

UN Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Tuesday, 22 October 2024

Negotiations entered full speed as Working Group I continued deliberations on resource mobilization and the financial mechanism, among other issues, and Working Group II reviewed a long series of items relevant to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Protocols. Contact group negotiations continued on: synthetic biology; marine and coastal biodiversity and island biodiversity; Article 8(j); resource mobilization; biodiversity and health; digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources; climate change; and capacity building.

Working Group I

(CBD) Financial Mechanism: Delegates continued Monday's discussion. SWITZERLAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NORWAY, NEW ZEALAND, and the UK underscored the important contribution and support provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), including the timely establishment of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Fund. They opposed establishing a standing committee on the financial mechanism, noting it will be resource intensive and add little value.

SWITZERLAND, NORWAY, AUSTRALIA, and others drew attention to methodological limitations on the review of effectiveness of the financial mechanism. SWITZERLAND noted that calls to change the GEF's governance structure ignore that it serves several conventions. CANADA stressed that a new financial mechanism is not required.

SOUTH AFRICA, with COLOMBIA, emphasized the GBF Fund remains inadequate and, with several others, supported a dedicated global instrument for biodiversity finance. Fiji, for 14 PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (PSIDS), called for transformative change to access funds, empowering local agencies to lead biodiversity initiatives, and stressed that the Pacific is underrepresented in existing governance structures. CHINA called for substantive reforms to fill gaps in levels of support, timeliness of fund allocation, and fairness. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION stressed that the existing system is biased, unfair, and needs reform in line with CBD Article 21 (Financial Mechanism). INDIA and BANGLADESH said that the GEF procedures are cumbersome, noting the need for a transparent and inclusive mechanism. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC) said the GEF should not be the exclusive mechanism for biodiversity conservation financing.

JAPAN, VIET NAM, and others said the GBF Fund should be strengthened. MEXICO and URUGUAY called for improving the capacity of existing mechanisms, including for fund disbursement. URUGUAY highlighted the importance of early-action projects. BOLIVIA called for fully integrating consideration of collective actions, including Mother-Earth-centric actions, urging a specific GBF Fund finance window. MEXICO, FIJI, and others supported direct access for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), Afro-descendants, women, and youth to at least 20% of the GBF Fund.

Many called for scaling up contributions. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA lamented the low funding allocation to counties with economies in transition. GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (GYBN) noted that the resource mobilization strategy, as well as the GEF and GBF Fund structures, are insufficient to guarantee full and effective participation of rights- and stakeholders, and direct access to predictable funds.

(CP) Financial Mechanism and Resources: The Secretariat introduced the document ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/6](#)). The AFRICAN GROUP and GUATEMALA, opposed by JAPAN and SWITZERLAND, called on the GEF to set up a stand-alone window dedicated to biosafety. The EU preferred requesting the GEF to "further explore modalities" to reform the Cartagena Protocol (CP) financial mechanism. A conference room paper (CRP) will be prepared.

(NP) Financial Mechanism and Resources: The Secretariat introduced the document ([CBD/NP/MOP/5/6](#)). The EU urged parties to identify and communicate funding needs regarding the ninth GEF replenishment (GEF-9), and requested the Secretariat to reach out to those parties that have not asked for support. TOGO suggested the Secretariat undertake consultations to examine barriers hindering parties' use and allocation of funds for Nagoya Protocol (NP) implementation. The CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC stressed that the low number of projects related to access and benefit-sharing (ABS) under GEF-8 is due to both a lack of capacity and general unawareness of the process. A CRP will be prepared.

(CBD) Capacity-Building: The Secretariat tabled relevant documents ([CBD/COP/16/9](#), and [CBD/COP/16/INF/24](#), [INF/33](#) and [INF/38](#)). A contact group was established.

(CBD) Liability and Redress: The Secretariat introduced relevant documents ([CBD/COP/16/12](#) and [CBD/COP/16/INF/10](#)). A CRP will be prepared.

(CBD) Cooperation: The Secretariat introduced an update on cooperation actions ([CBD/COP/16/10](#)) and drew attention to Recommendation 4/9 of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI). The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia (ZAA Australasia), outlined actions contributing to GBF implementation, and highlighted existing collaboration and potential for further synergies.

Delegates highlighted the importance of cooperation. MEXICO and the DRC stressed work on the interlinkages between biodiversity, food, and nutrition. The EU, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, CANADA, and JAPAN called for maximizing synergies, and suggested welcoming the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) decision on the outcome of the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement's implementation, as well as the Agreement on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). JAPAN also cited UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) 6 resolution on enhancing synergies. Several parties lauded the Bern Process for identifying actions for strengthening cooperation.

INDIA said national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) are essential for enhancing national policy coherence across different sectors. COLOMBIA highlighted the need to make IPLCs more visible and to elevate the role of the Ocean for climate change mitigation and adaptation. BOLIVIA suggested requesting exchange with Secretariats of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) on issues regarding other knowledge systems, rights of Mother Earth, and rights of nature.

CANADA supported strengthening joint programmes among the Rio Conventions. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said joint programmes must respect MEAs' respective mandates. PSIDS underscored the importance of collaboration with the BBNJ Agreement and advocated integration of best practices, particularly in marine spatial planning. Discussions will continue.

Working Group II

The Working Group heard progress reports from the contact group Co-Chairs on biodiversity mainstreaming and on biodiversity and health. A CRP will be prepared on detection and identification of living modified organisms (LMOs).

(NP) Cooperation: The Secretariat introduced the document ([CBD/NP/MOP/5/8](#)). The ITPGRFA, UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS), and World Health Organization (WHO) reported on activities of relevance.

(CP) Risk assessment and risk management: The Secretariat introduced the compilation of draft decisions for the CP MOP 11 ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/2](#)), and the relevant document ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/9](#)). The EU, NORWAY, and others supported the establishment of an *ad hoc* technical expert group (AHTEG) to work on additional guidance materials on the risk assessment

of living modified fish. NEW ZEALAND suggested alternative language to include crustaceans and algae. Many, including the AFRICAN GROUP, ECUADOR, COLOMBIA, and others, said such guidance is premature, instead prioritizing capacity building, and technical and scientific support for the use of existing guidance. SURINAME cited more pressing LMO issues. ZAMBIA and INDIA noted that existing guidance on LMOs can be applied for fish. A contact group was established.

(CP) Report of the Compliance Committee: Compliance Committee Chair Rigobert Ntep (Cameroon) reported on the work of the Committee. Chair Benítez introduced the relevant documents ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/3](#) and [CBD/CP/MOP/11/INF/2](#)), and the draft decision. Delegates debated the Committee's recommendation to further consider the implications of diverging interpretations of the definition of "LMO" under the CP and the varying legislative approaches in view of biotechnological developments such as genome editing. EGYPT, the EU, and NORWAY supported the recommendation. PANAMA, BRAZIL, URUGUAY, PARAGUAY, and ECUADOR opposed, noting it goes beyond the Compliance Committee mandate. NEW ZEALAND and PERU stated that the definition of LMO is clear, but the definition of "modern biotechnology" requires further examination in view of genome editing techniques. The UK stated that such decisions are taken at the national level. A Friends of the Chair group will continue discussions.

(CP) Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH): The Secretariat introduced the documents ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/7](#) and [CBD/CP/MOP/11/INF/3](#)). Delegates lauded the Secretariat on the improved BCH portal and on capacity-building support to developing countries. A CRP will be prepared.

(CP) Cooperation: The Secretariat presented an update on cooperative activities with other international organizations ([CBD/CP/MOP/11/8/Rev.1](#)). IUCN elaborated on activities on synthetic biology. The INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE discussed capacity support to ministries of agriculture, environment, and health on biosafety issues. Delegates took note of the document.

Contact Groups

Synthetic Biology: Co-chaired by Martha Kandawa-Schulz (Namibia) and Marja Ruohonen-Lehto (Finland), the group focused on the possible continuation of the multidisciplinary AHTEG and the development of a capacity-building action plan.

Most delegates agreed on the need for capacity building and technology transfer, and supported developing an action plan, with some stressing it is necessary to reduce inequalities. Some opposed, and proposed addressing the issue under the CP. Opinions diverged on the multidisciplinary AHTEG and the horizon-scanning process of synthetic biology applications: some appreciated the work done and suggested the process be extended, further noting that horizon scanning and capacity building are interlinked. Others expressed concerns and opposed continuation of the AHTEG's work, calling for focus on the benefits of synthetic biology for GBF implementation and on capacity building to reap such benefits. The Co-Chairs invited submission of textual proposals for preparation of a non-paper.

Marine and Coastal Biodiversity: Co-chaired by Erica Lucero (Argentina) and Gaute Hanssen (Norway), delegates focused on pending issues reflecting long-lasting divergent views regarding further work on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), and conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity and of island biodiversity.

On the draft decision on further work on EBSAs, divergent positions remained, including on requesting the Secretariat to hold additional EBSA-related workshops and their modalities, and on the inclusion of references to the BBNJ Agreement. Delegates agreed to request the Secretariat to develop voluntary guidelines, on peer-review processes for the description of areas meeting EBSA criteria and other relevant compatible and complementary scientific criteria, for consideration by the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice. Delegates also found common ground on pending issues regarding the modalities for the modification of descriptions of EBSAs and the description of new areas, including on the withdrawal of EBSA descriptions and the information-sharing mechanism.

