

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Monday, 14 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference opened on Monday, marking the first in-person meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in over two years. Three bodies are meeting concurrently: the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), and the Open-ended Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (WG2020). During the first day of work, following a joint opening session, the three bodies held their resumed plenary sessions.

Joint Opening

Zhou Guomei, Deputy Secretary General, China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED), on behalf of COP President Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, highlighted the meetings' importance for advancing preparations for the second part of the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15). She noted achievements in the first part of COP15, including the Kunming Declaration; the establishment of the Kunming Biodiversity Fund; and commitments from governments and stakeholders.

Franz Perrez, Swiss Ambassador for Climate, on behalf of the host country, stressed that after two years, "we can gather again face to face to work, think, and be creative together." He expressed concern over the situation in Ukraine, adding that problems must be solved by respecting international law and the UN Charter.

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary, CBD, urged a post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) that follows a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, incorporating all economic sectors. She pointed out that there is no time to waste, adding that "we are working under the shadow of a global pandemic and military conflict, threatening peace and human wellbeing."

Regional Groups and Major Stakeholders' Opening Statements: Senegal, for the AFRICAN GROUP, welcomed the resumption of face-to-face meetings and highlighted the need for realistic financing, technology transfer, capacity building, implementation mechanisms, and a viable agreement on benefit-sharing related to digital sequence information (DSI).

Argentina, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), stressed the need to agree on the GBF's structure, goals, and targets, underscoring means of implementation; mechanisms for monitoring and review; and access and benefit-sharing (ABS) related to genetic resources, including DSI.

France, on behalf of the EU, condemned the invasion of Ukraine, calling on the Russian Federation to withdraw its forces without preconditions. She called for an ambitious GBF related to the three CBD objectives and accompanied by objective indicators. She further highlighted the importance of intergenerational communication, and the need to promote the

role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), and women.

New Zealand, speaking for the JUSCANZ GROUP, called for a clear and concise framework building on the Aichi targets; a strengthened review mechanism; and ambitious and measurable targets to reverse biodiversity loss. She also noted deep concern over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Kuwait, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, welcomed the progress made during virtual meetings, but stressed the need to work with a spirit of cooperation and collaboration to build an ambitious GBF. She highlighted implementation issues, including capacity building and technology transfer.

UKRAINE condemned the Russian invasion, stressing that "Russia's attack on Ukraine is also an attack on the environment," and noting that it will take years to restore the resulting damage to biodiversity.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said that her country is "implementing its right to self-defence" according to Article 51 of the UN Charter, calling for a "depoliticized" process without "unjustifiable delays."

The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) made a number of proposals, including the respect of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC); the recognition of community-based monitoring and implementation systems; and that the traditional practices of Indigenous Peoples be reflected in conservation planning.

The CBD WOMEN'S CAUCUS stressed that the GBF should be gender-responsive, including in its indicators, and finance and resource mechanisms; and called for a standalone target on gender equality.

The GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (GYBN) said the GBF should be strengthened to include the rights of nature and that means of implementation need to be sufficient to achieve proposed targets, including funds for meaningful youth involvement.

The CBD ALLIANCE expressed concern that the GBF does not address current drivers of biodiversity loss. The group called for, among others, full respect of human rights; Indigenous-protected and conserved areas; rights of small-scale food producers; and removal of all harmful incentives.

WWF, speaking for a group of NGOs, called for: a more ambitious 2030 mission; a global target on protecting and conserving at least 30% of land and marine areas by 2030; recognition of the need to close the biodiversity finance gap; and inclusion of all elements required to prevent future pandemics and epidemics of zoonotic origin.

SUBNATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS called for the adoption of a decision at CBD COP15 for greater inclusion of subnational governments, cities and local authorities.

BUSINESS FOR NATURE urged strengthening references in the GBF on the role of business and financial institutions. He urged eliminating and redirecting all harmful financial flows, and providing incentives to businesses to enhance avoiding negative impacts at operational level.

The ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH GROUP highlighted the need to acknowledge all drivers of biodiversity loss; act with utmost urgency to stop extinction; and accountability mechanisms to enhance transparency, communication and agreeing on stepping stones for progress and impact.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), on behalf of the LIAISON GROUP OF BIODIVERSITY-RELATED CONVENTIONS, urged that the mandates, data, and monitoring indicators of respective conventions be woven into the GBF.

International Union for Conservation of Nature highlighted the need to conserve at least 30% of oceans and lands by 2030, recognizing IPLC-conserved territories. He called for increasing financial resources and international conservation finance flows to fund biodiversity action, leverage private finance, and improve domestic resource mobilization.

SBSTTA-24 Plenary

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benitez Díaz opened the second part of SBSTTA-24, noting that it is the first in-person meeting of SBSTTA since November 2019. He outlined intersessional work through more than 70 virtual sessions and highlighted the establishment of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund on Nature for Health. He urged delegates to focus on providing the best scientific, technical, and technological advice, in line with SBSTTA's mandate.

