

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Monday, 21 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work on Monday, with the Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (WG2020) holding a plenary session in the morning to address digital sequence information (DSI). In the afternoon, a WG2020 contact group continued its deliberations on a set of GBF targets, focusing on meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing. In the evening, a SBSTTA contact group continued discussions on GBF monitoring; and an SBI contact group resumed considerations on resource mobilization and the financial mechanism.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the WG2020 plenary and the WG2020 contact group as well as the discussions of the two contact groups that met in the evening on Saturday, 19 March. The remaining two contact groups will be summarized in the Bulletin on Tuesday, 22 March.

WG2020 Plenary

WG2020 Co-Chair Francis Ogwal (Uganda), opened the second week of the meeting, on Monday, 21 March, which marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the International Day of Forests. He said that the Working Group is on the right track on the GBF, reporting increasing convergence on issues under deliberation.

Digital Sequence Information: Co-Chair Ogwal drew attention to the report of the Informal Co-Chairs' Advisory Group on DSI (CBD/WG2020/3/INF/8), co-led by Lactitia Tshitwamulomoni (South Africa) and Gaute Voigt-Hanssen (Norway).

Co-Lead Tshitwamulomoni provided an overview of the group's work, drawing attention to document CBD/WG/2020/3/4/Add.1 and focusing on: policy approaches and options for benefit-sharing arising from DSI; areas of potential convergence and divergence; and areas for additional work prior to COP-15. She noted that the group suggests a step-by-step approach to narrow down possible options and identify the necessary elements to move discussions forward. She highlighted a multi-criteria analysis and a performance matrix to guide the development of an analytical framework and assess different policy options, including both qualitative and quantitative benefits. She noted that the section on areas of convergence and divergence was not negotiated by the group and reflects the co-leads' understanding of the discussions. She suggested that the informal advisory group continue its work until COP-15 to achieve further progress on the contested issues.

Co-Chair Ogwal opened the floor for initial reflections, reminding delegates of their shared commitment to work towards resolving the divergence of views regarding benefit-sharing derived from the use of DSI on genetic resources as expressed in CBD Decision 14/20.

The AFRICAN GROUP stressed that a GBF without a solution on benefit-sharing from DSI will not be fit for purpose, cautioning that it will not support such a framework. He suggested a DSI solution that will generate substantive resources through the creation of a global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism under the Convention, collecting 1% levy on retail prices of all biodiversity-related products to support on-the-ground biodiversity conservation. Regarding the draft recommendation, he expressed disappointment due to the limited ambition and lack of a transformative vision.

The ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP underscored that the DSI concept remains unclear, calling for strengthening related information, knowledge, and capacities. She suggested developing a constructive dialogue, since the issue is "still at an infancy stage," without drawing conclusions hastily; and involving all relevant stakeholders, including business and IPLCs.

The EU said that, despite intersessional work, exploration of policy options is still at the preliminary stage, noting that a solid assessment needs to be carried out before any DSI-related decision. He underscored that identified policy options are not very detailed, calling for an independent assessment of the policy options to inform suitable approaches and modalities.

GRULAC highlighted the sovereign rights of countries over their genetic resources and the intrinsic relationship between DSI and genetic resources. He emphasized the relationship between genetic resources and traditional knowledge, stressing that they should be part of the deliberations under the Working Group on Article 8(j). He noted that national experiences on DSI should be taken into consideration in the development of methodologies and tools.

Many parties supported further work on the performance matrix and the relevant criteria to ensure progress. Many delegates supported the step-by-step approach suggested. BELARUS, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, and others said the informal group should continue working on the issue in preparation for the COP-15.

The EU called for a well-defined, realistic roadmap on DSI to COP-15, suggesting clear guidelines on the step-by-step approach proposed. He supported extending the work of the advisory informal group, with better representation of all stakeholders to ensure an inclusive and balanced process. BRAZIL stressed the process "should not be a marathon," urging a decision at COP-15.

