

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Sunday, 27 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work on Sunday, with a SBSTTA closing plenary meeting throughout the day. SBSTTA adopted 11 decisions and recommendations to COP-15, and the meeting's report. The Friends of the Co-Leads on digital sequence information (DSI) met at lunchtime and in the afternoon. The WG2020 Contact Group on DSI continued discussions in the evening.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the SBSTTA plenary and the WG2020 Contact Group that met in the evening of Saturday, 26 March to address targets of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) on tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming. The remaining WG2020 Contact Group on DSI will be summarized in the Bulletin on Monday, 28 March.

SBSTTA Plenary

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz opened the session, outlining the agenda items to be considered.

Organizational matters: Regional groups nominated, and plenary approved, new members for the SBSTTA Bureau: Jean Bruno Mikissa (Gabon) for the African Group; Bilal Qteshat (Jordan) for the Asia-Pacific Group; Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic) for the Central and Eastern Europe Group; Ana Teresa Lecaros Terry (Peru) for the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC); and Marina von Weissenberg (Finland) for the Western Europe and Others Group.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION expressed disappointment in the election process. She noted that countries of Central Asia had been excluded from voting, “destroying prior tradition and practice.” She added that the balance in representation has been violated, noting that the EU essentially has two places in the Bureau. She called for reestablishing a fair process for the election of officers, and stressed that no future statement can be made in the name of the region without an agreement by the Russian Federation, including a written confirmation.

Fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5): Chair Benítez Díaz introduced the draft recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.2). He noted that the only bracketed part of the document concerns whether SBSTTA's recommendation to COP-15 should “welcome” or “take note of” GBO-5. He suggested “taking note with appreciation” as a compromise.

GERMANY suggested keeping the two options in brackets. The recommendation was adopted.

Proposed monitoring framework for the GBF: Chair Benítez Díaz introduced the document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.10), noting it contains a request to the Secretariat to facilitate a scientific and technical review of the proposed indicators of the GBF for consideration by WG2020 and COP-15.

Noting that he would not block consensus, BRAZIL expressed concern regarding a subsidiary body tasking the Secretariat with actions that have budgetary implications, stressing that this should not become common practice.

Parties adopted the SBSTTA decision.

Scientific and technical information to support the review of the GBF goals and targets, and related indicators and baselines: Chair Benítez Díaz introduced the draft recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.3), noting it contains draft terms of reference for an ad hoc technical expert group (AHTEG) on indicators for the GBF.

Chair Benítez Díaz suggested deleting four paragraphs on the use of headline, component, and complementary indicators, emphasizing that they are redundant, as they are part of SBI's mandate.

CANADA and SWITZERLAND opposed deletion, noting that the paragraphs in question have implications for the monitoring framework, and that items under discussion in the subsidiary bodies are interlinked. Chair Benítez Díaz reiterated that the paragraphs are remnants of an older version of the document and that agreement had been reached to address the document under SBI. The EU, the UK, and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO expressed their full support for the Chair's proposal.

The AFRICAN GROUP noted that some paragraphs should be deleted, but requested that the whole document be put in brackets until agreement is reached on the GBF.

On a paragraph on aligning national monitoring with the UN System of Environmental-Economic Accounting-Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA-EA), Chair Benítez Díaz suggested lifting bracketed text by inviting parties to align their national monitoring with SEEA-EA as appropriate and according to their national priorities and circumstances. The EU and ARGENTINA supported the proposal. SWITZERLAND opposed, calling for retaining the brackets.

COSTA RICA requested bracketing a paragraph inviting the UN Statistical Commission, IPBES, and others to support the operationalization of the monitoring framework for the GBF.

Chair Benítez Díaz suggested lifting the brackets on language on the development and operationalization of indicators related to traditional knowledge and IPLCs, noting that such indicators exist in the monitoring framework. FINLAND supported the proposal, but TOGO opposed, saying that the whole document has been bracketed.

On a paragraph requesting the Secretariat to support parties to implement the monitoring framework, subject to the availability of resources, Chair Benítez Díaz suggested that the request read to “facilitate the development of” guidance on relevant “capacity building and development.” CANADA and GABON opposed,

with the former adding that they can accept the reference to capacity building and development.

