Convention on Biological Diversity

Notice to Media

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The UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15): What's on the Table, What to Expect

Key negotiating issues defined and detailed: A COP15 Primer

Online media briefing -- full recording now available at https://youtu.be/WWHl_Xaa-Os

On Thursday Nov. 10, Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, David Cooper and David Ainsworth, respectively the Executive Secretary, Deputy Executive Secretary and Information Officer of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, conducted an interactive media briefing on the upcoming UN Biodiversity Conference (Montreal Dec. 7-19), including COP 15.

They detailed the purpose, scope, structure, objectives, and what to expect in terms of resources, events, interview opportunities and logistics.

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Confronting the greatest loss of species on Earth since the dinosaurs' demise, the world community convenes in Montreal in December under the auspices of the United Nations with the aim of adopting a new Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) with ambitious goals and

specific action targets and timetables to achieve transformational change by the middle of the century.

At the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, Dec. 7-19, chaired by China in Montreal's Palais des Congrès, representatives of almost every nation are called on to finalize and approve measures to arrest the dangerous, ongoing loss of terrestrial and marine biodiversity and set humanity on a path to a sustainable relationship with nature -- with clear indicators to measure progress and adequate resources for implementation.

The measures include enhancing the capacity of every nation to implement the framework, the delivery of new financial support and the redirection of harmful subsidies that damage biodiversity.

There is much to do to finalize the GBF (current draft: **https://bit.ly/3E1arxr**). Just prior to the Biodiversity Conference, negotiators will meet **in Montreal** from 3-5 December for last-minute pre-COP 15 Working Group discussion on the draft text. To facilitate this deliberation, WG Co-Chairs prepared, through an Informal Group Meeting, a streamlined text (available at **https://bit.ly/3zKkV1X**).

Says Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity: “What’s at stake are the fundamentals of human existence. Biodiverse, well-balanced ecosystems provide climate moderation, fertile soil and foods, clean water, modern drugs, and the foundation of our economies.

“Nearly half of humanity depends directly on natural resources for livelihoods and, in many cases, their daily subsistence needs.”

Land and sea-use change, over exploitation, climate change, invasive species and pollution, she notes, are the foremost causes of nature’s decline, according to the 2019 IPBES Global

Assessment of Biodiversity, which warned that one million plant and animal species face extinction within decades – a rate of loss 1,000 times greater than natural.

In the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres: "We face a triple planetary crisis. A climate emergency that is killing and displacing ever more people each year. Ecosystems degradation that are escalating the loss of biodiversity and compromising the well-being of more than 3 billion people. And a growing tide of pollution and waste that is costing some 9 million lives a year."

"We need to change course — now — and end our senseless and suicidal war against nature. We know what to do. And, increasingly, we have the tools to do it. But we still lack leadership and cooperation."

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen noted that, while progress has been made in the past, only six of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets set in 2010 were partially met at a global level by the 2020 deadline.

"We need to do better," she said. "The health of nature underpins our own health and well-being. And by recognizing nature as a crucial ally, we can unleash human innovation in the service of sustainability and move towards the agreed vision of living in harmony with nature."

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COP 15, key objectives:

- Raise ambition for nature and ensure whole of government and whole of society implementation of a new global plan to put nature on the path to recovery by 2030, and humanity on a path to its globally-agreed vision of "Living in Harmony with Nature by 2050"

- Link the nature/biodiversity and climate agendas. Meeting GBF goals will contribute to the climate agenda while full delivery of the Paris Agreement is needed to ensure the GBF's success

- Match commitments with accountable actions and resources to implement the framework

- Engage public, private and philanthropic sectors to close by 2030 the biodiversity finance gap, estimated to be around $700 billion USD a year, align trillions of dollars in global spending with goals for biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity is considered in economic decisions. Reform, redirect or end subsidies that harm biodiversity. (UNEP has reported that investments in ecosystems-based approaches need to at least triple by 2030 and increase four-fold by 2050.)