COLOMBIA noted that the process should contemplate a term to replace DSI and clarify its scope. JAPAN inquired as to the timeline of the approach, noting that any decisions taken should consider the legal viability of the framework and expressing doubts as to the use of a multi-criteria analysis in developing next steps.

Many parties supported prioritizing guardianship of traditional knowledge on benefit-sharing arrangements, underscoring the role of IPLCs as primary beneficiaries due to their pivotal role on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

Many delegates, including the AFRICAN GROUP, GRULAC, and others stressed the need to ensure that benefits arising from DSI use are shared in a fair and equitable manner. GRULAC underscored technology transfer jointly addressed with capacity building, scientific cooperation, and resource mobilization as integral parts of a solution on DSI, calling for actions to bridge the existing gap on capacities between developed and developing countries. SUDAN, BURUNDI, OMAN, and others called for ensuring technology transfer and capacity building. SOUTH AFRICA highlighted, in addition to financial benefits, the development of capacities and value chains, and the development of innovations and jobs at the country of origin. BRAZIL, SAUDI ARABIA, BOLIVIA, and others underscored lack of technological capacities in the developing world to benefit from DSI, calling for supporting capacity building and facilitating technology transfer. INDONESIA called for ensuring democratization of access and use of DSI. BOLIVIA emphasized the need to ensure that the digital divide is not increased as well as ensuring intergenerational continuity of traditional knowledge use and practices. GUATEMALA said that non-monetary uses of DSI should be public, and that commercial use of DSI falls under the scope of the CBD. SERBIA said solutions should avoid creating additional bureaucratic procedures and excessive burden to research and development.

SOUTH AFRICA and BRAZIL drew attention to existing relevant national ABS frameworks and legislation. BRAZIL stressed that DSI must be an integral GBF component, including contributing towards resource mobilization. MEXICO emphasized the relevance of a rights-based approach; the need to work on a definition; and the need for the technological community to attend to ethical, environmental, and social concerns. BOLIVIA stressed that genetic material cannot be freely manipulated, calling for respecting the sacred life of all beings on Mother Earth.

MALAWI warned that failing to include DSI in the GBF would have negative consequences for capacity building and technology transfer, exchange of DSI between countries, and incentives for local communities and DSI providers. UGANDA said the GBF is intimately linked with DSI and that its adoption is contingent on resolving outstanding issues.

SWITZERLAND objected to suggestions that agreement on the GBF cannot be found without agreement on DSI, noting existing convergence on issues around public databases, rights and roles of IPLCs, and capacity building, among others. NEW ZEALAND emphasized that any DSI-related outcome must remain within the Convention's mandate, stressing that any outcome must continue to support scientific research and prioritize IPLCs and traditional knowledge in benefit-sharing.

SWITZERLAND did not support extension of ABS mechanisms under the Nagoya Protocol to include DSI. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA argued that DSI does not fall under the scope of the Convention or the Nagoya Protocol, and cautioned

that benefit-sharing policy options could potentially conflict with the temporal scope of both.

TURKEY emphasized the link between DSI and country of origin, focusing on traceability, including disclosure of origin, to ensure benefit-sharing derived from the utilization of DSI. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA and the UK supported open access to DSI in principle. JORDAN stressed that applications and regulatory frameworks should cover entire DNA sequences, including parts yet unknown, and highlighted the third objective of the Convention, equity, and justice. INDONESIA called for legal clarity and development of relevant terminology, and stressed that open access does not mean unrestricted access.

ISRAEL called for additional inputs on DSI from diverse stakeholders, especially those focusing on molecular biological research for agriculture, innovation for drugs, and medicines for veterinary use and human health.

INDIA said DSI may be interpreted to include DNA and RNA sequence data, and information related to proteins and metabolites. He added that overcoming traceability is possible through advanced technology, adding that those communities that are true custodians of genetic resources should be beneficiaries of DSI.

Regarding non-parties and observers, the US encouraged the use of DSI data in public databases, and stressed the importance of including a broad set of stakeholders in future work.

