

# FNI Policy Brief 1/2023

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## A New Global Deal for Biodiversity

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

### Key points

- COP 15 received unprecedented political attention, which was crucial for the successful adoption of a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
- Given the considerable disagreement leading up to COP15, the level of ambition in the targets adopted was surprising.
- The targets are not equally ambitious: most of the targets that address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss are not quantitative.
- COP 15 was not particularly successful in promoting the links between biodiversity and the fight against zoonotic diseases and biodiversity and climate change.
- Countries now need to build on the momentum and start preparations for a new generation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans with national targets aligned with the GBF.



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# Introduction

In the early hours of 19 December 2022, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted by the COP15 to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), with 23 global targets together with five other decisions as a compromise package. These other decisions address closely related issues, such as a monitoring framework, resource mobilization, digital sequence information (DSI), capacity building, and mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review.

For many who had been following the lengthy preparatory process caused by the pandemic, the level of ambition, with several far-reaching quantitative targets, came as a surprise. Negotiations at the five meetings leading up to COP15, and even at COP15 itself, had proven very difficult, with an exceptional number of outstanding issues remaining all the way to the penultimate day of COP15. It was expected that, if there were no agreement, the COP presidency would table a take-it-or-leave-it GBF text for adoption by the end of the meeting. However, given the extensive disagreement, with a very low common denominator, it was feared that the GBF would be diluted and unambitious, unable to create the transformative change that the GBF was meant to represent.

In fact, the GBF would probably not have come about without the widespread media and political attention given to COP15. While still far from the level of global climate change summits, the attention far exceeded beyond that accorded to earlier biodiversity COP meetings. Most countries were represented in Montreal by ministers who took an active part in resolving the main outstanding issues in the final days of COP15.

## GBF: goals and targets

The GBF has four long-term goals for 2050 and 23 targets for urgent action over the decade to 2030: reducing threats to biodiversity (targets 1–8),

meeting human needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing (targets 9–13), and tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming (targets 14–23).

The target that had received by far the greatest attention prior to COP15 was the ‘30x30’ conservation target, calling for 30% of the Earth’s land and sea areas to be conserved through the establishment of protected areas and other area-based conservation measures. This has been seen as equivalent to the Paris Agreement target of keeping global warming within 1.5° C.

Less talked about but also of considerable significance are Targets 1 on reducing to near zero the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance and high ecological integrity, and 2 on restoration of 30% of degraded terrestrial and marine ecosystems. However, as regards protection of threatened species, there was no agreement on a numerical value. Target 4 is to ‘Ensure urgent management actions’ to halt extinction and for the recovery and conservation of species. The overall Goal A states that by 2050, the extinction rate and risks to all species shall be reduced tenfold.

Under Target 7, on reducing pollution risks, excess nutrients lost to the environment are to be halved. The same applies to reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals,

Also Target 6, on invasive alien species (IAS), includes a numerical value. Besides preventing the introduction and establishment of priority IAS, countries are to halve their rates of introduction and establishment of other known or potential invasive alien species.

The GBF is held to have a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that addresses not only the direct drivers of biodiversity loss but also the indirect, underlying causes. Right up to the end, there were dis-

agreements about most targets; particularly difficult was reaching agreement on the targets on underlying causes. These targets go beyond traditional conservation and across governmental and societal sectors. Seen in that light, Target 18 stands out as an ambitious achievement. It calls for phasing out or reforming subsidies that harm biodiversity by at least \$500 billion per year, while scaling up positive incentives for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

Many countries and NGOs also fought for other quantitative targets for the indirect drivers, including sustainable consumption and production patterns. This was only partly achieved, however. Target 16 includes, among its general, qualitative language on consumption and production, the target of halving global food waste.

Other less prominent, non-quantitative, targets of the GBF are listed in the box below.

### Non-quantitative targets of the GBF

- Minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity, and increase resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and disaster-risk reduction actions (8);
- sustainable use of wild species (9);
- sustainable use of areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fishery and forestry (10);
- restoring, maintaining and enhancing ecosystems services (11);
- conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in urban areas (12);
- ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources, digital sequence information on genetic resources, and traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources (13);
- ensuring the integration of biodiversity concerns into policies, regulations, planning and development processes within and across all levels of government and across all sectors (14);
- encouraging and enabling businesses to monitor, assess, and disclose their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity; provide information to consumers to promote sustainable consumption patterns; and report on compliance with access and benefit-sharing regulations and measures (15);
- promoting biosafety measures for handling biotechnology and distributing its benefits (17);
- strengthening capacity-building and development and access to and transfer of technology (20);
- strengthening the availability of data, information and knowledge to decision-makers, practitioners, and the general public (21);
- ensuring full representation and participation in decision-making, access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities and by
- making, access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities and by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities (22);
- ensuring gender equality in the implementation of this framework (23).