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Agenda / other official documents

Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

5th Meeting (Montreal, 3-5 December)

https://www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020/wg2020-05/documents

UN Biodiversity Conference (Montreal, 7-19 December)

- 15th meeting of Parties to the CBD (COP-15)
- 10th meeting of Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP 10)
- 4th meeting of Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (NP-MOP 4)

https://www.cbd.int/conferences/2021-2022

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Key issues closely linked to the GBF:

Progress against the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (2010-2020)

Parties will conduct a final review of progress on the 20 biodiversity targets established in 2010, findings reported in the 5th Global Biodiversity Outlook in 2020, and options to improve planning, progress monitoring, reporting and reviews.

Digital Sequence Information

Information on the genetic sequences of biological resources has many commercial and non-commercial applications, such as pharmaceutical product development, improved crop breeding, taxonomy, and monitoring of invasive species.

The relationship between Digital Sequence Information (DSI) and existing world agreements on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing is a source of intense interest and Parties will consider options based the work of the Working Group on the post 2020 global biodiversity framework and informal consultations.
https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/c064/37f6/d5024789093ef19bf5f84519/wg2020-05-03-en.pdf

A positive outcome on DSI could greatly aid the sustained conservation and use of biodiversity at the local, national, and international levels.

Finance

COP 15 will develop a plan to increase the mobilization of financial resources to support the implementation of the framework. The Framework itself will include goals and targets on finance.

COP 15 will also review the implementation of the Global Environment Facility, the Convention's financial mechanism.

Stronger planning, reporting, and review mechanisms

Parties are expected to adopt a stronger, multi-dimensional approach to planning, monitoring, reporting and reviewing CBD implementation.

An annex to the GBF is expected to contain headline indicators for national monitoring of implementation. Also foreseen: the establishment of a technical expert group on GBF indicators.

Traditional Knowledge and IPLCs at the UN Biodiversity Conference

At earlier meetings, CBD Parties adopted important tools and guidance to safeguard traditional knowledge and promote sustainable use of biodiversity.

COP 15 topics include a new work programme and institutional arrangements related to indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) to position them as GBF implementing partners.

Parties will also consider recommendations to study indigenous peoples' contributions to ecosystems management and biodiversity protection, the rights of indigenous peoples and the emerging rights of local communities.

Gender

The draft GBF emphasizes that its successful implementation will depend on ensuring gender equality, empowering women and girls, greater access to education, and respecting the principle of intergenerational equity.

It also includes a plan of action to ensure equal access to resources, services and technologies to support women's engagement in the governance, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Capacity building and development, and technical and scientific cooperation

Parties will negotiate long-term frameworks for capacity-building and development and how to strengthen technical and scientific cooperation. The goal: more effective promotion,

sharing and utilization of science, technology and innovation to support GBF implementation.

Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations, and initiatives

Parties will focus on cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives to implement the GBF.

The CBD Secretariat has identified substantive thematic and cross-cutting interests including capacity-building, information and knowledge management, monitoring and reporting, and communications.

Proposed efforts include an Issue Management Group on Biodiversity of the Environment Management Group (EMG) of the UN through 2030.

Protected and conserved areas

The GBF is expected to include an ambitious target to protect and conserve terrestrial and marine areas beyond the current 17% and 10% respectively.

At their meeting in 2018, CBD Parties agreed that, in addition to conventional protected areas such as parks, “other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)” would count towards the target’s fulfillment as they also contribute to multiple benefits and co-benefits. OECMs will be considered in a flexible way on a case-by-case basis.

Meanwhile, governments and other relevant organizations were encouraged to collaborate with indigenous peoples, local communities and others to identify areas that improve connectivity, ecological representativity, and key areas important for biodiversity.

Other Key Issues

Biosafety and Living Modified Organisms / The Cartagena Protocol

CBD's Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which entered into force in 2003, governs the movements of living modified organisms (LMOs) between countries.

In December, the Protocol's 173 Parties are expected to advance an implementation plan, including capacity building, that is anchored on and complementary to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Synthetic biology

At COP 15, discussions will include the potential of synthetic biology to address global challenges and what is needed to ensure its safe use. Parties will discuss horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment to understand what is in development and to assess potential impacts on biodiversity. This process would complement the work on risk assessment under the Cartagena Protocol.