Reminding delegates that genetic resources are “alive with a connecting spirit,” IIFB pressed for the inclusion of biocultural and genetic diversity, as well as the full and effective participation of IPLCs. The THIRD WORLD NETWORK argued that the current setup of “open access” databases reinforces inequalities.

Deliberations will continue under WG2020 Contact Group 5. The co-leads will prepare a non-paper based on the views exchanged, to be discussed on the Contact Group's first meeting on Wednesday, 23 March.

WG2020 Contact Group 3

Co-Lead Gabriele Obermayr (Austria) said that, following the first meeting of the contact group, the co-leads developed a non-paper to guide further deliberations. She noted that the non-paper was based on: the views expressed by delegates in the first session; the first draft of the GBF (CBD/WG2020/3/3); the Co-Chairs' reflection document (CBD/WG2020/3/6); and the report of the first part of WG2020-3 (CBD/WG2020/3/5). She stressed the need to ensure that the targets are clear to all, and have precise and concise language. She suggested including additional information and explanations in the glossary.

On **Target 9** (ensure the sustainable management and use of wild species to enhance benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations, while safeguarding customary sustainable use by IPLCs), delegates made numerous suggestions.

A few parties suggested “increasing” rather than “ensuring” the sustainable management and use of wild species. Some suggested ensuring the conservation and/or restoration of the places most important for delivering benefits. Others noted the target should focus on sustainable management and use of wild species rather than on conservation. A delegate preferred to referring only to sustainable management. A party suggested reference to equitable governance for nature and people. A regional group stressed the need to ensure that all uses of wild species are sustainable. A few parties suggested explicit reference to fisheries. Others proposed stronger focus on innovation and reference to sustainable bioeconomy. A party suggested introducing the concept of bioecology.

Some proposed deleting explicit examples of benefits, such as food and water security. Others suggested adding to these examples, with proposals including references to livelihood security, nutrition, and medicines. A few delegates offered general language to enhance “social, economic, and environmental benefits.” A party suggested reference to nature’s contributions to people (NCPs), including ecosystem services. Some delegates noted that “all” people should be recipients of benefits.

A regional group, supported by some, proposed referring to those most dependent on biodiversity rather than to those in vulnerable situations. Some parties suggested adding women to people in vulnerable situations.

Some delegates suggested referring to “terrestrial, freshwater, and marine” wild species. A few parties suggested adding coastal species. A party proposed referring to biodiversity in general. Some suggested deleting reference to “wild” species; others opposed this, saying this is a core element of the target.

Some parties preferred “protecting” rather than “safeguarding” customary sustainable use. A few parties suggested additional reference to the rights of IPLCs and the rights of Mother Earth. A delegate suggested referring to customary “legal” sustainable use.

Delegates further discussed the best place to include reference to the One Health approach.

Several delegates supported suggestions to refocus on the basic elements of the target, highlighting sustainable management and use, wild species, and benefits.

Many supported alternate text from Co-Lead Obermayr to “ensure all management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing benefits for all people, especially those in vulnerable situations, while safeguarding customary sustainable use by IPLCs.” Discussion will continue.

Many parties expressed support for the co-leads’ proposed version of **Target 10** (ensure that all areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, forestry and other productive uses are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, contributing to the efficiency and resilience of these production systems).

One party, supported by many, proposed alternate language making reference to increasing the efficiency, productivity, and resilience of production systems. Several parties were critical of the term “efficiency,” with others stating that both efficiency and productivity are necessary for food security. One party requested language on maintaining ecosystem services, while others preferred NCPs.

Parties were divided on the inclusion of fisheries in the target, with some suggesting that fisheries should be included under the target on wild species, and others suggesting that the target’s focus on food and agriculture justifies the inclusion. One party, supported by some, suggested adding language on restoration of “the places most important for delivering” conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

One party, opposed by others, proposed allocating “at least 20% of working landscapes for native or diverse vegetation,” suggesting that a quantitative aspect of the target is necessary. Several parties requested reference to “restoration.”