SOUTH AFRICA suggested an additional paragraph inviting the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, with the support of the Secretariat, to prepare a set of complementary actions related to plant conservation to support the implementation of the GBF. The proposal also includes that other relevant decisions adopted at COP-15, as well as previous other experiences with implementation of plant conservation as described in GBO-5 and the 2020 plant conservation report, be considered at a SBSTTA meeting following COP-15.

SWITZERLAND suggested making the request conditional to availability of resources. CANADA supported the proposal, but noted that it may be better placed in other documents.

Chair Benítez Díaz drew attention to the annex containing the terms of reference for the AHTEG on indicators, suggesting keeping the brackets in the document as “it is premature to deal with this.”

The EU stressed its “big disappointment,” emphasizing that, despite the Chair’s efforts to move forward and the hours devoted in relevant contact groups’ discussions, parties are not ready to make progress. She warned that “this is a catch-22 situation; we are making one step forward and two steps back; and if we continue like this we will never be able to reach agreement in Kunming.”

The parties approved the recommendation with these amendments. The whole document is bracketed and many additional brackets exist in various paragraphs.

Programme of Work of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services:

Chair Benítez-Díaz introduced the draft recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.4), noting that this item had been considered in plenary during the first part of SBSTTA-24.

BRAZIL requested brackets on a paragraph on linkages between deliverables of the IPBES and the CBD. After requests for justification from GERMANY and EU, he noted that there was not sufficient time to consider the implications of the paragraph, and warned against certain parties having “unrealistic expectations.”

The UK requested bracketing of paragraphs related to work programmes and reports of IPBES, in order to update them to reflect the upcoming ninth session of IPBES (IPBES-9). The AFRICAN GROUP supported clarifying the modalities of collaboration between IPBES and the COP.

IPBES SECRETARIAT outlined the body’s upcoming programme of work, in which IPBES-9 will take place in Bonn, Germany, on 3-9 July 2022, and IPBES-10 in Madison, Wisconsin, US, in April-May 2023. She noted that, considering that CBD COP-15 would take place after IPBES-9, IPBES may consider the request for a second global assessment and an assessment on connectivity at IPBES-10.

The document was adopted with brackets.

Synthetic Biology: Chair Benítez Díaz introduced the recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.5), noting numerous brackets. BRAZIL requested bracketing the entire document, arguing that it prejudices the outcomes of ongoing negotiations. CANADA, supported by many, pressed to adopt the document with existing brackets. Following deliberation, the document was adopted with existing brackets.

Risk assessment and risk management of Living Modified Organisms: Chair Benítez Díaz noted that the document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.6) was discussed in plenary during the first part of SBSTTA-24. The recommendation was adopted with brackets.

Biodiversity and Agriculture: Chair Benítez Díaz noted that the document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.7/Rev.1) considers both a recommendation, considered in the first part of SBSTTA-24, and an annexed draft plan of action 2020-2030 for the International

Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity. ARGENTINA requested brackets around a subparagraph of the draft decision related to preparing a global assessment of soil biodiversity.

In the draft plan of action, AUSTRALIA requested using the tripartite definition of FPIC. On a subparagraph concerning challenges, BRAZIL requested bracketing a reference to food safety. He also requested bracketing a sub-element around the linkages between soil biodiversity, and human health and well-being. The document was adopted with brackets.

Invasive Alien Species: Delegates addressed the recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.8).

ISRAEL suggested, and delegates agreed, to remove brackets around “changes of pathways” in the decision on monitoring effects of large-scale releases of alien populations. AUSTRALIA called for including the tripartite definition of FPIC in relevant text on IPLCs.

Delegates adopted the recommendation with minor amendments.

Biodiversity and Health: Delegates addressed the final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.9). Chair Benítez Díaz drew attention to brackets on preambular and operative text.

The AFRICAN GROUP noted the lack of adequate time for conclusive discussions of the relevant CRP, and called for including “DSI and associated traditional knowledge” in the paragraph on issues to be prioritized in the production of an updated draft global action plan on biodiversity and health.

NORWAY requested alignment with language of the WHO decision on preparedness for, and response to, health emergencies.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, supported by CHINA, proposed bracketing a reference to the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13 on the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

BAHAMAS expressed reservations on the inclusion of the One Health approach in the final recommendation, requesting bracketing. The Secretariat explained progressive discussions on this approach by the CBD COP, where COP-12 welcomed the approach, COP-13 emphasized its value among other holistic approaches, and COP-14 welcomed incorporation of biodiversity considerations into the approach.

