

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Friday, 18 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work on Friday with the SBI holding a plenary session in the morning to address the draft gender plan of action, communication for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), and cooperation with other conventions. A contact group under the Working Group on the GBF (WG2020) met in the afternoon to discuss GBF's goals. In the evening, a SBSTTA contact group continued discussions on GBF monitoring; and an SBI contact group resumed considerations on capacity building and development.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the SBI plenary and the WG2020 contact group as well as the discussions of the two contact groups that met on Thursday, 17 March, during the evening. The remaining two contact groups will be summarized in the Bulletin on Saturday, 19 March.

SBI-3 Plenary

SBI Chair Charlotta Sörqvist opened the session, outlining the agenda items to be addressed.

Draft gender plan of action: The Secretariat introduced the relevant document (SBI/3/4/Add.2/Rev.2) and described the consultation process, comprised of virtual discussions and written submissions, which took place in June-July 2021. She noted that the document includes elements of a draft recommendation and contains, as an annex, the draft gender plan of action, with sections on: purpose; modalities; expected outcomes and objectives; and associated elements of the plan.

Many parties emphasized the importance of mainstreaming gender equality and responsiveness as overarching concepts for the GBF. They further underscored the need to recognize women's role in biodiversity conservation and ensure their equal participation in all activities, including benefit-sharing and decision making.

The EU, the UK, and AUSTRALIA, opposed by SOUTH AFRICA and others, stressed that gender inclusive approaches should be funded by existing voluntary participation funds rather than by a women's delegate fund as currently envisioned in the draft decision. The UK pointed to the Special Voluntary Trust Fund, noting it should be strengthened to support the gender plan of action.

Malawi, for the AFRICAN GROUP, noted that women and girls are among the most vulnerable in relation to biodiversity loss and land degradation, especially in developing countries, calling for mainstreaming gender considerations in most of the GBF targets.

The EU, MEXICO, COSTA RICA, and others supported a specific target on gender in the GBF, reflecting contributions of women and girls on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The EU and ARGENTINA welcomed the explicit reflection of the human rights approach. CANADA stressed that

the gender plan of action should be included in the main body of the decision, and that actions should be within the scope of the three objectives of the Convention and provide guidance for gender-responsive implementation.

COLOMBIA drew attention to strengthening synergies between the gender plan of action, and similar initiatives and commitments under other MEAs. She called for clarity on the role and functions of relevant focal points, and for incorporating the gender plan of action's and the GBF's mid-term reviews. COSTA RICA drew attention to a new GBF target, stressing the link between gender equality and capacity building for effective implementation.

MEXICO and others stressed the need for means of implementation. BURUNDI, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, and others stressed that the plan should ensure appropriate capacity-building measures to enable its implementation.

NEW ZEALAND and ARGENTINA underscored the need to include all those who identify as women and girls in all their diversity.

PARAGUAY noted that the current version of the draft plan of action is not acceptable, mentioning differing definitions on gender in its national constitution and requesting further time for consultations with its capital.

Underlining that "women's rights are human rights," WOMEN'S CAUCUS stressed that the GBF needs demographically disaggregated data and gender-specific indicators. IIFB made a number of textual proposals for the draft, including language on: FPIC; and IPLCs, women, and youth.

Chair Sörqvist announced that a contact group on the item will be formed, co-chaired by Scott Wilson (Canada) and Melissa Laverde (Colombia), which will meet for a single session on Saturday, 19 March.

Communication for the GBF: The Secretariat presented the relevant document (CBD/SBI/3/4/Add.1/Rev.1), which sets out the framework for developing the communication strategy. He reported that the document has been reviewed by the Informal Advisory Committee on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA-IAC) and other communications experts.

The EU urged alignment with GBF language on capacity building, planning, and the review mechanism, and stressed the need to avoid reporting burden. The proposed website, he noted, should be used to communicate with larger audiences, while reporting on GBF implementation by parties should be done through the Convention's clearing-house mechanism.

Noting that the communication strategy will support behavioral change, the AFRICAN GROUP urged supporting priority actions by all stakeholders and called for further elaborating issues on equity.

BRAZIL emphasized that parties drive the GBF's implementation, and that the Secretariat should provide a supporting role. On the scope and mandate, he pointed out the

need to avoid encroaching on the agendas of other MEAs, and called for using agreed language and terms. ARGENTINA suggested that the role of the Secretariat in supporting behavior change be elaborated upon, and that the strategy messaging relate to “leaving no-one behind.”

