



What are the implications of a human rights-based approach for biodiversity and health?

OHCHR presentation for the webinar:

Advancing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to support the full enjoyment of all human rights, including
the right to health and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

21 January 2026

The relationship between human rights and biodiversity

- The **full enjoyment of human rights**, including, among others, the rights to life, health, culture, food, water, sanitation, and housing, **depends on biodiversity**.
- The **degradation and loss of biodiversity undermine** the ability of persons and groups to fully enjoy their **human rights**.
- Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are also essential elements of the **human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment**.
- Respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights in the context of biodiversity-related actions is not only an **obligation under international human rights law**, but also a **crucial approach to achieving the best outcomes** for both people and biodiversity.
- Human rights should be viewed as complementary to and necessary for environmental protection. They offer '**the most effective, efficient, and equitable path forward to safeguarding the planet**.'

What is a human rights-based approach?

Refers to the **design and implementation of policies and programs based on international human rights law**. It aims to **address inequalities and achieve well-being and dignity for all**.

Focuses on **strengthening the capacities of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations and of right-holders to claim their rights**.

Recognizes that **human rights**, including the right to participation, **empower all people**, particularly those who are **marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded** situations due to **geography, poverty, gender, age, disability, cultural or ethnic background**, or other factors.

Overall, this approach seeks to **address inequalities and discrimination by advancing human rights through participatory and locally owned processes**.

What does HRBA mean in the biodiversity context?

In the context of **conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity**, a HRBA entails ensuring that biodiversity plans, policies, laws and **processes must seek the respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights** as a core objective, recognizing that the **well-being of people is inherently linked to biodiversity**.

By anchoring biodiversity-related plans, policies, laws and processes in human rights, **the action taken for the benefit of the planet will also benefit people**, thereby contributing to **true harmony with nature**.

Human Rights and HRBA in Section C of the KMGBF

Section C, *inter alia*:

- calls for following a **human rights-based approach**, respecting, protecting, fulfilling and promoting human rights;
- calls for ensuring that the **rights, knowledge**, including traditional knowledge, associated with biodiversity, innovations, worldviews, values and practices of **indigenous peoples and local communities are respected**, and documented and preserved with their **free, prior and informed consent**;
- affirms the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, and **human rights law** and notes that nothing in the KMGBF may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights that indigenous peoples currently have or may acquire in the future;
- acknowledges the **right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment**;
- recognizes the **right to development**;
- highlights that the successful implementation of the Framework will depend on **ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women and girls and reducing inequalities**;
- The Framework is to be understood, acted upon, implemented, reported and evaluated consistent with the above considerations.

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Ecological Civilization-Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth

KUNMING – MONTRÉAL



HRC resolution 57/28

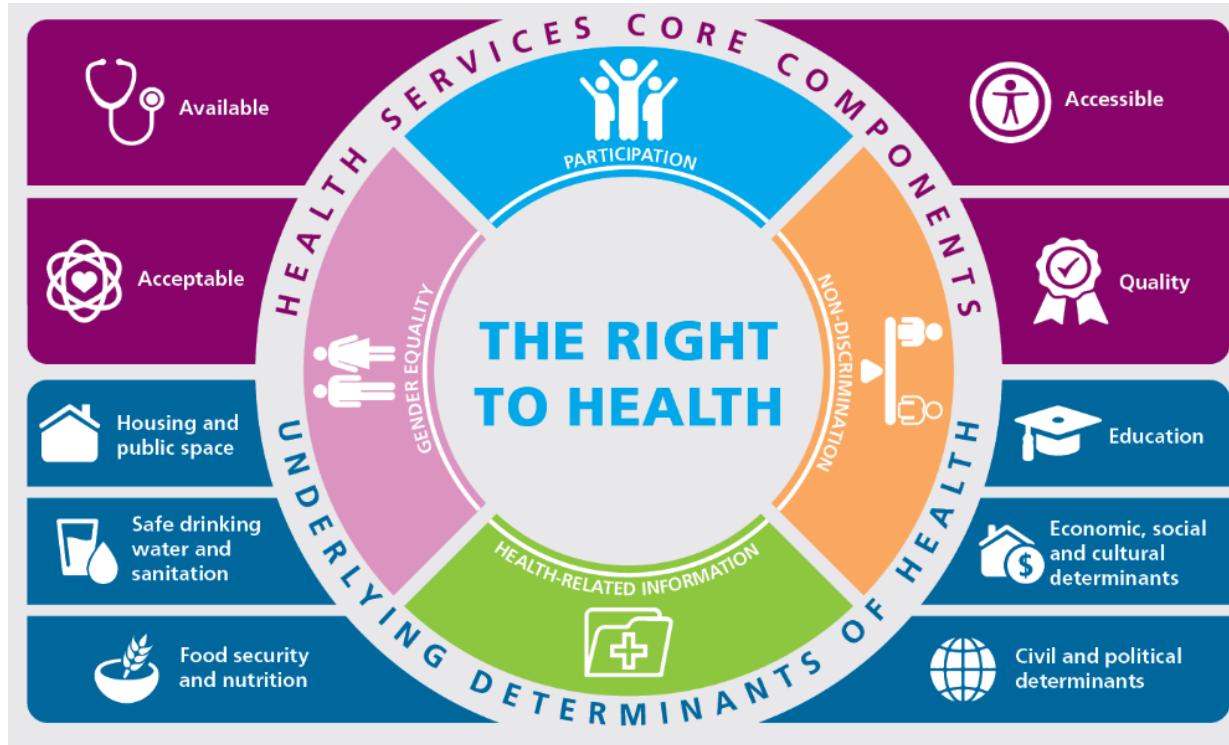
Requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to increase its support, technical assistance and capacity-building for States, with their consent, to implement approaches that **integrate the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of conservation of biological diversity**, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources,

