

UN Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Monday, 21 October 2024

Following Sunday's ceremony, opening and regional statements marked the beginning of the official proceedings of the UN Biodiversity Conference, including the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the 11th Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CP MOP 11), and the fifth Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol (NP MOP 5) on access and benefit-sharing (ABS). Two Working Groups met in the afternoon, to review draft decisions, and establish multiple contact and informal groups. Four contact groups met in the evening to address draft decisions on: Article 8(j) and related provisions on Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and traditional knowledge; digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources; biodiversity and health; and biodiversity mainstreaming.

Plenary

The meeting opened with a spiritual welcome by the Misak Indigenous People of Cauca, Colombia. COP 15 President Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, stressed that the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is a major milestone for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. He called for solidarity and feasible actions backed by innovative financial resources.

Susana Muhamad, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colombia, was elected COP 16 and CP MOP 11 President, with Nneka Nicholas, Antigua and Barbuda, elected NP MOP 5 President.

CBD Executive Secretary Astrid Schomaker said COP 16 is the largest to date, a sign of increased understanding of the biodiversity crisis. She urged courage and compromise to step up action for nature, concluding that "peace with nature cannot be put in brackets."

COP 16 President Muhamad stressed that the GBF is not "a standard environmental policy," but a "revolution of how we live on this planet," requiring a of whole-of-government and -society approach. She emphasized the value of multilateralism, negotiation, and mutual understanding, urging delegates to build trust through frank discussions and find landing zones in controversial agenda items. She highlighted deliberations on Article 8(j), DSI, resource mobilization, and the monitoring framework, stressing that "Cali 2024 could be a light in the very dark world that is unfolding."

Statements: Senegal, for the AFRICAN GROUP, said that the submission of national targets from 41 African parties portrays

the region's commitment to CBD and GBF implementation. They underscored the need to: increase biodiversity-related funding; establish a specific fund to support implementation; reach a solid, binding agreement on the multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism from DSI use; and facilitate capacity building and technology transfer.

Cambodia, for ASIA-PACIFIC, highlighted the importance of: capacity-development programmes at all levels for GBF implementation; resource mobilization, including the need for timely access to funding; a balanced decision on DSI; and synergies, including among the Rio Conventions.

Jamaica, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), highlighted: sufficient, timely, and adequate resource mobilization; the DSI mechanism; the mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting, and review; and the central role of IPLCs.

Hungary, for the EU, called for adopting: a process for the global review of collective progress of GBF implementation; the revised resource mobilization strategy; the operational modalities of the DSI mechanism; and a solid new work programme on Article 8(j).

Switzerland, also for Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, and UK (JUSCANZ), prioritized finalizing the monitoring framework and the global review of collective progress, as well as improving means of implementation, operationalizing the DSI mechanism, advancing work on marine and coastal biodiversity, and promoting IPLCs' full and effective participation.

Maldives, for SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS), urged parties to recognize the special circumstances of SIDS and make available adequate, predictable, and timely funding to implement the GBF successfully, and resolve outstanding issues on marine and coastal biodiversity. Brazil, for the LIKE-MINDED MEGADIVERSE COUNTRIES, underlined the gap between GBF Target 19 (resource mobilization) and reality. On the DSI mechanism, they stressed the need to create a fund under the authority of COP, not undermine national ABS systems, and ensure IPLCs' rights. Drawing attention to the Middle East Green Initiative, Saudi Arabia, for the LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES, noted that several countries had submitted their national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) and emphasized technology transfer, international cooperation, and resource mobilization as essential for GBF implementation, particularly for countries suffering conflicts and resource scarcity.

The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) called for: establishing a subsidiary body on Article 8(j); direct and equitable access to financial resources

for IPLCs; and including IPLCs in DSI governance. CBD WOMEN'S CAUCUS called for full participation of women in the COP, and urged implementing the Gender Plan of Action, and gender-sensitive indicators and support. The CBD ALLIANCE cautioned against false solutions that harm biodiversity and peoples; and called for reaffirming the CBD moratorium on geoeengineering and applying the precautionary principle.