Several parties, including CANADA, FRANCE, GERMANY, MEXICO, FINLAND, COLOMBIA, CHILE, and EGYPT, drew attention to lengthy and in-depth relevant discussions in the Friends of the Chair Group and urged compromise in order to advance work on biodiversity and health.

Delegates adopted CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.9 with the brackets and amendments.

Doreen Robinson, Head of Biodiversity and Land at UN Environment Programme (UNEP), in a statement on behalf of members of the Quadripartite for One Health and others, said that the One Health approach is key in supporting sustainable development outcomes by maximizing co-benefits and synergies. She highlighted the Multi-Partner Trust Fund on Nature for Health announced at UNEA 5.2, with an initial contribution of 50 million euros from Germany. The fund, she noted, aims to help countries achieve more holistic policymaking by creating evidence of the links between biodiversity, climate, and health, including through the application of the One Health approach.

Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas:

Delegates addressed the final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.11). Chair Benítez Díaz reported the lack of time to complete negotiations and highlighted the Annex, which contains outcomes of deliberations and inputs submitted by parties.

MALAYSIA expressed disappointment regarding the lack of prioritization in regard to time for marine issues, and proposed footnotes which would also be included in the final

recommendation on conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.12).

SEYCHELLES shared similar concerns to Malaysia, adding that several targets of the GBF are linked to marine issues and EBSAs and requested intersessional work to complete the work on these items.

Following informal consultations, SEYCHELLES, building on a proposal by Malaysia, suggested language to be incorporated in both draft recommendations on marine issues. The proposed text:

- takes note of the outcomes of the unresolved discussions on EBSAs/the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity discussed under item 6 at SBSTTA-24 contained in the annex and the proposals submitted by parties and observers on the matter, on the invitation of the chair, contained in document CBD/SBSTTA/24/Inf.42, which are to be taken as the basis for further considerations on this issue at COP-15;
- takes note that work reflected in the annex was not completed due to the extraordinary circumstances resulting from the limitations on in-person meetings caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, the need to urgently negotiate the GBF, and the need to schedule a meeting in consideration of delegates who participated in BBNJ IGC-4;
- further notes that this practice would not set a precedent for the future, and that sufficient time will be allocated for fair, just, thorough, and equitable deliberations by the subsidiary bodies;
- requests the Secretariat, in advance of COP-15 and subject to the availability of funds, to facilitate consultations both in person and online among parties, other governments, and relevant stakeholders, including IPLCs, women, and youth, with a view to advancing discussions on EBSAs/ the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity;
- recognizes that the outcomes of these consultations will help to form the basis for focused deliberations on this issue at COP-15, and further requests that dedicated time be given on this issue on organization of work for COP-15; and
- transmits the previously referred work facilitated by the Secretariat to the CBD for consideration at COP-15, with the view to adopting a decision on this matter.

Maldives for SIDS, ISRAEL, COLOMBIA, SWEDEN, CHILE, BRAZIL, and DENMARK supported the suggested text.

COLOMBIA and CHILE expressed concern that the issues were not tackled during the virtual session. SIDS urged for work on the substantive matters intersessionally, without replicating the same challenging situation at COP-15. FINLAND suggested specifying IPLCs, women, and youth as relevant stakeholders invited to the intersessional consultation, which was agreed.

JAPAN supported the idea for intersessional work, querying whether consultations will be formal after SBSTTA-24 is concluded. He further noted, with BRAZIL and the UK, that some of the annexes on the document on EBSAs have not been discussed due to time limitations. The Secretariat explained that intersessional consultations will enhance mutual understanding on some of the contentious issues without conducting formal negotiations. BRAZIL suggested clarifying that the informal consultations will be open to all parties.

The final recommendations on EBSAs and on the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity were adopted with these amendments.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, on behalf of DeepSea Conservation Coalition (DSCC), Greenpeace International, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), WWF International, and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), stressed that the ocean is the largest ecosystem, hosting the highest diversity, the greatest biomass, and absorbing the most carbon dioxide. She noted that despite suffering the highest and most unprecedented threats, it

is apparently being neglected. She warned that without a healthy ocean, targets and commitments to restore the natural world will fail. She urged parties to assign enough time intersessionally and at COP-15 to address issues around marine and coastal biodiversity.