COSTA RICA highlighted the need to support information exchange and public awareness. She suggested emphasis on biodiversity education and inclusion of references on campaigns, museum exhibitions, and webinars. COLOMBIA said outreach and awareness raising should include the context of the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and that coordination with other biodiversity MEAs ensures broadening of messages and increased visibility.

BOLIVIA called for inclusion of “living in harmony with nature” and recognition of the rights of Mother Nature. He urged reference to multiple values of biodiversity and proposed an “international day for Mother Nature” to celebrate biodiversity values.

UK said clear and effective communication and public awareness are key for a whole-of-society approach to implementation. She said the review by CEPA-IAC should not exempt parties from the review, and suggested that parties report on communication activities every four years to reduce reporting burden.

CANADA expressed concern on the reporting burden posed by linking the communication strategy to NBSAPs and the monitoring framework. She further expressed preference for the use of component and complementary indicators for tracking progress on GBF implementation.

BELIZE highlighted the need to support communication by IPLCs, knowledge platforms, and rebranding of messages on biodiversity, including, supported by PERU, ECUADOR, and SURINAME, translation into local languages and dialects to better disseminate its messages. SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, MALAWI, and others said the strategy should be supported with adequate financial resources.

INDIA called for including communication on digital sequence information (DSI). SRI LANKA stressed the importance of open access to data, resources, and digital platforms, and called for empowering women and IPLCs with communication skills.

MEXICO called for a simple, clear slogan on biodiversity conservation for the public similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) 1.5 degrees message. NAMIBIA responded by suggesting an apex target that would put the planet under 100% sustainable, participatory, and ecosystem-based management. NORWAY supported the suggestion, pointing to a decision by the members of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy to conserve 100% of their national waters by 2025.

The CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC suggested integrating women and youth into the strategy’s targets alongside IPLCs. EGYPT queried the implementation cost of the communication strategy, and stressed the need to diversify communication to address local communities according to local circumstances. BENIN suggested evaluating stakeholders’ behavioral change. ALGERIA called for assessing the communication strategy at different stages of its development and implementation.

IIFB suggested references to IPLCs, women, and youth as well as to Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 on the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032. WOMEN’S CAUCUS stressed the role of IPLCs, women, and youth, requesting additions to various parts of the document. GYBN underscored that the interconnectedness of environmental and social crises should be at the core of the strategy, calling for culturally appropriate messages.

Chair Sörqvist noted that a CRP will be prepared for further consideration.

Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives: SBI Chair Sörqvist noted that SBI would resume the first reading of this item, which had begun in the first part of SBI-3. She introduced the note by the Executive Secretary (CBD/SBI/3/10), as well as a number of information documents, including a report of activities on cooperation with other conventions during the intersessional period (CBD/SBI/INF/31). The EU, the AFRICAN GROUP, and many others welcomed the note by the Executive Secretary.

The EU, supported by many, stressed: the need for cooperation and synergies on biodiversity-related measures, including between existing conventions and agreements; that joint programmes with other MEAs may help with implementation; and that, if new cooperation mechanisms are needed, they should be built upon pre-established processes or bodies. She called for a reference to a mechanism enabling dialogue between representatives of intergovernmental bodies as a follow-up to the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats to achieving the GBF. GEORGIA and SWITZERLAND suggested acknowledging regional initiatives, such as the Bern Convention, in supporting achieving the GBF. GABON highlighted the Abidjan Convention.

SWITZERLAND, ZIMBABWE, NORWAY, PALESTINE, SEYCHELLES, and others supported the Data Reporting Tool for MEAs (DaRT), which will support synergies in national reporting to biodiversity-related conventions, and thereby reduce both the administrative and reporting burden.

The AFRICAN GROUP, supported by many, looked forward to more parties being trained on DaRT for MEAs; suggested that a biodiversity-related convention liaison group be established to facilitate dialogue; and called for a firm statement on international cooperation in the GBF. SOUTH AFRICA drew attention to the support provided by the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation and its Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, calling for a reference to its work in the GBF.