Several delegates suggested additional language on, among others, cattle raising and livestock; “semi-natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes”; the rights of small-scale food producers; agroecology; agroecosystems; circular economy; pollinators; and “all sectors of the economy.”

Parties disagreed on whether to include specific types of sustainable agriculture in the target rather than simply “sustainable

agriculture,” with those opposed arguing that this would continue disagreements present in other subsidiary bodies; and still others suggesting “biodiversity-friendly practices.”

Several developing country parties argued that ensuring “all” areas are managed sustainably was unrealistic; one, opposed by several, suggested “continually increasing” areas under production.

Co-lead Obermayr referred the target to a friends of the co-lead informal group to further work on the text. The Contact Group will hold its next session on Saturday, 26 March.

SBSTTA Contact Group on Biodiversity and Health

The Contact Group held its third meeting on the evening of Saturday, 19 March, with Co-Chair Helena Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) indicating that this will be its last session. The session focused on negotiating operative text based on the third version of the non-paper, which incorporates the changes proposed by parties. She also explained that the Co-Chairs had seen convergence regarding terms to be used, including to: refer to both national and subnational governments; add social to mental and physical health; and replace wildlife with wild species. Some delegates opposed the suggestion to add specific mention of small island developing states (SIDS) and countries with economies in transition every time developing countries are referenced. Co-Chair Brown indicated that, until this issue is resolved in the draft recommendation, brackets would remain around the global action plan and the alternative formulations referring to options or voluntary guidelines. She then directed the discussion to the annexed draft global action plan.

On the overview section, delegates agreed to: delete the reference to the build back better agenda; include reference to persons with disabilities; and refer to mainstreaming biodiversity and health in accordance with the provisions of the CBD. Delegates agreed to retain references to GBF implementation and the achievement of the 2050 Vision of living in harmony with nature. A number of brackets remain in the section, including on respecting states’ sovereign rights, the One Health approach, and ABS, including genetic sequence data.

On the background section, delegates agreed on language recognizing, among others, the value of the One Health approach to address the cross-cutting issue of biodiversity and human health as an integrated approach consistent with the ecosystem approach.

In the introduction section, delegates discussed a reference to fair and equitable access to vaccinations, therapies, and treatments. Many developing country representatives asked to retain it, pointing to the biodiversity and health linkages, whereas a number of developed country representatives asked to delete it, with one noting that this is out of the Convention’s scope. The reference remains in brackets. Delegates then discussed whether to explicitly refer to UN Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 and/or whether to describe the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, which the resolution recognizes. A small group was tasked with trying to resolve this issue.

On a paragraph on NCPs, a developing countries regional group asked to unbracket a reference to ABS, with some delegates opposing; the reference remains bracketed. Delegates agreed to remove the brackets in a paragraph on biodiversity decline.

Regarding a paragraph on emerging infectious diseases, some delegates asked to add specific reference to zoonotic and vector-driven diseases, which others opposed, while some asked to add further examples to the list, including swine flu. A few countries

categorically opposed to a reference to the IPBES Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics which some countries wanted to retain. A small group was tasked with addressing the issue.

A number of developing country delegates, opposed by some developed country representatives, asked to include a reference to ensure equal and equitable access to medical supplies, in view of poverty and other development challenges. One delegate proposed to instead address the issue of unequal access. The issue will be further discussed in an informal group.

Delegates were not able to reach consensus on including a reference to the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Regarding a paragraph on One Health among other holistic approaches, delegates agreed to refer to the environment rather than “our ecosystems” and to refer to multi-sectoral approaches. Specific references to the One Health High Level Expert Panel and other specific bodies remain bracketed.

On a paragraph on documents taken into account in the draft global action plan, some delegates wanted to include specific references to work under CITES and other bodies; others opposed, and the references remain bracketed.

Regarding a paragraph on the COVID-19 pandemic, delegates agreed to delete the reference to the “build back better” agenda, while a reference to specific international bodies remains bracketed.

On a paragraph on achieving a biodiversity-inclusive One Health transition, delegates agreed to refer to the emergence of future zoonotic diseases, including those with pandemic potential.