A recent CBD publication offers further information: https://bit.ly/3SOKhT5

Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) / the Nagoya Protocol

Significant progress has been made under the Nagoya Protocol since its 2014 entry into force but greater efforts are needed for effective implementation. In Montreal, the related agenda includes a review of:

- national reporting
- the capacity-building framework
- a proposed global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism
- the global financial support mechanism, and
- operations of the ABS clearing-house

These considerations intersect notably with highly important questions about if and how the benefits of digital sequence information on genetic resources should be shared.

ABS is deeply linked to GBF goals and targets, such as those relating to business, indigenous peoples and local communities, traditional knowledge, and resource mobilization.

Parties will also need to agree how to monitor ABS-related elements of the GBF, including standardized information on monetary and non-monetary benefits.

Climate change

Recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports show land-use changes raise greenhouse gas emissions, reduce carbon sequestration, lower biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency and more.

Addressing excessive meat consumption and other consumer patterns would mitigate both biodiversity loss and climate change. And investing in ecosystem restoration, agricultural and pasture lands rehabilitation, and sustainable agricultural productivity can combat climate change, biodiversity loss and food insecurity at the same time.

At COP15, Parties will consider the CBD Secretariat's summary of recent papers on this topic, while its Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) has prepared recommendations, detailed at https://adobe.ly/3BXujzw

Invasive alien species

Parties will consider strategies to prevent and reduce the rate of introduction and establishment of invasive alien species by 50%, and to control or eradicate such species.

Agriculture

Parties will adopt a global action plan for the conservation and sustainable use of soil biodiversity prepared by the CBD Secretariat, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the

Global Soil Partnership (GSP) and other specialized organizations.

The GBF will set important targets to elevate sustainable food systems on the global agenda and ensure sustainable agricultural management by reducing pollution and pesticide use, mitigating the loss of nutrients, encouraging responsible choices to reduce food waste and overconsumption, and conserving genetic diversity, including by monitoring plant genetic resources critical for agriculture.

Health

Health is a cross-cutting theme in the GBF. At the summit in Montreal, Parties will consider an updated global action plan recommended by CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), detailed here.

The current draft of the GBF acknowledges that its sound implementation will strive to generate co-benefits – biodiversity-inclusive One Health approach. Health is also a cross-cutting theme in GBF targets 5, 12 and others.

Sustainable Wildlife Management

CBD Parties are encouraged to establish and maintain strong regulatory systems to differentiate between subsistence uses and illegal hunting, to incentivise sustainable consumption, to strengthen the capacity of indigenous peoples and local communities to exercise their rights and responsibilities in sustainable wildlife management; and to minimize the impacts of illegal hunting.

Parties need to agree on ways to ensure that the supply of wild meat is sustainably and legally managed at the source, reduce demand for unsustainably managed and/or illegal wild meat, and create an enabling environment for the sustainable management of wild meat.

At COP 15, Parties will examine how to recover and conserve species and the genetic diversity of wild and domesticated species, including through conservation beyond natural habitats, and how to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

Ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs)

Work on EBSAs represents an international achievement, covering nearly all parts of the global ocean, but further progress is needed. Climate change and other major drivers of biodiversity loss are rapidly transforming many marine ecosystems and affecting many EBSAs.

Parties will consider how to modify existing EBSA descriptions and 17 proposed EBSA descriptions in the North-East Atlantic Ocean region.

Conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity

Parties will discuss the role of marine, coastal and island biodiversity and implications of the GBF for related work programmes, including:

- underwater noise, marine debris, area-based conservation, marine spatial planning, and coral reef and cold-water ecosystem management
- synergies and cooperation with other international processes, and
- progress on capacity building and regional collaboration under the Sustainable Ocean Initiative.

Nature and culture

Summit outcomes will include ways to leverage the relationship between nature and culture to enhance GBF implementation.