LOCAL AND SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS highlighted local and subnational biodiversity strategies and action plans as key to GBF implementation. BUSINESS FOR NATURE COALITION underscored that voluntary action is insufficient, and urged reforming harmful subsidies and increasing positive incentives. The INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE called for legal certainty related to the DSI mechanism.

ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS reiterated their commitment to support GBF implementation by advancing scientific evidence to address the interconnected drivers of biodiversity loss. THE GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK called on parties to uplift IPLCs, women, and youth, support environmental defenders, and transform the financial system.

Organizational Matters: Delegates adopted the agendas of COP 16, CP COP/MOP 11, and NP COP/MOP 5 ([CBD/COP/16/1](#) and [Add.1](#), [CBD/CP/MOP/11/1](#) and [Add.1](#), and [CBD/NP/MOP/5/1](#) and [Add.1](#)). On the organization of work, including establishment of two Working Groups ([CBD/COP/16/1/Add.2](#)), the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC), and ARMENIA expressed concerns over the heavy agenda, underscoring challenges, particularly for smaller delegations. The Secretariat provided clarifications and delegates approved the organization of work. They further elected Charlotta Sörqvist (Sweden) and Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico) as Chairs of Working Group I and II respectively; Somaly Chan (Cambodia) as Rapporteur; and Khangeziwe Mabuza (Eswatini) as the Bureau representative responsible for credentials.

Reports: Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), presented the SBSTTA 25 and 26 reports ([CBD/SBSTTA/25/13](#) and [CBD/SBSTTA/26/9](#)). Chirra Achalender Reddy (India), Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), tabled the SBI 4 and 5 reports ([CBD/SBI/4/17](#) and [CBD/SBI/5/4](#)). Ning Liu (China), on behalf of COP 15 President Huang Runqiu, reported on the 12th meeting of the Working Group on Article 8(j) ([CBD/WG8J/12/8](#)) and on the first and second meetings of the Working Group on benefit-sharing from DSI use ([CBD/WGDSI/1/3](#) and [CBD/WGDSI/2/3](#)).

CP Compliance Committee Chair Rigobert Ntep (Cameroon) presented the Committee's report ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/3](#)). BRAZIL, NEW ZEALAND, EGYPT, NORWAY, and the EU made interventions regarding a recommendation of the Committee that CP MOP 11 consider the implications of diverging interpretations of the definition of "living modified organism" under the CP and varying legislative approaches among parties concerning developments in biotechnology, including genome editing. COP President Muhamad noted that substantive matters will be dealt with under the relevant agenda item. NP Compliance Committee Chair Betty Kauna Schroder (Namibia) presented the Committee's report ([CBD/NP/MOP/5/3](#)).

CBD Executive Secretary Schomaker introduced documents on the budget, requirements for the trust fund for voluntary contributions, and functional review of the Secretariat ([CBD/](#)

[COP/16/4](#), [Add.1](#), and [Add.2](#)). Delegates then established a budget group, chaired by Charles Gbedemah (Ghana), tasked also with addressing the process for Executive Secretary appointment.

(CBD) National Target-Setting and NBSAPs: The Secretariat reported that 108 parties have submitted national targets and 35 updated NBSAPs to date. COP 16 President Muhamad said a conference room paper (CRP) will be prepared on the basis of the relevant SBI 5 recommendation, following informal consultations.

Working Group I

The Secretariat introduced the compilations of draft decisions ([CBD/COP/16/2/Rev.1](#), [CBD/CP/MOP/11/2](#), and [CBD/NP/MOP/5/2](#)).

Chair Sörqvist established contact groups on: DSI; mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting, and review (PMRR), to address both the GBF's monitoring framework and the enhanced multidimensional approach to PMRR; the work programme and institutional arrangements on Article 8(j); and resource mobilization.

Chair Sörqvist suggested that delegates refrain from making substantive comments, and for deliberations to continue in the contact groups. A procedural discussion ensued with several stressing the need for consistent rules, as many agreed to present their statements in the contact groups, while some proceeded with statements in the Working Group, noting difficulties for smaller delegations' participation in parallel groups.