CANADA cautioned against additional work on liaison mechanisms prior to COP-15, and supported initiatives for integrating nature and culture in the GBF, and joint work with IUCN on nature and culture. BELIZE requested solidifying priorities and establishing interconnected priorities among conventions and economic sectors.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA highlighted the Global Species Action Plan, which pools species conservation actions required to implement the GBF. INDIA referred to the Gandhinagar Declaration from the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) COP13, which calls for considerations on migratory species and the concept of “ecological connectivity.”

ARGENTINA called for increasing consistency and avoiding overlaps, stressing that differing conventions’ mandates need to be observed. COLOMBIA supported nature-based solutions (NbS), as they present cost-effective tools to harmonize implementation actions, and provide synergies with other conventions and the SDGs.

Chair Sörqvist said that discussions will continue in plenary on Tuesday, 22 March.

SBI Contact Group on Resource Mobilization and the Financial Mechanism

Co-Chair Ines Verleye (Belgium) guided the discussions, which took place in the evening of Thursday, 17 March. Delegates addressed a non-paper on a draft recommendation concerning a draft four-year outcome-oriented framework of programme priorities for the eighth replenishment period of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-8).

On the draft recommendation, delegates agreed to note with concern the low rate of response by parties regarding the full assessment of funds needed for the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols during GEF-8.

Following a lengthy discussion on GEF's *modus operandi* and timing considerations, they agreed on text noting that, following the GBF adoption and the conclusion of the GEF-8 replenishment, it is envisaged that GEF will include in its report to the COP an explanation of how GEF-8 is contributing to the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols, and to the GBF, taking into account the priorities and needs identified by recipient countries.

Regarding the framework of programme priorities annexed to the document, delegates addressed a section on objectives. They agreed that it provides guidance to the GEF for GEF-8, and that it is within the context of the GEF mandate to provide resources to achieve global environmental benefits. The framework utilizes the three objectives of the Convention, its protocols, and the GBF to set priorities for the financial mechanism. Delegates further agreed that the GBF goals and targets, in particular, provide direction on the outcomes of the four-year framework. Divergent opinions remain on language recognizing that the three objectives of the Convention should be considered in a balanced manner by the GEF. Discussions will continue.

Co-Chair Verleye noted that the next session of the contact group, which will take place on Monday, 21 March, will address resource mobilization (CBD/SBI/3/CRP.15).

WG2020 Contact Group 1

The second meeting of the Contact Group focused on GBF goals. Co-Lead Norbert Baerlocher (Switzerland) drew attention to a draft non-paper on Goal A, adding that delegates can submit their comments until the end of Friday, 18 March. He noted that this goal would be discussed during the Group's third meeting.

Goal B: Co-Lead Vinod Mathur (India) introduced the goal: that nature's contributions to people (NCPs) are valued, maintained, or enhanced through conservation and sustainable use, supporting the global development agenda for the benefit of all. He drew attention to the GBF Co-Chairs' alternative text, which takes into account parties' concerns regarding replacing NCPs with "ecosystem services" and includes the concept of valuation.

Parties emphasized that the goal's focus should be sustainable use. Several also affirmed that sustainable use is the link between conservation and benefit-sharing. Some parties called for inclusion of ecological footprints to be reduced to sustainable thresholds.

Parties debated on whether to revert to NCPs or to use ecosystem services. Those for NCPs emphasized that the definition includes ecosystem services, encompasses other worldviews, and allows involvement of IPLCs. Those preferring ecosystem services highlighted the term's acceptance and use in national, regional, and global levels to measure baselines. One observer noted that the NCP concept was approved by the second session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-2) following a two-year consultative process, and is the basis for all past and present IPBES assessments.

Some delegates said the goal should also build on synergies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, and many supported that the goal foster innovation. Some opined that sustainable development needs no mention in this goal, as it is included as a standalone area in the GBF.

Other proposed concepts such as: sustainable use and management; restoration for enhancement of NCPs; NbS; and the right to a safe, clean, and healthy sustainable environment.

Goal C: Co-lead Mathur introduced the goal, which deals with the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources, with a substantial increase in monetary and non-monetary benefits shared. He asked parties to consider the definition of "substantial increase," and potential alternative wording.

Several parties requested the insertion of language related to traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources. One recommended adding "with the FPIC of IPLCs."

One group requested that the goal makes explicit reference to DSI, with a party insisting that the reference should be placed in the first line of the goal. Some parties opposed its inclusion at this time, noting that the concept is still being negotiated. Some parties suggested compromises, such as mentioning "utilization of biodiversity"; addressing benefit-sharing from genetic resources "in any format"; or bracketing the reference until the issues is resolved.

