

Biodiversity Virtual Sessions Briefing Note

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

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Friday, 18 September 2020

Summary of the Convention on Biological Diversity Special Virtual Sessions: 15-18 September 2020

2020 was supposed to be a super year for biodiversity. The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) scheduled for Kunming, China, in October 2020 was supposed to adopt a post-2020 global biodiversity framework containing a new ten-year set of global goals and targets to reverse the negative trend of biodiversity loss. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was not to be. Numerous biodiversity-related meetings were postponed. The 24th meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), originally scheduled for May 2020 to prepare for COP 15, are now planned for early 2021. COP 15 has been postponed to at least May 2021. In-person negotiations on the post-2020 framework have also been put on hold until next year.

To maintain momentum ahead of the United Nations Biodiversity Summit on 30 September 2020 and COP 15 in 2021, the CBD convened a series of special virtual sessions. The virtual sessions were conducted under the guidance of the SBSTTA and SBI Chairs and provided the opportunity for the presentation of information and for statements by parties and observers.

The virtual sessions began with bad news for global biodiversity. The launch of the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, a final report card on progress against the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets adopted in 2010 with a 2020 deadline, starkly announced that none of the targets will be met. The report outlines eight transition areas that recognize the value of biodiversity, the need to restore the ecosystems on which all human activity depends, and the urgency of reducing the negative impacts of such activity.

Other events included the testing of a process for party-led review of implementation, a report from an expert panel on the strategy for resource mobilization for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and an update on the process for developing the framework. There were mixed reviews on the updated zero draft of the framework, indicating which issues will have to be tackled going forward so that parties can adopt the framework at COP 15.

The virtual sessions were held each day from 7:00–9:00 am Montreal time (Eastern Daylight Time, UTC-4:00), due to the

challenges of finding suitable times to meet with participants living in numerous time zones with varying degrees of internet connectivity.

This briefing note summarizes the four days of events at the CBD Special Virtual Sessions.

Launch of the Fifth Edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook

The launch of the fifth Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5) headlined the opening of the special virtual sessions on Tuesday, 15 September. SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benitez noted the sessions are taking place to help parties prepare for the next meetings of the subsidiary bodies, delayed until the first quarter of 2021.

CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema stressed that the future of humanity depends on the capacity to act “with urgency and compassion.”

Hamdallah Zedan, on behalf of the COP 14 presidency, said that the issues of climate, land, biodiversity, and water must be at the heart of countries' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Presentation of GBO-5: David Cooper, CBD Deputy Executive Secretary, presented the report. Cooper highlighted GBO-5's conclusions that although some of the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets have been partially achieved, none will be fully met. The report emphasizes: poor alignment between international and national targets; slow progress in conservation efforts; and parties' failure to address financial subsidies in sectors harmful to biodiversity. It notes some successes, including a falling rate of global deforestation and an increase in protected areas.

To bend the curve of biodiversity loss, Cooper continued, GBO-5 recommends eight transition areas for integrated and transformative change, including climate action, biodiversity-inclusive health, and sustainable production.

Cooper stressed that achieving the 2050 vision of “living in harmony with nature” remains attainable as long as parties take strong conservation and restoration actions.

Local Biodiversity Outlooks and Global Partnership for Plant Conservation (GPPC): Joji Cariño, Forest Peoples Programme, presented the second edition of the Local Biodiversity Outlooks, which focuses on local biodiversity and stories of resilience among indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Cariño explained the report finds that IPLCs are underrepresented in national strategies and action

plans, despite agreement that putting culture and the rights of IPLCs at the heart of biodiversity strategy can bring about positive outcomes. She explained the report stresses that sustained partnerships between scientific and indigenous knowledge are necessary and proposes six transition areas aligned with GBO-5, including culture, food, and incentives and finance.

Suzanne Sharrock, Botanic Gardens Conservation International, reported on the GPPC. She stressed that, despite most targets not being met, more progress in plant conservation has been made than without the GPPC. She stressed the need for plant conservation to be included in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Statements by Parties: Chile, the United Kingdom, Costa Rica, and Mexico welcomed GBO-5. South Africa pointed to the need to mainstream biodiversity into other sectors in order to implement targets. Sweden pressed for society to build resilience through biodiversity restoration and wise use of resources.

The Global Youth Biodiversity Network pressed for the inclusion of local, grassroots voices in future GBOs. The CBD Women's Caucus emphasized that women are key knowledge holders in biodiversity and conservation. The CBD Alliance questioned the lack of attention to structural causes of biodiversity loss.

Testing of A Party-Led Review Process Through an Open-Ended Forum

SBI Chair Charlotta Sörqvist moderated this session on Wednesday, 16 September, which began the test of a party-led review of implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. The review aims to increase transparency between parties and identify options to overcome obstacles.

Moustafa Fouda, on behalf of the COP 14 presidency, reminded participants that their expertise and experiences would be invaluable to developing an enhanced review mechanism in the context of COP 15 and the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Noting the popularity of championing technological solutions to biodiversity conservation, CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema called the virtual session an opportunity to "put our money where our mouth is."

Presentations by Parties: Five parties presented on their implementation efforts.

Sri Lanka presented an overview of its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), which includes objectives of, among others, ensuring long-term conservation of biodiversity and promoting equitable benefit-sharing. Considering challenges to implementation, she raised a lack of trained staff, as well as the poor perception of how biodiversity conservation can contribute to national development.

Ethiopia presented an overview of its revised NBSAP, as well as of its fifth and sixth national reports, noting that its targets are mapped to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. He raised the challenge of physically auditing the reported implementations. Responding to a question from Canada, he suggested that the party-led review process would be useful as a mechanism in the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Poland presented its NBSAP's objectives, which include improving nature protection systems; the integration of economic

sectors with biodiversity objectives; and reducing threats from climate change and invasive species. She noted that Poland has not made sufficient progress to achieve any of its objectives by 2020, citing a poor choice of indicators as one potential cause.