(CBD) Article 8(j): Many parties noted they would present their statements in the contact group, as suggested by Chair Sörqvist. Kiribati, for the PACIFIC SIDS, stressed the need for adequate support, robust institutional arrangements, and substantive financial mechanisms for IPLCs. The DRC, for the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed that they cannot accept any revision of terminology related to IPLCs, and queried the budgetary implications of options for institutional arrangements. ZIMBABWE expressed concern that the participation of local communities in CBD processes continues to be limited. The DRC expressed concern regarding the submission by Colombia and Brazil on the role of communities and Afro-descendants in the implementation of the Convention ([CBD/COP/16/INF/35](#)), discouraging any attempt to include Afro-descendants in the agenda. COLOMBIA and BRAZIL emphasized that their proposal aims to ensure that Afro-descendants are fully included in CBD implementation.

Regarding institutional arrangements, COLOMBIA, ZIMBABWE, and others supported establishment of a dedicated subsidiary body. INDONESIA expressed preference for continuing the Working Group, to avoid budgetary implications. JAPAN urged not to prejudge any decision on institutional arrangements.

Chair Sörqvist said she will hold informal consultations on the recommendations of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and will prepare a CRP on the in-depth dialogue on the role of languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge.

(CBD/CP/NP) Resource Mobilization: BOLIVIA requested their submission on GBF Target 19(f) on enhancing the role of collective actions ([CBD/COP/16/INF/8](#)) be reviewed by the contact group. The AFRICAN GROUP expressed deep concern with slow progress on GBF Target 19, noting that more resources and an effective financial mechanism are necessary. NIGERIA drew attention to problems with Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding allocation and governance. MALAWI and COLOMBIA supported the establishment of a dedicated biodiversity fund.

(CBD/CP/NP) Financial Mechanism: The Secretariat introduced relevant documents ([CBD/COP/16/6/Rev.1](#), [Add.1](#), and [Add.2](#), [CBD/COP/16/7](#), and [CBD/COP/16/8/Rev.1](#)). The GEF presented its report, focusing on: GEF-7 and GEF-8 programming; responses to guidance by COP 15; and portfolio implementation. Sam Johnston, Independent Evaluator, presented his report on the sixth review of the effectiveness of the financial mechanism ([CBD/COP/16/INF/25](#)).

GUATEMALA, BRAZIL, SEYCHELLES, and others expressed concerns regarding the low level of contributions to the GBF Fund, as well as the pace and quality of biodiversity finance flows. GUATEMALA proposed adding new elements under GEF-9, related to the protection, management, and restoration of ecosystems. BRAZIL, the DRC, and others lamented that the independent evaluator's report was not submitted for SBI consideration. They noted that discussions should explore ways to support the GEF and the GBF Fund in resource mobilization efforts, to enhance predictability, and increase the scale of contributions from developed countries.

The EU and JAPAN raised concerns about establishing a standing committee, noting that SBI is well-equipped to discuss guidance to the financial mechanism. SEYCHELLES noted concerns regarding the timely access to and disbursement of funds from the GBF Fund, and suggested that the GEF evaluate the effectiveness of its implementing agencies.

Working Group II

Chair Benitez established contact groups on: biodiversity mainstreaming; marine and coastal biodiversity and island biodiversity; biodiversity and health; synthetic biology; biodiversity and climate change; and scientific and technical needs to support GBF implementation, and matters related to the work programme of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). He said that the COP multi-year programme of work will be addressed in consultations with Working Group I; and that CRPs will be prepared on: diverse values of biodiversity; invasive alien species; plant conservation; capacity building and development and awareness raising under the NP; assessment and review of the effectiveness of the NP; and enhancing the implementation of the NP in the context of the GBF.