Parties were divided on the question of the "substantial increase" of monetary and non-monetary benefits, with some agreeing for retention of the language; and others arguing that the wording is presently too vague, and that a numerical component would be necessary. Proposals varied, including an increase of 50% and inserting a footnote describing the spirit of the language. Some raised concerns about a lack of appropriate baselines, leading one party to suggest an online registry to obtain an initial sense of benefit-sharing.

One party suggested inserting language on benefit-sharing "in accordance with international ABS instruments." A non-party argued that access is missing from the current iteration of the goal; one party disagreed, arguing that making benefit-sharing dependent on access would be "the death knoll to biodiversity."

Goal D: Co-Lead Mathur introduced the goal, which focuses on closing the gap between available financial resources and other means of implementation, and those necessary to achieve the 2050 Vision of living in harmony with nature. He invited delegates to focus on what the term "means of implementation" signifies.

Some parties called for language on: reducing incentives harmful to biodiversity; aligning all policies and financial flows with biodiversity objectives; and mainstreaming biodiversity concerns in all economic sectors and policies. Others suggested enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of resource use.

Some delegates stressed that eliminating direct and indirect harmful incentives does not replace financial commitments. They noted that these ideas, while valid, aim at addressing drivers of biodiversity loss and should not be misunderstood as leveraging new resources, cautioning against creative accounting.

Regarding what other means of implementation signify, some delegates highlighted capacity building, access and transfer of technology, technical and scientific cooperation, exchange of information, and research and training. A party noted that planning, strategizing, and the governance structure as a whole also constitute other means of implementation. A delegate noted that other means of implementation are already addressed in several Convention articles.

A delegate suggested removing reference to the finance gap and refer instead to resources that need to be mobilized and efficiently employed. Some proposed also including non-monetary means of implementation.

Many emphasized the need for establishing a global biodiversity fund, underscoring commitments of developed countries under Article 20 of the Convention (financial resources) and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). They underscored the need to address the technical and technological needs of developing countries as well as capacity building. Some noted the need of explicit mention of adequate and equitable deployment of financial resources.

Some delegates stressed the need to include resources from all sources. A party suggested specifying public and private financial flows. A few parties suggested "addressing" rather than "closing" the funding gap. A party proposed reference to building on past investments to address the finance gap.

A delegate highlighted the Dasgupta review on the economics of biodiversity, pointing towards a self-sustaining funding system for a nature-positive world.

Observers highlighted the need to reform the financial sector following a holistic approach and significantly increasing financial flows to be commensurate with implementation needs. They

cautioned against reliance on private finance and stressed the need to ensure the full and effective participation of IPLCs, women, and youth in decision making.

2030 Milestones: Co-lead Baerlocher reported that the friends of the co-leads group on milestones had held three meetings over lunch breaks since Tuesday, 15 March, to deliberate on whether the section on milestones should be maintained in the GBF. The group co-facilitators Melissa Laverde Ramirez (Colombia) and Virginie Dumoulin (France) outlined the discussions. They reported that some milestones are not aligned with the intended rationale of the GBF, and that others are unclear on their objectives and links to the goals and targets. The group also noted duplicated elements, and concluded that the milestones add confusion and complexity to the structure of the framework. They reported, however, that the parties prefer to keep elements of the milestones, and proposed integration into the goals and targets as appropriate.

Contact Group Co-lead Baerlocher proposed that the friends of the co-lead group continue to meet, guided by a new mandate, to provide guidance to the contact group on ways of incorporating the milestones into goals and targets.

Many parties agreed to the new mandate of the friends of the co-leads, with some insisting the mandate be strictly to provide guidance and not to redraft the sections. Some parties complained about being overstretched, arguing that the resulting strain on smaller delegations is unfair. Others also pointed out that integrating milestones that have not been agreed upon to goals and targets that are also not agreed is futile.

Working Group Co-Chairs intervened on the issue, noting the concerns of smaller delegations, and urging parties to draw on all their reserves to ensure that the four years spent on preparations and negotiations of the GBF are not lost. Parties agreed to extend the friends of the co-leads, to provide a non-paper on suggestions for incorporating milestones into targets and goals of the GBF.