Other Matters: No other matters were raised.

Adoption of the report: Rapporteur Senka Barudanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) introduced the draft report of the meeting (CBD/SBSTTA/24/Part2/L.1), noting that it is largely procedural. She further said that the report of the first part of SBSTTA-24 will be incorporated into the final version.

On organizational matters, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION requested inclusion of its statement on the election of officers in the final report.

On the GBF, COLOMBIA noted, in the final report, its deep concern that it has been left in brackets.

On marine and coastal biodiversity, CHILE and COLOMBIA requested to be added as supporters of DENMARK's statement of their reluctance to agree to not addressing the issue further at SBSTTA-24, noting that "it was unfortunate that the agenda item was not being discussed." CHILE proposed an additional paragraph acknowledging the severe time constraints, but that their support for the proposed way forward rests on the understanding that sufficient time would be allowed for discussion at COP-15.

On biodiversity and health, BELGIUM noted his disappointment on the outcome of negotiations, and that the relevant action plan will be discussed at COP-16 rather than COP-15.

Delegates adopted the report.

Closure of the meeting: Bridging the end of work at SBSTTA-24 and the beginning of work for COP-15, CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema quoted T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets": "To make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." She noted SBSTTA's ambitious agenda during an "unprecedented period in its history," and highlighted progress on a proposed monitoring framework, and on biodiversity and agriculture, among others.

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benítez-Díaz highlighted the difficult virtual intersessional work prior to this meeting, and expressed his joy at being able to discuss, argue, and even disagree in person after a two-year pause. He noted that SBSTTA is now sending 12 L documents to COP-15, some of which will require both formal and informal intersessional work. Visibly moved, he thanked his team at the SBSTTA bureau; the Secretariat; the logistics teams; and the co-leads of the contact groups and informal groups for their efforts. He closed the meeting at 17:06.

WG2020 Contact Group

WG2020 Contact Group 4 on GBF targets 14-21, co-led by Anne Teller (European Union) and Jorge Murillo (Colombia), met for its third session in the evening of Saturday, 26 March 2022. The group addressed targets on tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming. They negotiated on the basis of a non-paper containing the Co-Leads' proposals for the respective goals based on previous discussions in the contact group.

Target 16: Delegates reacted to the Co-Leads' proposal on encouraging sustainable consumption choices through supportive legislative and regulatory frameworks, and improving education and access to information in order to reduce by at least half the waste and, where relevant, overconsumption of food and other materials. One delegate asked to reduce food waste by at least half and significantly reduce all waste, whereas others asked to delete all references to overconsumption of food in light of inequities. A developed country regional group proposed to reduce waste by at least half, including food waste; whereas others, drawing on the SDGs, proposed to halve global per capita food waste

and substantially reduce waste generation. A developing country regional group asked to refer to responsible consumption choices and to focus the target on consumer choices. Delegates further asked to include references to: policy options; cultural, economic, and social preferences; accurate and verified information; fairness and equity, taking into account historical patterns of production and consumption; and incentives to promote sustainable consumption. The latter was withdrawn after strong opposition. The Co-Leads' proposal with many bracketed additions and proposed deletions will form the basis for further discussions.

Target 17: Delegates considered the Co-Leads' proposal focusing on strengthening capacity and implementing measures regarding impacts of LMOs, while recognizing the potential benefits of biotechnology towards achieving the CBD objectives. A number of delegates opposed reference to potential benefits, noting the target's focus on the impacts of biotechnology, while others urged retaining it. Delegates debated whether the target is applicable only to Cartagena Protocol parties, or whether to refer to all parties, noting a number of related CBD provisions binding on all. A number of delegates welcomed the Co-Leads' proposal. Others requested adding references to, *inter alia*: taking into account socioeconomic considerations, including through horizon scanning, monitoring, and assessment; ensuring liability and redress for damage; synthetic biology and other new genetic techniques; and risk assessment and management of LMOs. All additions and proposed deletions were retained in brackets as the basis for further discussion.

Target 18: Delegates initiated discussions on the Co-Leads' proposal to phase out or reform incentives harmful to biodiversity in a just, effective, and equitable way, while substantially and progressively reducing them by at least US\$ 500 billion per year, including all of the most harmful subsidies; and ensure that positive incentives, including public and private economic and regulatory incentives, are scaled up, consistent with the CBD and other relevant international obligations. The numerical values and operative text to "identify, redirect, repurpose, and eliminate" incentives harmful to biodiversity remain in brackets.