(CBD) Sustainable Wildlife Management: The Secretariat introduced relevant documents ([CBD/COP/16/11](#), [CBD/COP/16/INF/6](#) and [INF/7](#)). On complementary guidance to support GBF implementation, in a draft decision based on SBSTTA recommendation 25/7, the UK urged limiting the preparation of guidance to key elements for which there is little or no guidance, and, with the EU, invited regional and sub-regional organizations to produce guidance. JAPAN stressed, supported by BRAZIL and ARGENTINA, avoiding duplication of existing guidance, and suggested referencing work by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). BRAZIL proposed language on means of implementation to address guidance gaps. ZIMBABWE underlined that guidance must be party-driven, and address poverty issues and community needs. A CRP will be prepared.

(NP) Report of the Compliance Committee: On a paragraph urging parties to comply with their obligation under the NP, BRAZIL suggested acknowledging the need for enhanced support to developing countries, and inclusion of IPLCs' priorities in GEF funding, "in line with national circumstances and priorities." A CRP will be prepared.

(NP) ABS Clearing-House and Information-sharing: The Secretariat introduced the report on progress in the operation of the ABS Clearing-House ([CBD/NP/MOP/5/7](#)). The EU noted the urgent need to fill information gaps to ensure legal certainty in regard to ABS. INDIA and ARGENTINA highlighted progress made in issuing certificates of compliance. GABON, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, GUATEMALA, and BAHRAIN urged continued capacity building on the ABS Clearing-House. TOGO urged interlinkages with the agenda item on DSI in Working Group I. A CRP will be prepared.

(NP) Global Multilateral Benefit-sharing Mechanism (Article 10): The Secretariat introduced the document ([CBD/NP/MOP/5/10](#)). The UK, SWITZERLAND, URUGUAY, and the EU supported deferring consideration of the item to MOP 6. GABON, TOGO, and MOROCCO called for a clear timetable to enable progress on Article 10 at MOP 6. BRAZIL, supported by the EU, EGYPT, URUGUAY, and GABON, suggested postponing deliberations in view of ongoing DSI negotiations.

Contact Groups

DSI: Co-Chairs Lactitia Tshitwamulomoni (South Africa) and William Lockhart (UK) provided an overview of intersessional work since COP 15; drew attention to discussions on potential hosts for the DSI Fund; and presented a scenario note for the work of the contact group. Delegates exchanged initial views on the organization of work and focused on the purpose and use of the funding raised by the mechanism.

Article 8(j): Co-chaired by Lucy Mulenkei (IIFB) and Matilda Wilhelm (Sweden), the contact group considered elements and tasks within the programme of work that had not been previously addressed. Participants addressed which tasks they consider priorities, with many converging on the need to prioritize elements directly relevant to GBF implementation. Delegates queried the relevance of tasks directing the development of new guidelines and the applicability of others to a global context.

Biodiversity and Health: Co-chaired by Barbara Engels (Germany) and Stanislas Mouba (Gabon), the contact group focused on the global action plan on biodiversity and health to forge agreement on pending issues.

Mainstreaming: Co-chaired by Bráulio Ferreira de Souza Dias (Brazil) and Sanne Kruid (the Netherlands), delegates exchanged views on the operative paragraphs of the draft decision not discussed during SBI 4. Regarding a list of requests to the Secretariat, delegates accepted, among other things, integrating the consideration of biodiversity mainstreaming into regional and subregional dialogues aimed at supporting GBF implementation; and strengthening collaboration with relevant convention secretariats, organizations, and institutions to achieve biodiversity mainstreaming at all levels.

The contact groups continued discussions into the evening.

In The Corridors

With over 23,000 registered participants, the "People's COP," as the Colombian Presidency dubbed the meeting, is the largest UN Biodiversity Conference to date. "Such numbers show increased recognition of the urgency to address the biodiversity crisis," one participant opined. Others pointed to the societal mobilization in the host country; yet others to increased awareness and the role of the media. Many agreed that, with such a degree of participation and increased visibility, the conference appears well-positioned to embody the ethos of the whole-of-society approach needed to reorient ways of life, incentivize behavioral change, and achieve the ambitious goals and targets of the GBF.

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