Our warm thanks to the Secretariat

We would like to close by thanking the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity for your dedicated work over the years since 1992, with little applause and scarce funds. In spite of this, biodiversity has become something of an orphan issue in a world where climate change is claiming more attention. Rather than trying to emulate the climate process, we have to reverse this, and rapidly, or else even action on climate change will become ineffectual because of the lack of healthy biodiverse ecosystems and the multitudes of subtle relationships within them. We therefore need to point out how vital biodiversity is to addressing climate change and raise awareness of this fact among policy-makers. We believe that civil society has a vital role in supporting the CBD. Sometimes support will involve supplying critical early warnings where we feel this is necessary.