Presentations from parties continued on Thursday, 17 September.

Reviewing its implementation efforts, Finland noted that the most pronounced improvements in biodiversity conservation were in low-ambition actions. Moreover, there were promising trends in partially implemented actions. He said that future actions need to be fewer in number, have concrete outcomes, and should be accompanied by clear implementation indicators. He highlighted Finland's involvement across biodiversity multilateral environmental agreements, as well as chemical conventions, and stressed the need for consultations with all involved stakeholders.

Confessing a "mixed level" of progress, Guyana reflected on its NBSAP, which included promoting conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity through, among others, a national land use policy, access and benefit-sharing regulations, and improving biodiversity monitoring nationally in key sectors. He noted that, while resources were made available, strategies were implemented unevenly, with certain areas receiving more focus. He highlighted challenges involving limited funding, lack of capacity, inconsistent methodologies, and lack of awareness of biodiversity needs at the political level.

Strategy for Resource Mobilization

On Thursday, participants heard a report from the Expert Panel on Resource Mobilization, whose work is intended to inform the Open-Ended Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Panel members Jeremy Eppel, Yasha Feferholtz, and Tracey Cumming presented.

On the review of experiences and evaluation of the strategy for resource mobilization, the panel found that, while the underlying structure of the strategy is still sound, it is challenged by the presence of subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity, a lack of mainstreaming, a failure to address the private sector and other financial mechanisms, and a lack of priority for biodiversity outside environment ministries. The panel recommended that the strategy focus on redirecting and reducing the harmful use of resources, enhance synergies with climate change and Sustainable Development Goals finance, and comprehensively integrate biodiversity in business and finance sectors.

The panel found that funding needs remain high. It reported that an ambitious global biodiversity framework could benefit the global economy by USD 500 billion per year, while there would be significant costs to not investing in biodiversity conservation. Noting that the financial cost of such investments would amount to less than 1% of global gross domestic product (GDP), the panel recommended allocating more resources to protected areas, especially in low-income countries, which have the highest potential to benefit from such investments.

Considering resource mobilization in the post-2020 biodiversity framework, the panel concluded that change must involve reducing or redirecting resources that harm biodiversity. The panel also recommended enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of resources through, among others, good governance,

vertical and horizontal coordination among governments, and more realistic timeframes.

In the subsequent discussion, parties considered, among others:

- the need to consider the economic burdens of the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the need to make financial flows consistent with net positive developments for biodiversity; and
- the possibility of a dedicated global biodiversity fund, as discussed during the second meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Preparation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benitez Diaz and SBI Chair Charlotta Sörqvist facilitated this session on Friday, 18 September.

CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema said that “the future of the world, its resources, and its future abundance” depends on present action. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility, called for an ambitious framework, especially on resource mobilization.

The Co-Chairs of the Open-ended Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, Basile van Havre and Francis Ogwal, summarized the updated zero draft of the framework. They noted that the draft streamlines language on goals and targets. It includes a new goal on means of implementation, as well as milestones to ensure progress.

They explained that the draft text adds a deadline of 2030 to each target. It also contains a new target on the recovery and conservation of wild flora and fauna. The text brings new language on implementation support mechanisms, including, among others: mobilizing resources; capacity development; knowledge generation, management, and sharing; and technical and scientific cooperation.

Moreover, they added, the new draft considers enabling conditions of implementation, including: the participation of IPLCs; gender equality; intergenerational equity; and, where appropriate, considering and recognizing the rights of nature.

The Co-Chairs indicated that the issue of digital sequencing information will be considered at the Working Group’s third meeting.

Statements from Parties: Germany, for the European Union (EU), expressed concern that marine, urban, and genetic diversity were under-represented in the draft. Both Uganda, for the African Group, and the EU called for further incorporation of access and benefit-sharing in the text.

Antigua and Barbuda, for the Latin American and Caribbean Group, stressed that: the mainstreaming of biodiversity must be deepened and systematized; resource mobilization be included as a COP decision; and the peer review process should include headline indicators so as to take into account national circumstances.

Uganda, for the African Group, said that indicators should consider biodiversity at multiple scales, and that the draft should recognize sustainable use as a poverty alleviation strategy.

Brazil stressed the recognition of common but differentiated responsibilities. Iran stressed that sanctions on his country affect biodiversity initiatives internationally.

Georgia, for Central and Eastern Europe, and the United Kingdom stressed the need for strong monitoring, implementation, and review mechanisms.

IPLCs said that customary practices and traditional knowledge must be a vital part of supporting biodiversity and sustainable use. The Global Youth Biodiversity Network called for the draft to have a human rights perspective at its center, as well as to mainstream intergenerational equity across targets. The CBD Women’s Caucus warned against a weakening of gender mainstreaming in the new draft.

Warning that subsidies harmful to biodiversity will negate positive investments, the CBD Alliance called for renewed emphasis on the role of IPLCs. He noted that the current draft would not comply with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The UN Environment Management Group expressed its support to parties in implementing the future framework.

China, on behalf of the COP 15 presidency, welcomed the new draft; affirmed its support for multilateralism in continuing the goals of biodiversity conservation; and announced an online ministerial roundtable on 24 September to build consensus ahead of the UN Biodiversity Summit on 30 September 2020.

Glossary

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
GBO	Global Biodiversity Outlook
GPPC	Global Partnership for Plant Conservation
IPLCs	Indigenous peoples and local communities
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
SBI	Subsidiary Body on Implementation
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice