

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Thursday, 17 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work at a full speed on Thursday, with five contact group sessions during the day and into the night. Though the first signs of fatigue and frustration were apparent, considerable progress was made. In the morning, a contact group under the Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (WG2020) addressed targets related to tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming. In the afternoon and evening, SBSTTA and SBI contact groups held two sessions each on GBF monitoring, and on resource mobilization and the financial mechanism respectively.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the four contact group meetings in the morning and afternoon as well as the discussions of the two contact groups that met on Wednesday, 16 March, during the evening. The remaining two contact groups will be summarized in the Bulletin on Friday, 18 March.

WG2020 Contact Group 4

This contact group, co-led by Anne Teller (EU) and Jorge Murillo (Colombia), focused on GBF targets 14-21, on tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming.

Co-Lead Teller provided an update of the discussions in the contact group during the first part of WG2020-3. She drew attention to the non-paper developed by the co-leads and the WG2020 Co-Chairs' reflection note (CBD/WG2020/3/6).

Targets 18 and 19: Co-Lead Murillo initiated discussions on Targets 18 (incentives harmful to biodiversity) and 19 (resource mobilization). Urging delegates not to address the numerical targets contained in the targets, he invited parties to express general positions on three umbrella questions. Delegates agreed that the order of the targets should not be reversed. Most parties opined that Target 19 should be split into two targets: one that addresses financial resources and a separate one for non-financial resources. Opinions were split on whether a potential new international financing instrument should be referenced in the target on resource mobilization.

On Target 18, discussions focused on whether harmful subsidies should be redirected, repurposed, reformed, or eliminated. Many parties noted that "redirected, repurposed, and reformed" should be deleted, stressing that harmful subsidies need to be eliminated and that the level of ambition must not be lower than in the Aichi Targets. A regional group suggested "eliminating or redirecting," further calling for scaling up regulatory incentives

that are positive for biodiversity. A few delegates proposed "substantially and progressively reducing and eliminating." One party suggested keeping "reforming and eliminating." Another proposed regulating harmful financial flows, penalizing financial actors that cause biodiversity loss, and ensuring that financial flows are appropriately channeled to protect biodiversity. One delegate suggested replacing "eliminating" with "reducing."

Some delegates said that holistic studies to identify harmful subsidies should be conducted. Some parties emphasized the need for national efforts to identify which policies should be repurposed according to national circumstances. One delegate proposed "identifying and phasing out" subsidies. A party opined that "rationalizing" subsidies is more realistic than "eliminating" them. Another suggested "reducing" rather than "eliminating." Yet another suggested referring to "genuinely harmful" subsidies rather than "most harmful" ones. A few parties stressed that any actions need to be in line with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and regulations.

On Target 19, parties addressed whether the resource mobilization elements (resources from all sources, international financial flows to developing countries, public and private finance, domestic resource mobilization, and national finance plans) are appropriate and adequate. Many developing parties pointed to CBD Article 20 (financial resources), highlighting the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CDR). A regional group noted that international financial flows to developing countries should include official development assistance (ODA), private financing, and philanthropy.

Delegates called for references to: a list of all different funding sources that countries can use as guidance to develop their national plans; access to innovation; aligning financial flows; payments for environmental services; the need for effective and efficient resource use; equity, CDR, and financing Mother Earth-centered actions; and strengthening links with climate financing.

Observers cautioned against overreliance on private financing. They said equity is missing in Target 19; and urged, supported by a couple of parties, financial mechanisms that ensure direct funding of IPLCs, women, youth, and smallholder farmers for effective implementation of the GBF.

Targets 14, 15, and 16: Co-Lead Teller suggested an initial set of questions on the intended sectors of each target, in order to gather an overview of parties' preferences for proposed changes. One party strongly opposed this approach, referring to it as "diversionary tactics" in a "strategy of postponing" discussions.

On Target 14 (integrate biodiversity values across government levels and economic sectors), parties agreed that the main focus should be on governments. Several agreed that “financial flows” was an appropriate concept to align with biodiversity values. Some parties said financial flows should be aligned with priorities of governments, and that this alignment should be carried out progressively while bearing in mind biodiversity values. A few delegates suggested referring to “financial resources”; others, to “financial activities.”

One party suggested an alternative target regarding determining cross-sectoral goals for sustainable use by 2030, with implementation measures based on ecosystem approaches and “close cooperation with biodiversity users.”

On Target 15 (all businesses assess and report on their dependencies and impacts on biodiversity), most parties agreed that the focus should be businesses, with many saying financial institutions should be included among institutions that manage their impacts on biodiversity and move towards full sustainability. One party opposed the latter suggestion. Another noted that governments should support, rather than require, businesses to take measures.

Parties said that Target 16 (people are encouraged and enabled to make responsible choices and have access to relevant information and alternatives) should focus on consumption and production patterns. They agreed that governments play an important role in encouraging responsible consumption choices, and in leading transition to circularity, and sustainable consumption patterns. They also highlighted the role of government in biodiversity education, including actions on biodiversity literature, environmental education, and sustainability reporting. One party suggested that the target specifically be tied to biodiversity-related outcomes. Yet another recommended aligning the target with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns).

Some delegates argued that targets should consider the role of civil society and IPLCs, and should be gender-responsive.

Targets 20 and 21: Co-Lead Murillo introduced the targets. On Target 20 (ensure that traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices of IPLCs, with their free prior and informed consent (FPIC), guide decision making for the effective management of biodiversity), delegates agreed that availability and accessibility to quality information, knowledge management, and strengthening communication are important elements that need to be included. One party suggested referring to “effective and equitable” governance of biodiversity. Another proposed including the notion of “epistemological parity of knowledge systems and the need for inter-scientific dialogue.” A delegate suggested qualifying the target “in accordance with national legislation.”

On Target 21 (ensure equitable and effective participation in decision making related to biodiversity by IPLCs, and respect their rights over lands, territories, and resources, as well as by women and girls, and youth), discussions focused on whether the target’s focus should remain on vulnerable groups or if it should refer to all relevant stakeholders with diverging opinions. Delegates further discussed the inclusion of “gender-sensitive” participation, agreeing to include a gender element, with some suggesting “gender-responsive” participation.

Many insisted on keeping the focus on vulnerable groups, noting that other sections of the GBF address all relevant

stakeholder participation. Some preferred all-encompassing language. One party proposed including persons of diverse gender identities; another, people with disabilities. A delegate suggested recognizing the “holistic” rights of IPLCs. A regional group requested reference to the UN Declaration to the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and to international human rights law and obligations. Some delegates suggested including access to justice and information for IPLCs. A party emphasized that gender sensitivity and youth participation should be cross-cutting principles across the GBF rather than included in a standalone target. A party and observers highlighted the need to ensure the safety of environmental rights defenders. A couple of delegates requested strengthening platforms, policies, and processes in accordance with national circumstances to ensure IPLCs’ participation.

A party suggested an additional target on women, ensuring that they have equitable access to and benefits from conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and ensuring their effective participation at all levels.

Co-Lead Teller informed delegates that the group’s mandate also includes addressing sections on: implementation support mechanisms; enabling conditions; responsibility and transparency; and outreach, awareness, and uptake. Since these topics relate to issues being discussed under SBI and SBSTTA, she noted that the Contact Group would take these up after deliberations in the subsidiary bodies are completed. She added that a non-paper with consolidated, rather than composite, text will be produced as a basis for further negotiation.

SBSTTA-24 Contact Groups

Biodiversity and Health: The contact group held its second meeting in the evening of Wednesday, 16 March, with Co-Chair Marina von Weissenberg (Finland) leading the discussions. The Secretariat announced a second non-paper covering the sections considered by the contact group at its first meeting on Tuesday, 15 March. A number of delegates stressed that none of the additions had been negotiated and should all be bracketed. Some raised concerns about their proposals not being properly reflected and one asked to bracket the whole annexed draft global action plan. One representative asked that every mention of developing countries be supplemented with a specific mention of small island developing states. There were also repeated requests to refer to fair and equitable benefit-sharing and sustainable use throughout the document.

Delegates then resumed discussions of the specific elements of the draft action plan, with delegates making numerous suggestions. On sector-specific mainstreaming of biodiversity and health linkages, one delegate asked that reference to genetic resources include associated traditional knowledge and to both prior informed consent (PIC) and mutually agreed terms (MAT).

On education and awareness of biodiversity and health linkages, delegates requested to add references to sustainable use, education, and dissemination of information. Regarding surveillance and monitoring to address health threats, delegates asked to add references to: exposure to environmental chemicals; the importance of pandemic preparedness; surveillance for high-risk pathogens; safe access to pathogens; fair and equitable sharing of vaccines; prevention of misappropriation of genetic

sequence information; and addressing associated intellectual property. One party opposed references to intellectual property, noting that the subject goes beyond the scope of the discussion. Another delegate asked to bracket references to the transfer of disease from wild species, since it might have devastating effects on species' conservation and other sectors such as tourism.

On research on biodiversity and health linkages, delegates added references to: ABS-compliant research efforts; investment in scientific development programmes; the contribution of biodiversity to discovery of new medicine; and fair and equitable access to technology, health research, and sharing of development costs. Regarding capacity building and funding, delegates requested references to, *inter alia*, triangular cooperation, and strengthening systems for risk management and cooperation with local communities.