Requests the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in consultation with relevant actors, to conduct a **global analytical study on the implementation of a human-rights based approach into the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, in line with the provisions of the **Convention on Biological Diversity**, consistent with the considerations set out in section C of the Framework and taking into consideration the **outcomes of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention**. This study has been submitted to **HRC 61** which starts on **23 February 2026**.

Encourages **the Office of the High Commissioner to cooperate** with other relevant United Nations organizations and bodies, including the United Nations Environment Programme and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as with Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, peasants, rural and local communities, environmental human rights defenders, women, and persons and groups in vulnerable situations, including older persons, persons with disabilities, youth and children, **on advancing human rights-based biodiversity action**.

**What changes when you apply a
HRBA for biodiversity and health?**

From a policy goal to a legal obligation



The **right to health** is the right to the enjoyment of a variety of goods, facilities, services and conditions necessary for the **realization of the highest attainable standard of physical & mental health**.

Respect – Protect – Fulfill Framework

	Right to Healthy Environment	Right to Health
Respect	States must refrain from activities that cause environmental degradation (e.g. pollution, deforestation, unsafe waste disposal) or that endanger ecosystems and people's health.	States must refrain from actions that directly or indirectly interfere with access to health determinants (clean water, safe food, housing, sanitation, healthy workplaces).
Protect	States must regulate and control private actors—industry, agribusiness, extractives—to prevent environmental harm; enforce standards and environmental impact assessments.	States must prevent third parties (private health providers, polluting industries, employers) from violating the right to health; adopt laws to ensure safety and quality of determinants.
Fulfil	States must adopt policies, laws, and budgets to promote sustainable development, restore degraded environments, and ensure access to environmental benefits for all.	States must take positive measures to ensure universal access to quality healthcare and underlying determinants, including through national health strategies and action plans.
Cross-cutting principles	Non-discrimination, participation, access to information, precautionary and non-regression principles, intergenerational equity.	Equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability, and progressive realization using maximum available resources.

Right to Health as a driver for Biodiversity Protection

Ecosystems are underlying determinants of the right to health

Biodiversity loss is a public health risk

HRBA means that biodiversity becomes part of public health discussions and policies

Economic, Social & Cultural Rights

RIGHT TO HEALTH

UNDERLYING DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Access to safe and potable water - adequate sanitation - safe and sufficient food and nutrition - adequate housing - healthy occupational and environmental conditions - access to health-related education & information

BIODIVERSITY

The Right to Health & the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment



STRUCTURAL

- State Commitment to Both Rights
 - Ratification of core human rights treaties (ICESCR, CRC, CEDAW, Arhus Escazü)
 - National policies linking health and environmental protection (e.g. a, water, climate, occupational health)
 - National policies linking health and environmental protection



PROCESS

- Efforts to Realize the Rights
 - Integration of environmental health standards in public health plans
 - Population with access to safe water, sanitation, clean air, and healthy workplaces
 - CO₂ emissions per capita and enforcement of pollution control measures
 - Public participation and access to environmental and health information
 - Budget allocation to preventive, primary, and environmental health programmes



OUTCOME

- Enjoyment of the Rights in Practice
 - Reduction in deaths and diseases from pollution and unsafe environmental conditions
 - Decrease in child and maternal mortality linked to environmental determinants
 - Improved health-adjusted life expectancy (HALE)
 - Decline in incidence of climate-sensitive and occupational diseases

“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health requires a clean, safe, and sustainable environment.”

– CESCR General Comment No. 14- & 0.26

INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

Measuring the Right to Health & the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment

Key resources

- Briefing note: Applying a human rights-based approach in line with Section C of the Kunming Montreal Biodiversity Framework
- HRC resolution 57/28 on biodiversity and human rights
- UN EMG, Guidance on integrating human rights in National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- OHCHR, Integrating human rights in national biodiversity strategies and action plans: Research, analysis and recommendations for rights-based biodiversity action, October 2022
- UNEP, OHCHR, Human Rights and Biodiversity: Key Messages
- OHCHR, UNEP, UNDP, What is the Right to a Healthy Environment: Information Note
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Human rights depend on a healthy biosphere, A/75/161
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz: Conservation measures and their impact on indigenous peoples' rights, A/71/229.
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, José Francisco Calí Tzay: Protected areas and indigenous peoples' rights: the obligations of States and international organizations, A/77/238