While the GBF is largely portrayed in a positive light, a general point of criticism is that targets addressing the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss are imprecise and too general, not significantly different from the previous Aichi Biodiversity Targets in terms of measurability in implementation. More concretely, the financial commitments towards developing countries have been criticized for being too low, and that there should have been a more ambitious numerical target for halting species extinction. It has also been argued that targets for the sustainable management of productive areas should have been made applicable also beyond the primary industries of agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry.

### Resource mobilization

A major hurdle was the question of how developing countries should be compensated for meeting the GBF targets. Negotiators were faced with the proverbial chicken or egg dilemma: Developed donor countries wanted adoption of ambitious targets to come first, whereas recipient developing countries wanted money on the table before agreeing to adopt targets.

This controversial issue exploded in the final days when several developing countries, led by Brazil, walked out of the negotiations, insisting on pledges for more funds from the rich countries before they would commit to the level of ambition set out in the draft GBF.

The sharp division of opinions concerned both the amount of funds to be transferred from the developed to the developing countries and the underlying mechanism. In particular, African countries were firm in demanding a dedicated global fund outside the existing CBD funding mechanism, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The developing countries have traditionally been skeptical to the GEF, where finance allocation is determined through a voting system in which the USA – not a party to the CBD – has a major say in allocation. They also refer to the UN Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC), with its parallel funding mechanisms outside the GEF. The developed countries, however, re-

fused to open a new funding mechanism outside the GEF.

As a compromise it was agreed to establish a special Global Biodiversity Framework Fund under the GEF, to support GBF implementation and to complement existing support financing. This new fund is to be open to financing from all sources. Moreover, for the first time, the GBF includes quantified targets for resource mobilization. Target 19 aims to increase the level of financial resources substantially and progressively from all sources to at least USD 200 billion per year by 2030, including by increasing transfers from developed to developing countries to at least USD 20 billion per year by 2025, and at least USD 30 billion per year by 2030. This should be seen in connection with Target 15, on reforming subsidies and other incentives harmful to biodiversity, and on reducing them by at least USD 500 billion per year by 2030.

### Biodiversity and health

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, preparations for COP 15 continued in the form of online meetings, consultations, webinars, and the like. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as an opportunity to rethink mankind's relationship with nature. Clearly influenced by the pandemic, these events recognized the important role of biodiversity in helping to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases. At a Biodiversity Summit held in the margins of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly in 2020, the UN Secretary-General as well as several state leaders called for embedding nature-based solutions in pandemic recovery plans.

However, the momentum for biodiversity to prevent zoonotic diseases faded during the later preparatory phase for COP 15 when physical meetings were resumed. At COP 15, the UK argued for a special target on health and the importance of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems in addressing the risk of the emergence and transmission of zoonotic diseases. This target was not adopted, and the GBF includes no reference to the role of nature in preventing zoonotic diseases.

es. However, Target 11 mentions nature's contribution to 'reduction of disease risk'.

On the other hand, the COP15 decision on biodiversity and health does address the issue, though not in very strong terms. It encourages Parties "to take actions for a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and thereby contribute to minimizing the risk of future diseases of zoonotic origin, taking into account the One Health approach, among other holistic approaches".

## Monitoring and implementation framework

At regular intervals the question of a mechanism on an implementation/accountability mechanism has been discussed in the CBD, but the developing countries have generally been reluctant to be subjected to performance reviews that might spotlight weaknesses in their implementation efforts. Here, the climate change regime has moved ahead of the CBD. Under the Paris Agreement, countries are to undertake and communicate efforts for greenhouse gas emissions reduction as their 'nationally determined contribution' (NDC) to global goals. They must report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts, and there is a global stocktaking every five years to assess collective progress. Moreover, the Agreement includes a 'ratcheting up' mechanism prescribing that national contributions must be scaled up over time, for constant and ever-increasing progress towards the global goals.

However, the framework adopted by COP15, which it refers to as 'an enhanced multidimensional approach to planning, monitoring, reporting and review with a view to enhancing implementation', does not include a ratcheting-up or a country-by-country review mechanism. However, it still indicates some progress, despite being weaker than the Paris Agreement framework. The main vehicles for implementation are national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) aligned with the GBF targets and in-

cluding national targets communicated in a standardized format. A set of new NBSAPs is to be submitted to and reviewed by COP16 in 2024. A global stocktaking of the collective progress in implementation will follow at COP17 and 18. Moreover, the GEF, in partnership with UNDP and UNEP, has already committed to fast-track support to eligible governments to prepare for revised NBSAPs.