On the section on monitoring the action plan's progress, a number of delegates called for deleting the paragraph referring to the GBF and its monitoring framework, and one delegate asked to bracket the whole section in light of ongoing discussions.

Delegates then briefly discussed the appendices to the global action plan. A number of parties supported the deletion of the appendices on: interlinkages between biodiversity and health; the options to integrate biodiversity considerations into COVID-19 stimulus and recovery measures; and key messages on mainstreaming biodiversity and health linkages. Co-Chair von Weissenberg suggested converting the appendices and glossaries into information documents, and focusing discussions on the draft recommendation and the action plan.

On the draft recommendation, some urged achieving fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. Others suggested adding capacity building. Parties held divergent opinions on referencing the IPBES report on Biodiversity and Pandemics. One party proposed providing, on a voluntary basis, information from the implementation of the global action plan.

This concluded the first round of the contact group's deliberations.

GBF Monitoring: This contact group, co-chaired by Alfred Oteng-Yeboah (Ghana) and Andrew Stott (UK), discussed proposed indicators and monitoring approaches for the GBF.

Deliberations focused on the non-paper on the proposed monitoring framework for the GBF. Co-Chair Stott drew attention to following ongoing informal discussions that would inform the introductory sections of the non-paper: SBI on planning, reporting, and review; WG2020 on milestones; and SBSTTA on baselines. He suggested that the contact group begin with annex 2 on proposed headline, component, and complementary indicators for the GBF.

Deliberations of the headline indicators were guided by considerations of whether the indicator is: relevant to key elements of the target; technically feasible to use at national level; technically feasible at the global level and disaggregatable; and ready to use now or in the near future.

On indicator 1.0.1 (percentage of land and seas covered by spatial plans that integrate biodiversity), several parties noted that the indicator is relevant for national level application. Some parties opposed, saying spatial plans do not exist in many countries and called for capacity building to support this indicator.

Some parties suggested including: area covered by land- and sea-use change negatively affecting biodiversity; measures of connectivity of landscapes; natural and modified ecosystems; and trends in land tenure in territories of IPLCs.

On indicator 2.0.1 (percentage of degraded or converted ecosystems that are under restoration), several countries said the indicator, though relevant, is not technically feasible at national or global level due to lack of technologies and on-the-ground data. Some said the indicator requires further development and should include areas such as ecological restoration, rehabilitation, and ecosystem connectivity.

Parties acknowledged the relevance of indicator 3.0.1 (coverage of protected areas and other effective conservation measures (OECMs) by effectiveness). They called for expansion of scope to include indicators of ecosystem connectivity, extent of land and water territories managed by IPLCs, and recognition of IPLC land tenure. Some parties also called for including variables such as species representativeness and the species protection index. Several urged addressing protected areas and OECMs in separate headline indicators. While some supported the use of Key Biodiversity Areas, others preferred concepts such as ecologically and biologically significant areas. Most noted that even though the indicator requires some development, it is technically feasible at national and global levels, can be disaggregated, and is ready for application in the near future.

Discussions continued in a contact group session in the evening.

SBI-3 Contact Groups

Reporting, Assessment, and Review of Implementation:

Co-Chair Gillian Guthrie (Jamaica) guided the discussions, which took place in the evening of Wednesday, 16 March. A delegate reported on progress in informal discussions in a small group, noting they helped identify areas of convergence and divergence.

Regarding a paragraph "welcoming" the guidance for revised and updated NBSAPs (contained in annex A), some parties proposed "adopting" it. Delegates discussed a bracketed reference to the elements related to the communication of national targets and actions related to the GBF, with some preferring an alternative formulation referring to national ambition rather than targets. One party, supported by many, proposed deleting explicit references to the elements. A regional group stressed the importance of referring to the template for national reporting. A developing country asked to also include guidance on the provision of financial support, technology transfer, and capacity building.

On "welcoming" the template for additional voluntary non-state actor commitments that contribute to the GBF (contained in annex B), some delegates preferred "adopting" the template, while others requested to keep the reference bracketed.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding a request to parties to review and update their NBSAPs vis-à-vis each of the goals and targets of the GBF, following guidance in annex A. Many delegates preferred shortening the paragraph. A number of delegations proposed additional paragraphs, in case parties do not update their NBSAPs, with alternative formulations relating to developing countries' need for means of implementation. Others proposed referring to the involvement of stakeholders and IPLCs, requiring their PIC, which was opposed by some. Co-Chair

Guthrie urged focusing the main paragraph on the main point of updating NBSAPs, noting that the other ideas will be retained separately.