SBSTTA Contact Group on GBF Monitoring

Co-Chair Oteng-Yeboah guided the discussions, which took place in the evening of Thursday, 17 March. Delegates resumed discussion on headline indicators.

Indicator 4.0.1 (proportion of species populations that are affected by human-wildlife conflict) was opposed by several parties, with some suggesting to instead focus on the proportion of species requiring extensive recovery action.

A number of parties welcomed indicator 4.0.2 (number of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in conservation facilities), with many saying that it should also address animal genetic resources and the proportion of genetically distinct populations within species. One party asked to consider both *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation. Another preferred a single headline indicator per target, suggesting focusing this discussion on the Red List Index.

Regarding indicator 5.0.1 (wildlife that is harvested legally and sustainably), several parties suggested focusing on avoiding illegal and unsustainable use of wildlife, pointing to data available through other Conventions, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Some noted difficulties in measuring illegal and unsustainable use of wildlife. One party and an observer asked to focus on the risk of zoonotic pathogen spillover.

On indicator 5.0.2 (proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels), a number of countries acknowledged the relevance of the indicator, with some warning that it cannot be disaggregated and compared between countries. Others pointed to divergent national data sets. Some urged considering bycatch and all aquatic species.

On indicator 6.0.1 (invasive alien species (IAS) spread), several parties stressed the importance of addressing IAS, with some requesting to also focus on pathways and prevention, and others pointing to the need to collect more information.

Regarding indicator 9.0.1 (national environmental-economic accounts of benefits from the use of wild species), some delegates urged focusing on sustainable use of wild species, and disaggregating terrestrial and marine species. Warning against monetization of nature, several delegates raised concerns with employing the UN System of Environmental-Economic Accounting - Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA) and relating it to national economic accounts.

On indicators 10.0.1 (proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture) and 10.0.2 (progress towards sustainable forest management), many noted the ongoing work under the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Some asked that the indicators apply also to other managed ecosystems and urged focusing on specific sectors in subindicators.

On indicator 11.0.1 (national environmental-economic accounts of regulation of air and water quality), a number of parties reiterated concerns about the reference to national environmental-economic accounts, with one party suggesting making monetary value indicators optional.

Regarding indicator 12.0.1 (share of the built-up area of cities that is green/blue space for public use), some said this indicator should also consider the quality of urban green space, so as to be taken into account in city planning.

Several delegates welcomed indicator 13.0.1 (indicators of operational legislative, administrative, or policy frameworks ensuring fair and equitable sharing of benefits, including based on PIC and MAT), with some asking to also refer to ABS measures and to delete the reference to PIC and MAT. Some said this indicator has to be further developed and include ABS implementation.

Regarding indicators 14.0.1 (extent to which national targets for integrating biodiversity values into policy development ensure that biodiversity values are mainstreamed across all sectors and integrated into environmental impact assessments) and 14.0.2 (integration of biodiversity into national accounting and reporting systems, defined as implementation of the SEEA-EA), some delegates reiterated concerns about the accounting system, whereas one delegate noted that accounting does not necessarily mean monetization. A number of delegations asked to disaggregate the first indicator by sectors and to better reflect the level of integration of biodiversity in decision making.

In the Corridors

Delegates have gritted their teeth and held on. Four days in, though, a tenuous contact group meeting may have been the straw that breaks the camel's back. After a discussion on milestones came to loggerheads, talk about yet another group on goals brought out open exasperation in the plenary hall. "We've been doing this for days without enough time to read texts—I haven't even eaten lunch today," hammered one delegate as the contact group went into overtime. Others complained about rapidly changing schedules, inconsistent texts, and the perennial problem of parallel talks: trying to establish indicators on targets that do not yet exist.

"Honestly, this meeting is brutal—three weeks is longer than a COP," echoed another delegate. Despite their initial energy, some self-admittedly naïve delegates who were initially looking forward to a Sunday hiking on the Salève are openly yearning for time to nap and do some laundry.

GBF Co-Chairs encouraged delegates not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. They reminded the room of the billions of people—the young, the old, the vulnerable—whom delegates collectively represent. Everyone is exhausted, but is saving even a little of what is left to save not worth the lost sleep and deferred meals? Some delegates pledged "herculean efforts." Whatever position delegates may hold, what's certain is that the sole day off in the Geneva Conference cannot come soon enough.