Regular national reports are the key tools for monitoring national progress through the target indicators that were "adopted as part of the GBF package".

## Digital Sequence Information (DSI)

How to deal with benefit sharing from the use of digital sequence information (DSI) from genetic resources did not attract much attention in the comprehensive media coverage of COP15 – probably because of the complexity of the topic. However, the developing countries had set resolving this question as a key condition for their support to the GBF, and the DSI question was therefore negotiated within the context of GBF.

The regime for access to genetic resources and benefit sharing from their use (ABS), as prescribed in the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol, presumes that providers and users of genetic resources negotiate agreements and exchange physical material with clear provenance, ownership, and value, and that this material can be tracked through the research process, culminating in something of value. However, recent technological developments have significantly reduced the demand for physical genetic material, which can now be digitally sequenced relatively cheaply; moreover, data can be exchanged rapidly among researchers, institutions, countries, and databases.

The developing countries have feared that free access to and exchange of DSI will undermine the ABS regime and thereby also their own incentives to protect biodiversity. By contrast, the developed countries have seen DSI and its free accessibility as essential

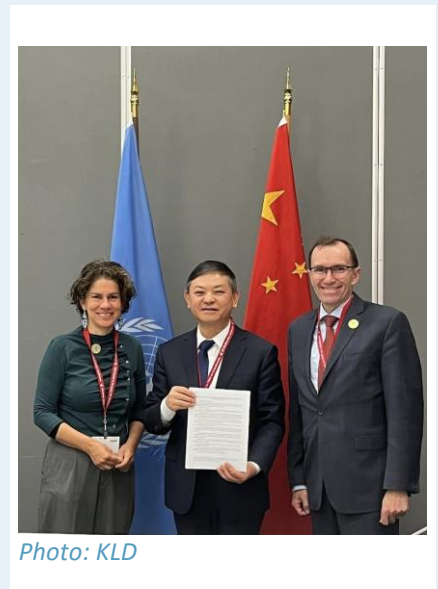


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for all areas of the life sciences. In their view, establishing barriers to the already well-established provisions for free access and exchange would undermine research and industrial development, to the detriment of both the developed and the developing worlds.

GBF Target 13 and the COP15 decision on DSI recognize the need to ensure fair and equitable benefit-sharing from DSI. To this end, a multilateral mechanism has been established as part of the GBF, including a global fund. A process for further developing and operationalizing the mechanism is to be finalized for adoption at COP 16. The decision also establishes a technical working group to undertake further development of the multilateral mechanism. The effectiveness of the mechanism is to be reviewed at COP 18.

Norway played an important role, by co-leading (together with South Africa) the pre-negotiations of the DSI mechanism. At COP15, the Norwegian Minister for Climate and Environmental Protection, Espen Barth Eide, together with his Chilean ministerial colleague Maisa Rojas conducted the final negotiations on DSI with other ministers. Norway announced a contribution of NOK 10 million for the intersessional work on DSI.

## Biodiversity and climate change

Climate change is a major threat to biodiversity, exacerbating the impacts of the other main threats. In turn, actions to conserve biodiversity may offer solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change and reducing the risk of natural disasters. A 2021 workshop of 50 leading biodiversity and climate experts, co-organized by the global science-policy bodies for climate change and biodiversity, IPCC and IPBES, provided further momentum to promote synergies and trade-offs.

Biodiversity and climate change have been recurring themes on the CBD agenda, but actual CBD activity has not yet been widely reflected in the practice of the UNFCCC.

Recently, the main reference point for the interrelationship between biodiversity, climate change and human well-being has been the concept of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) elaborated by the IUCN. Its endorsement across international forums has been seen as an important prerequisite for unlocking the full potential of such solutions. The UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA) in 2022 endorsed NbS and agreed on a definition. The UNFCCC COP27 in its Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan encourages the use of Nature-based Solutions, but only in relation to forests. The GBF includes Target 8 to minimize the impact of climate change on biodiversity and increase its resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction, referring to NbS ‘and/or ecosystem-based approaches’. The latter is well-established terminology in the CBD which some developing countries have preferred to ‘NbS’, and the text thus represents a compromise. The same reference to ‘NbS and/or ecosystem-based approaches’ is included in Target 11 on restoring maintaining and enhancing nature’s contributions to human beings.

Despite recognition of the biodiversity–climate change interlinkages and of NbS in the GBF, COP15 could also be seen as a setback. Whereas earlier COP decisions on biodiversity and climate had been quite substantial, countries failed to agree on any matter of substance in the COP15 decision on biodiversity and climate change which was not discussed by ministers. The developed countries insisted that NbS should be included, but this was rejected by the developing countries, who argued that developed countries would not accept reference to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities between developed and developing countries in the decision. This principle is enshrined as Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration and in the UNFCCC, but not explicitly in the CBD. Also, some countries did not approve of the reference to the IPCC–IPBES workshop in the decision.