Some delegates asked to use the term "subsidies" and to specify that they be addressed in a manner consistent with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, while others opposed, suggesting addressing the issue "in accordance with the CBD and other relevant international obligations." One delegate proposed to take into account national socio-economic conditions and to prioritize the stewardship of IPLCs, small-holder producers, and women.

Co-lead Murillo proposed restructuring the text to first refer to eliminating harmful incentives and then to redirecting and repurposing them to positive incentives or nature-positive activities domestically and internationally. Delegates considered the restructured target, reintroducing brackets and additions. A delegation proposed a shorter proposal to identify and eliminate, redirect, or repurpose to nature-positive activities, incentives that are harmful to biodiversity, including all harmful subsidies, and ensure that positive incentives are scaled up consistent and in harmony with the CBD and other relevant international obligations. All proposals remain bracketed and were maintained as the basis for future discussion.

Target 19: Co-Lead Teller explained that the target had been split into two sub-targets: one on financial resources and the other on capacity building. The one on financial resources contains brackets on numerical values and other controversial issues, such as references to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). She asked delegates to decide if they could agree to a general reference to increasing financial resources "from all sources," or whether specific ones had to be listed; and whether payments for ecosystem services should be specified. One delegate stressed that most developing countries are environmental creditors and have to be compensated for environmental

services they provide to the world. Another added that unless there are clear numerical elements in this target, there should be no numerical elements in any other GBF target. A number of delegates opposed references to CBDR, noting that this language is not contained in the CBD, while others wanted to maintain it as a principle of international environmental law. A developing country regional group asked to increase financial flows by at least US\$10 billion per year to at least US\$100 billion by 2030 in the form of international grants. Some delegates, opposed by others, preferred to specify a percentage, namely 1% of the global GDP as set out in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Economic Outlook. One party proposed to instead double domestic resource mobilization by 2030.

Pointing to the GEF as the financial mechanism for the CBD, a number of delegates opposed an additional financial mechanism, while others urged establishing a global biodiversity fund. A developing country proposed an alternative formulation that: in accordance with CBD Article 20 (financial resources), developed country parties shall provide X US\$ billions in new and additional financial resources to enable developing country parties to meet the agreed full incremental costs of the implementation of the GBF, including through increased funding for the global biodiversity fund, avoiding double counting, enhancing transparency and predictability, and stimulating payments for environmental services. A representative expressed concerns about attempts to remove references to developing countries, especially in this provision, and asked to further clarify developed countries' obligations. The heavily bracketed and amended Co-Lead proposal will form the basis for future discussions.

Regarding the sub-target on capacity building, many delegates welcomed the Co-Leads' proposal, while others asked to include references to: access to technology and innovation; technology horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment; South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation; achieving a substantial increase in joint technology development and joint scientific research programmes; and strengthening scientific research capacities on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The changes remain bracketed and will be subject to further discussion.

In the Corridors

Daylight savings time is rough on everyone. If the haggard looks on some delegates' faces were any indication, it was the last thing the Geneva Biodiversity Conference needed on Sunday, as those who had left the venue at 3:00 AM were back in their seats with little sleep to refresh them. Even though only one subsidiary body was on the schedule, parties held back-to-back plenary, Friends of the Chair, and Contact Group sessions through the day and into the night.

"Insufficient time" has been one of the most uttered expressions during the meeting: the inevitable backlash of trying to do so much in such a brief period. "We have the mandate—if only we had had the time to use it," one seasoned observer asked in the lazy Sunday sunshine. "With what we're leaving them, ministers are going to have their hands full in Kunming."

The sound of the gavel closing the SBSTTA plenary later that afternoon marked some of the successes of the two-and-a-half week exercise. Even though brackets in the text dampened a true sense of celebration, genuine applause underscored the tremendous amount of effort on everyone's part—the Secretariat, the delegates, and the invisible but essential work of interpreters, editors, and logistical staff. "I would have liked some more sleep, of course," one delegate admitted, "but I think it's been worth it, even if it was a heck of a boot camp." Would they do it again? Many seem game for the intersessional work that has been called for. "We have no choice. The GBF depends on it. So we have to roll up our sleeves." After a nap, perhaps.