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See also: A Nature Positive Narrative, UNEP, 2021

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Contact information for other stakeholders:

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities:

- **Forest Peoples Programme**: Tom Dixon, tdixon@forestpeoples.org

Business:

- **Business for Nature**: Lucy Coast, lucy.coast@businessfornature.org
- **Task Force on Nature-related Financial Disclosures**: Annebeth Wijtenburg, Annebeth.Wijtenburg@tnfd.global

General:

- **Nature Conservancy**: Joanna Benn, joanna.benn@tnc.org
- **Campaign for Nature** ("30x30" campaign): Greg Zimmerman, Wyss Foundation, greg@wysscampaign.org; Kirsten Weymouth, National Geographic Society, kweymouth@ngs.org
- **World Wildlife Fund** (which recently published a 2022 edition of the Living Planet Report): Scott Edwards, sedwards@wwfint.org

Restoration:

- **UNEP**, Ann-Kathrin Neureuther ann-kathrin.neureuther@un.org
- **IUCN**: Will Richard, Will.Richard@iucn.org

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Media access to the Biodiversity Summit and COP15

Media wishing access to the meetings in person, or to participate through interactive online news conferences and other online events, may still apply at www.cbd.int/participation/2021-2022/media/checklist

Please note that media requiring help to obtain a Canadian visa were asked to register by Sept. 30.

Plenary and other public sessions and media briefings will be live streamed on CBD's YouTube Channel: www.cbd.int/live.

Questions will only be accepted from media onsite or those using a special interactive platform to which all accredited media will have access; questions will not be accepted via the YouTube channel.

Accredited media will also have access to open sessions during the special preliminary three-day pre-COP 15 negotiations in Montreal 3-5 December on the GBF 's goals, targets and text (the current draft is available at https://bit.ly/3RSpRJm).

That text will then be submitted for final consideration and adoption at COP 15, anticipated Dec. 19 (noting a possibility of the meeting running overtime into Dec. 20).

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UNEP backgrounder

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, is the variability of living things that makes up life on Earth. It encompasses the 8 million or so species on the planet – from plants and animals to fungi and bacteria – the ecosystems that house them – such as oceans, forests, mountain environments and coral reefs – as well as the genetic diversity found among them.

Biodiversity ensures that we have fertile soil, as well as a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables to eat. It is the foundation of most of our industries and livelihoods, and helps regulate climate through carbon storage and regulating local rainfall. It filters our air and water and mitigates the impact of natural disasters such as landslides and coastal storms. It is also integral to key development sectors that modulate health outcomes directly or indirectly, such as pharmacy, biochemistry, agriculture, and tourism.

Ecosystem services

Biodiverse, well-balanced ecosystems are fundamental to human existence. Here are some of the many essential services and benefits that ecosystems provide to people:

- Pollination
- Pest and disease management
- Spiritual health and cultural identity
- Food
- Timber and other fibres
- Recreation and tourism
- Water purification
- Air filtration
- Erosion prevention
- Protection from natural disasters
- Carbon sequestration and storage

Sustainable Development Goals

Biodiversity is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Biodiversity and ecosystems feature prominently across many of the SDGs and associated targets, such as Goal 2 (End Hunger), Goal 13 (Protect the Climate), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and Goal 15 (Life on Land).

Biodiversity contributes directly to human well-being and development priorities. Biodiversity is at the centre of many economic activities, particularly those related to food and other commodities from crop and livestock agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. Globally, nearly half of the human population is directly dependent on natural resources for its livelihood, and many of the most vulnerable people depend directly on biodiversity to fulfill their daily subsistence needs.

For more on the SDGs and biodiversity: https://www.cbd.int/cop/cop-14/media/briefs/en/cop14-press-brief-sdgs.pdf

Livelihoods and the economy

Biodiversity underpins economic prosperity. Roughly $44 trillion of economic value generation – which represents more than half of global GDP – is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services. Construction, agriculture, and food and beverages are the three largest industries that are most dependent on nature. Such industries require either the direct extraction of resources from forests and oceans or the provision of ecosystem services such as healthy soils, clean water, pollination and a stable climate.

Among those living in poverty, more than 70 per cent depend at least in part on natural resources to earn their livelihoods, whether through farming, fishing, forestry, or other nature-based activities.

Medicine

Nature is an essential source of many drugs used in modern medicine. Plants, animals and microbes enable medical researchers to understand human physiology and treat diseases. Four billion people rely primarily on natural medicines, and about 70 per cent of cancer drugs are either natural products or synthetic ones inspired by nature. In the United States, at least 118 of the top 150 prescription drugs are based on natural sources.