## Indigenous Peoples and local communities

Much of the world's biodiversity is preserved in the territories of indigenous peoples. Indeed, the CBD has a history of greater attention to their rights and important role as custodians of nature than the UNFCCC or other multilateral environmental agreements. The GBF further attests to this by including strong wording in a human rights context on the rights of territories and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities. Such concerns are normally addressed in general terms, but the GBF integrates them into many of its targets. Moreover, it is stated that nothing in the GBF may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights that indigenous peoples currently have or may acquire in the future integrates them into many of its targets. Moreover, it is stated that nothing in the GBF may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights that indigenous peoples currently have or may acquire in the future.

## China and COP15 presidency

China was meant to host COP15 in Kunming in 2020. After postponements of COP15 due to the COVID-19, an initial, mainly procedural, part was held in a hybrid setting, online and in Kunming in October 2021. After the pandemic worsened in China in 2022, it was decided to move the major part of COP 15 to the city hosting the CBD Secretariat, Montreal, Canada, but still with China in the presidency seat.

The move was seen as uncomfortable for China, and it was argued that China provided limited support for preparations of the GBF and for raising political attention to COP 15. President Xi Jinping did not intend to participate in Montreal and therefore did not invite other heads of states. Thereby COP15 was cut off from getting political attention and momentum at the level of UNFCCC COP27, which was held a few weeks earlier at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, with many heads of state present.

Nor at COP15 itself, presided by Minister of Ecology and Environment Huang Runqiu, did China appear to play an especially proactive presidency role. However, by the end of COP 15, it became clear that China had in fact been very active behind the scenes in preparing the GBF package that was finally adopted; China was then generally praised for presenting a well-balanced compromise between a wide range of positions.

Despite some reservations on the part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the package was pushed through by the Chinese minister. Procedural concerns were raised by some African countries, which eventually acquiesced, content to have their views recorded in the report of the meeting. Perhaps it was easier to resolve a serious procedural situation of this kind with China in the presidency seat and with its strong position in the Group of 77 and China – the group established to promote developing countries interests in UN negotiations.

## Conclusions and discussion

As widely observed, the GBF would not have been adopted without the appearance of ministers in the final days of COP15 to take political responsibility for resolving issues that their national CBD representatives had not been able to resolve after years of intersessional meetings. As this seems to be becoming a recurrent pattern in connection with the adoption of major deals at biodiversity and climate change COPs, one may ask whether there could be other, less cumbersome and less resource-demanding ways of conducting such negotiation processes, in which political involvement was included, with clearer directions from the beginning of the process – not only at the end.

The takeover by ministers of the negotiations of the overall GBF, and not on negotiations on thematic COP 15 decisions, also led to a disconnect between the two. This applies not least to the issue of biodiversity and climate change and the concept of Nature-based Solutions which was reflected in the GBF but rejected in the COP decision.



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The case of GBF adoption is not the first time that countries have set goals and targets for biodiversity. They did so in 2002 and then in 2010 with the adoption of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for 2020 – none of which were met. What could prevent this from happening again with the GBF targets?

First and foremost, the biodiversity crisis and the GBF have enjoyed greater political attention, and that the GBF is a better and clearer agreement with higher ambition and more numerical and time-specific targets that can be measured. Also, a better monitoring and implementation framework has been accompanied with targets, together with a target for financial support to developing countries. Here, it will be important to build on the COP15 momentum and quickly get the ball rolling towards a new generation of NBSAPS with GBF-aligned national targets to be reviewed by COP16 in 2024.

However, this high level of ambition does not apply to all the GBF targets. The targets closest to translating the claimed transformative change with a whole-of government and whole-of-society-approach do not add much to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in terms of concreteness or specific action. This includes targets on crucial issues such as sustainable use, integration of biodiversity concerns across sectors, the role of business, and the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns. The quantitative targets addressing direct measures for biodiversity, such as expansion of protected areas and nature restoration and reduction of pollution, are indeed major achievements. However, concerning the highly-celebrated target on protected areas, it should be noted that the increase in protected-area coverage that has already occurred in

recent decades has not prevented the decline in global biodiversity from continuing.

It is essential to respond to the weak language of many targets by determined action at the national level. This will require unprecedented political will, with commitment not only by national ministries of the environment but by all parts of governments and economic sectors. Moreover, a similar will to action must be demonstrated across a wide range of international institutions and organizations. This will be essential to implementing the new global deal for biodiversity.

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