



Why is Synthetic Biology on the SBSTTA-26 agenda?

SBSTTA-26 will consider the outcomes of the horizon scanning process contained in the report of the multidisciplinary Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group, and to make recommendations for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its sixteenth meeting and, as appropriate, by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol at its eleventh meeting and by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol at its fifth meeting. Further, SBSTTA-26 will also make a recommendation on the need to extend the process of broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology. To support these deliberations, the Secretariat has prepared a note drawing on the report of the 2nd multidisciplinary Expert Group, containing the outcomes of the process, a literature review, a synthesis of information of additional prioritized trends and issues in synthetic biology and a compilation of peer review comments.

What is synthetic biology?

The operational definition of synthetic biology is “*a further development and new dimension of modern biotechnology that combines science, technology and engineering to facilitate and accelerate the understanding, design, redesign, manufacture and/or modification of genetic materials, living organisms and biological systems.*” For more information, please refer to [Technical Series No. 100: Synthetic Biology](#).

Background

At their fourteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties (COP) agreed that broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessing of the most recent technological developments was needed for reviewing new information regarding the potential positive and potential negative impacts of synthetic biology vis-à-vis the three objectives of the Convention and those of the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols.

At the fifteenth meeting of the COP, a process for broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring, and assessment of the most recent technological developments of synthetic biology was established with the following four steps: (a) information gathering; (b) compilation, organization and synthesis of information; (c) assessment; and (d) reporting on outcomes.

To support this process, a multidisciplinary Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group was established. In addition, Parties, other Governments, indigenous peoples and local communities, and relevant organizations were invited to submit to the information and the Secretariat was requested to convene online discussions of the Open-ended Online Forum on Synthetic Biology.

The multidisciplinary Expert Group met twice in person and once virtually to conduct the cycle of broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment. In this process, the multidisciplinary Expert Group identified trends and issues regarding the developments of



synthetic biology vis-à-vis the objectives of the Convention, identified capacity-building, technology transfer and knowledge-sharing needs in light of the outcomes of the process, prepared a report on the outcomes of its assessment and made recommendations to the SBSTTA on specific issues that may require further consideration by the COP or the Conferences of the Parties serving as meetings of the Parties to the Protocols.

Further, discussions on synthetic biology, may contribute to Target 17 (“Establish, strengthen capacity for, and implement in all countries biosafety measures as set out in Article 8(g) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and measures for the handling of biotechnology and distribution of its benefits as set out in Article 19 of the Convention”) of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

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Important links:

<https://www.cbd.int/synbio>