The Co-Chairs indicated that the non-paper will be forwarded to plenary. One delegate reflected that biodiversity and health should not be one of the more controversial decisions, and expressed concern that the focus had not been on negotiating the specific action elements.

SBI Contact Group on the Draft Gender Plan of Action

The Contact Group, co-chaired by Melissa Laverde (Colombia) and Scott Wilson (Canada), held its first session on Saturday, 19 March, addressing a non-paper on the draft post-2020 gender plan of action.

On modalities, one participant, supported by others, expressed concerns about language related to climate change, arguing that it went beyond the scope of the Convention. Another suggested a compromise around “considering” the consequences of climate change.

One observer, supported by a party but opposed by others, suggested text related to the sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources. Compromise text was reached by referencing “pursuit of the three objectives of the Convention.” One delegate asked to delete reference to biological and genetic resources, and to ecosystem services.

Delegates debated whether to refer to “those who identify as women and girls,” or “diverse gender identities including women and girls,” with a number of parties expressing concerns regarding the latter formulation and one even suggesting it would require a footnote defining gender narrowly. Delegates agreed to refer to women and girls in all their diversity.

Delegates agreed to refer to “gender-responsive” rather than “gender-sensitive” GBF implementation; and to national and subnational governments, cities, and other local authorities regarding submission of relevant information.

Delegates further debated the gender plan of action’s objectives; indicative actions; and possible deliverables, and proposed timelines and responsible actors, as included in a summarizing table in the non-paper.

Delegates agreed to refer to all genders. One party asked to keep references to benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources bracketed.

After lengthy discussions, delegates agreed to delete references to rights over biological resources and instead refer to women and girls’ access to ownership and control over biological resources, as well as land and water, across the columns on objectives, indicative actions, and deliverables.

Regarding a proposed action on supporting women’s organizations and networks, delegates considered an alternative proposal to “lead or participate in decision-making on policies relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources, through, *inter alia*, consultation of women in accordance with national law and policies relating to land, waters and oceans, land tenure and property reforms, FPIC, and the provisions of financial support.”

One party asked to bracket the reference to FPIC, or limit it by stating “as applicable.” Delegates agreed to refer to the full and effective participation of women and girls in FPIC processes, either bracketing free or referring to PIC, and approval and involvement. Delegates debated whether to include specific references to benefit-sharing or to just refer to the three CBD objectives. One delegation pointed out repeated references to policies related to land and water, with one proposing to bundle them together and refer to updating national legislation.

After four hours of negotiations, the Co-Chairs indicated that they would forward the text with remaining square brackets to plenary to resolve outstanding issues. Some groups expressed concerns that gender issues would again not be given sufficient time and attention, and one proposed establishment of a small group to continue work. The suggestion will be conveyed to plenary.

In the Corridors

A change is as good as a rest. One day off from the tiresome routine of the previous week ushered noticeably rested delegates into the second week of the meeting. Delegates seemed more pliable to views and expressed themselves in a more constructive manner, with the occasional joke and good banter. This was essential, as the working group on the post-2020 framework addressed, for the first time, digital sequence information, one of the meeting’s “hot potatoes.” Although significantly divergent views surfaced during the initial discussions, a seasoned delegate suggested that “if we manage to find common ground on DSI, many pieces of the GBF puzzle will find their place way more easily than most think.”

Renewed vigor helped during the discussion on GBF targets. One referred to sets of “new eyes” as delegates provided solutions to targets, replacing jargon and complex text with simpler wording focusing on the key messages. One delegate, lauding the return to simplicity in a target, exclaimed: “This is the kind of text we want, not a newspaper. We had been completely lost before this!” Still, alternative suggestions were flying and consensus remains distant. As one participant noted, it will take a serious push in the remaining eight days of the meeting to reach a successful outcome and pave the way for a celebratory COP-15, which will put humanity on a path towards healing the wounds we have been inflicting upon the planet for so long.