On a paragraph encouraging parties to facilitate coordination among focal points, IPLCs, and stakeholders, some proposed to instead “call” on parties. Some delegates also asked to refer not only to biodiversity-related conventions, but to all multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). One delegation urged singling out IPLCs and women, since they play a special role. Some suggested additional provisions requiring PIC of Indigenous Peoples. Another delegation preferred FPIC. Some delegations said they could accept PIC, opining that if FPIC is used reference to “approval and involvement” should be added. Another delegation asked to also add a reference to consultation. One party asked to limit the paragraph by stating “as appropriate or as applicable.”

On a paragraph inviting IPLCs and stakeholders to develop commitments in support of the GBF, using the template in annex B, some delegates asked to bracket the reference to the template; another asked to clarify that this is voluntary, and only as appropriate and applicable. A number of delegates urged that this should be integrated with the work on NBSAPs.

Co-Chair Guthrie said that the discussions will continue when the working group resumes on Tuesday, 24 March and encouraged the small group discussions to continue in the interim.

Resource Mobilization and the Financial Mechanism:

Shonisani Munzhedzi (South Africa) and Ines Verleye (Belgium) co-chaired this contact group, which continued discussions on the financial mechanism for the GBF. The Secretariat introduced the draft recommendation on resource mobilization (CBD/SBI/3/CRP.15).

Prior to discussing the document, one party requested that two non-papers they submitted be included for consideration at COP-15: one on establishing a Global Biodiversity Fund, and another recognizing “payments for environmental services schemes.”

One regional group, opposed by others, submitted a proposal for a global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism for adoption by COP-15. The same group suggested incorporating placeholder text about the elaboration of potential new functions for the mechanism.

Delegates recommended various operational paragraphs, discussing, among others: requesting a technical expert group on methodologies for financing “Mother Earth-centric actions”; actions that could be taken by the private sector; and designing a resource mobilization framework.

Parties were divided about retaining a number of paragraphs which discussed:

- developed country funding support as a source for implementation of the Convention;
- the eligibility of all developing countries for biodiversity financial support; and
- the process to amend the list of developed country parties to the Convention, with one party suggesting reference to the “impact of the global pandemic” and to “prioritizing countries needing the most urgent assistance,” to the opposition of several.

On the successor to the strategy for the resource mobilization, Co-Chair Verleye presented two options: one recommending taking the strategy presented in the document’s annex as a flexible

successor to the resource mobilization strategy; and the other requesting SBI-4 to provide recommendations on a strategy for adoption at COP-16. Parties were largely supportive of the first option, with some proposing that it would be possible to revise it in future discussions, and others pointing out that the paragraph could not be approved until the successor was developed. One party asked whether it would be possible for the SBI to request that the WG2020 Co-Chairs create an informal process to achieve consensus by COP-15, lest the process be “tied down to failure.” Following consultations, the options were parked pending discussions with WG Co-Chairs.

On national finance plans, one party proposed that three paragraphs be streamlined into one which would invite parties to develop national biodiversity finance plans based on their national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs). Another expressed skepticism toward the usefulness of national biodiversity finance plans. Several parties demurred, and expressed their support of the plans. One party suggested an amendment to the proposal, suggesting an additional paragraph inviting parties to identify “available resources and financial gaps and constraints” for the implementation of NBSAPs. Both the amended proposal and the initial paragraphs remain bracketed as potential options.

The Secretariat will update the document for its next consideration on Monday, 21 March. The contact group continued into the evening, discussing a non-paper on a draft recommendation concerning a draft four-year outcome-oriented framework of programme priorities of the eight replenishment period of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-8).

In the Corridors

The make-or-break moment that the Geneva Biodiversity Conference was projected to be is evolving to be a break moment for most. Parties exhibited clear signs of disillusion on making measurable progress. Fatigue was evident during the morning’s deliberations; some delegates expressed frustration regarding guidance for negotiations that asked yes or no questions and used traffic light signals to measure views on different issues. Demands to enter the “real negotiating mode” by some may have been as an eagerness to begin negotiations under less stressful circumstances. In the case of many, though, it became an omen of apprehension in the face of overwhelming number of meetings from dawn to dusk.

While co-leads and co-chairs urged parties to exercise patience as initial views are consolidated into negotiating text, tensions resurfaced in the afternoon and evening, and delegates complained about being muzzled, detracted, or slowed down. “It will be hard to maintain a positive spirit until the end,” one noted, pointing to the marathon of contact group meetings still ahead. Another, even more pessimistic, opined that “as we get increasingly tired and irritated, it will be impossible to reach consensus on the most controversial items,” pointing to the forthcoming discussions on digital sequence information. Even though many acknowledged that they had expected a challenging meeting, many expected the first week to yield more than it has. “We wanted a racehorse,” one delegate said, “but in terms of work, the GBF is becoming a mammoth.” Hopefully, unlike the now-extinct elephantid, the GBF will survive the pressures and be ushered intact into the second week of talks.