Resource Mobilization: Co-Chairs Ines Verleye (Belgium) and Patrick Luna (Brazil) introduced the draft decision as forwarded by SBI 4, including its four annexes on: a revised strategy for resource mobilization; a non-exhaustive list of actions to close the gap in biodiversity finance; elements for discussion on a possible global instrument for biodiversity; and terms of reference for a possible working group. Delegates discussed the relationship between the strategy for resource mobilization and the non-exhaustive list of actions, as well as the most appropriate way to address the proposed new instrument for biodiversity finance. Some delegates highlighted the need to prioritize discussions for a new instrument, while others expressed skepticism on such establishment and preferred focusing on the strategy for resource mobilization. The Co-Chairs assured delegates that negotiations will follow a balanced approach.

Article 8(j): The contact group resumed its consideration of high priority tasks in the new programme of work. Following divergence on language addressing issues including direct drivers of biodiversity loss and “biodiversity-based” activities, Co-Chairs Lucy Mullenkei (IIFB) and Pernilla Malmer (Sweden) mandated several breakaway groups to find compromises. The session continued at a slow pace, addressing tasks on the intergenerational transmission of IPLCs’ languages, and on the traditional knowledge (TK) indicators, among others. Many delegates stressed the need for tasks to remain simple. Following strong divergence on a proposal to include reference to people of African descent in the programme of work, element 6 (full and effective participation of IPLCs) was tabled for the next session.

Biodiversity and Health: On the global action plan, delegates reached preliminary agreement on outstanding language addressing actions for mainstreaming biodiversity and health interlinkages into GBF implementation for Targets 17 (biosafety and benefits of biotechnology), 20 (capacity building, technology transfer, and scientific and technical cooperation for biodiversity), and 13 (ABS, DSI, and TK); agreeing to retain brackets around language addressing ABS, pending the outcome of DSI negotiations. Divergent views were expressed on whether

to retain annexes on: monitoring elements for the global action plan; interlinking biodiversity and health for health promotion and disease prevention; and targeted messages for mainstreaming biodiversity in the health sector. Several delegates expressed concern that these annexes had not been the subject of negotiation. Delegates decided to address the draft decision first, before seeking agreement on the outstanding annexes.

Climate Change: Co-chaired by Clarisse Kehler Siebert (Sweden) and Xiang Gao (China), the group considered ways of strengthening cooperation and synergies in tackling the interlinked crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. Delegates highlighted the need to acknowledge global developments, including the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement’s implementation. They also raised elements for inclusion in the decision, such as the need for increased investments, capacity building, and ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions.

DSI: Delegates continued discussions on trigger points for contributions to the DSI fund. A lengthy discussion took place on a suggestion to establish an informal Friends of the Co-Chairs’ group to discuss the scope of DSI under the multilateral mechanism, with some delegates expressing concerns over efforts to define DSI. Delegates then continued Monday’s discussions on who should contribute monetary benefits to the DSI fund and who should not. They focused on relevant thresholds, including turnover, sales, or profit. They further discussed whether a list of sectors or subsectors that benefit from DSI use is necessary for the operationalization of the mechanism.

Capacity building: Co-chaired by Mukondi Matshusa (South Africa) and Holly Kelley-Weil (UK), the group considered the modalities for operationalizing the global coordination entity of the technical and scientific cooperation mechanism. Delegates focused on, among other things, its organizational structure, governance, and oversight, including whether to mandate the COP or the Bureau to approve the entity’s workplan, as well as the initial term of service and performance of its host organization. They also addressed operational modalities and procedures, including on modalities for ensuring that TK is considered and guidelines for ensuring the incorporation of continuous education and learning opportunities.

In The Corridors

Discussions over financial resources are polarized in MEA negotiations, reflecting the unequal level of development among regions and divergent priorities. In addition to the difficulty of negotiations on how to close the biodiversity finance gap, which is estimated as high as 700 billion USD per year, the modalities of the Convention’s financial mechanism add another level of complexity. “The GEF has been serving the Convention well for many years now, was quick to establish the GBF Fund, and enjoys the trust of donor countries,” one supporter noted, summarizing the arguments. Opponents, however, insist that a deep reform is long overdue. “GEF governance structures are discriminatory,” one participant said passionately, sharing examples of challenges to access much-needed funding, “it is time for a dedicated global instrument for biodiversity finance.”

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