Reducing pollution impacts

Ecosystems that have more plant species tend to have a greater capacity to remove pollutants from soil and water than do ecosystems that have fewer species.

Trees and other plants also play an important role in regulating air quality by blocking or removing pollutants from the atmosphere. For example, trees and other vegetation in urban areas can improve air quality for city dwellers.

Climate change

Ecosystems regulate the earth's climate by capturing and storing greenhouse gasses. For example, the oceans absorb over one-third of all CO_2 emitted into the atmosphere, and as

trees and woody plants grow, they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, effectively locking it away in their tissues. In fact, healthy ecosystems provide around one third of the mitigation needed to limit global temperature rise. Conversely, when we damage ecosystems – from peatlands and
mangroves to tropical rainforests – they release carbon instead of storing it.

Reducing risk

Biodiverse ecosystems can serve as buffers against natural disasters by reducing damage from floods, storms, tsunamis, avalanches, landslides and droughts. For example, mangrove forests can absorb up to 90 per cent of the energy of wind-generated waves, while coral reefs protect hundreds of millions of people from the worst impacts of extreme events. Healthy ecosystems can also protect against the spread of disease: Where native biodiversity is high, the infection rate for zoonotic diseases is lower.

How fast are we losing biodiversity?

Today, one million plant and animal species face extinction. We are currently losing species about one thousand times faster than the natural rate.

According to a landmark report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20 per cent, mostly since 1900. More than 40 per cent of amphibian species, almost 33 per cent of reef-forming corals, and more than one third of all marine mammals are threatened. At least 680 vertebrate species have been driven to extinction since the 16th century and more than 9 percent of all domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least 1,000 more breeds still threatened.

Although the causes of biodiversity loss vary in different parts of the world, the main causes globally are:

- Changes to land use and oceans, largely due to agricultural expansion and other infrastructure, leading to the loss of habitats.
- Over exploitation of wild species and resources, whether for consumption or trade.
- Climate change – a growing threat to biodiversity in all parts of the world
- Pollution – from nutrients, harmful chemicals and waste on land and in water
- The spread of invasive alien species, whether through deliberate trade and release or unintentional spread, causing disruption to ecosystems across the planet.

Why is biodiversity loss a concern?

The greatest consequence of biodiversity loss at the local level is the ongoing degradation of ecosystems and their ability to provide benefits to people. A degraded ecosystem is less able

to filter water, support livelihoods, regulate the climate and local hazards, or deliver other essential services that ecosystems provide to people.

Whilst most biodiversity loss results in degraded ecosystems, some disturbance and species loss can lead to ecosystem collapse. Biodiversity loss can bring 'extinction cascades', in which one species loss leads to another, which leads to another. Losing biodiversity also means locking out options for the future, such as the possibility of developing new drugs.

There is also an ethical concern to address biodiversity loss. We have a responsibility to future generations to pass on a planet as rich in natural wonders as the one we inherited.

Why is the CBD COP important?

The upcoming Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will set a clear course for the next decade of action to stop and reverse biodiversity loss and ensure that the use of biodiversity is sustainable.

At the conference, the 196 Parties (to the CBD) are expected to adopt a new global framework to safeguard biodiversity and its contributions to human well-being. The agreement will serve as a global plan for biodiversity a roadmap to achieve the Convention's three objectives: conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components, and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources.

The conference aims to adopt a robust framework that is: 1) is ambitious in its goals and targets, 2) recognizes and commits appropriate resources to progress towards these targets, and 3) includes a strengthened mechanism to hold Parties accountable for such progress. Such a frmework will re-establish a mutually beneficial relationship between people and biodiversity, and set the world on a socio-ecologically centred development pathway for the decades to come.

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About the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and entering into force in December 1993, the CBD is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources.

With 196 Parties, the CBD has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including:

- threats from climate change, through scientific assessments,
- the development of tools, incentives and processes,
- the transfer of technologies and good practices and

- the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous peoples and local communities, youth, women, NGOs, sub-national actors and the business community.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing are supplementary agreements to the CBD. The Cartagena Protocol, which entered into force 11 September 2003, seeks to protect biodiversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology.

To date, 173 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims to share the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies. Entering into force 12 October 2014, it has been ratified by 135 Parties.