Election of Officers: Chair Benitez reminded delegates that Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) had been elected as SBSTTA-24 Rapporteur during the first part of the meeting. As consultations for new bureau members are ongoing, SBSTTA will readdress election of officers during its final plenary session on 27 March.

Organization of work: Chair Benitez reminded delegates that the agenda of SBSTTA24 was adopted during the first part of the meeting. He elaborated, by agenda item, on the organization of work for the resumed meeting. Delegates adopted it as contained in annex I of the joint scenario note (CBD/SBSTTA/24/Add.2/Rev.2) without comments.

WG2020-3 Plenary

Francis Ogwal (Uganda) and Basile van Havre (Canada), Co-Chairs of the WG2020, opened the meeting by reminding participants that “investing in biodiversity is investing in the future of humanity,” and welcoming recent biodiversity-related resolutions from the UN Environment Assembly.

Organization of Work: Co-Chair Basile van Havre presented the organization of work (CBD/WG2020/3/1/Add.2/Rev.3). BRAZIL expressed frustration with the current mode of drafting, calling the current text “a Northern view of a Southern framework” and stressing that drafting should be party-driven. The organization of work was adopted without objections.

Update from Co-Chairs: Co-Chair Ogwal provided an update on the work that was performed virtually between 2020-2022. He highlighted the Co-Chairs' reflections (CBD/WG2020/3/6), which emerged as a result of the virtual work.

GBF: Co-Chair van Havre elaborated on the work of the contact groups established in the first part of WG2020-3 and the origin of the non-papers for negotiations. He explained that the contact groups will continue work during the resumed session and, following their first respective meetings, non-papers will be developed based on the submissions. These non-papers will thereafter become the working documents for the group's negotiations and be presented as CRP documents at SBI-3 plenary.

SBI-3 Plenary

SBI Chair Charlotta Sörqvist (Sweden), via video, opened the meeting, noting that the SBI agenda includes key inputs for the GBF. She explained that she is self-quarantining following a positive COVID-19 test and Gabriele Obermayr (Austria) will chair the meeting during her absence.

Organization of work: Chair Sörqvist reminded delegates that Erik Okoree (Ghana) has been elected as Rapporteur during the first part of the meeting. She provided an overview of the work ahead by agenda item, noting that 5 L documents, 11 CRP documents, and new elements on some agenda items are posted on the meeting's website. She underscored that the four contact groups established during the first part of the meeting will continue their work during this meeting, and described their *modus operandi*.

BRAZIL expressed concern about the limited time devoted to resource mobilization, noting he will be submitting two non-papers during the contact group discussions. Delegates approved the organization of work with no further comments.

Financial Mechanism: The Secretariat introduced two documents related to the eighth replenishment period of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF-8): the executive summary of the report of the full assessments of funds (CBD/SBI/3/6/Add.2/Rev.1), and draft proposals for a four-year, outcome-oriented framework of programme priorities during the replenishment period (CBD/SBI/3/6/Add.4). They also introduced two information documents, on additional submissions received from biodiversity-related conventions (CBD/SBI/3/INF/43) and on aligning guidance to the GEF with the Post-2020 GBF (CBD/SBI/3/INF/45).

Regional groups and parties shared initial comments on the introduced documents and their implications for the financial mechanism, including: the role of nature-based solutions (NbS) in the financial mechanism; synergies between the GEF and other biodiversity-related agreements; and resource mobilization.

Delegates highlighted GEF's role as the financial mechanism for the GBF, calling for support of all countries in implementation, particularly developing and vulnerable ones. Some urged recognition of national sovereignty in regard to financial plans and project decisions on future funding.

Many parties stressed the need to learn from past mistakes and proposed setting up a global biodiversity fund to support implementation. Some called for a 1% levy on retail sales in developed countries of all products derived from biodiversity, while others suggested devoting 1% of the global GDP, namely about USD 800 billion, for biodiversity conservation. Some called for an enhanced framework to support developing countries meeting the incremental costs of implementation of the Convention and the GBF, stressing the need for capacity building and technology transfer.

Discussions on the financial mechanism will continue in a contact group on Thursday 17 March and in plenary on Friday 18 March.

In the Corridors

Has it been forever, or has no time at all passed? The halls of the International Conference Center in Geneva were abuzz on Monday as delegates could—for the first time in almost exactly two years—share hearty handshakes, or giggly elbow bumps. There was no mistaking the atmosphere among those gathered that, no matter the miracles of technology, it's good to be back in person.

Still, the spectre of the upcoming COP, and the incredible amount of work to do until then, lingered. “We are starting a countdown,” WG2020 Co-Chair Francis Ogwal reminded those assembled in plenary. As if the schedule was not pressure enough: three bodies meeting in two weeks, with daily extensions into the late hours, had some participants bracing for some long nights—and others wondering just how much can be done when everything is being squeezed into such a narrow window.

A few seasoned delegates agreed that the mood does not promise leaps and bounds of progress: “The real decisions will come down to the last night of the COP, as always,” one quipped. How much gets done before then will determine just how late that night goes—and most likely how successful it will be.