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CBD Alliance Opening statement

We are simply too far behind in what we **should** be doing. The CBD meetings cannot be a space for countries to greenwash their images. We don't want to hear how well everybody is doing, we need to hear **how much more you will do** because it is urgent to change paths.

Doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome is madness. We need nothing less than a fundamental system change and a pledge based system will simply not do it.

Earth's capacity to regenerate should be the limit and respecting it the target. It means agreeing on concrete time bounded limits to activities that destroy nature.

Mainstreaming cannot mean a free pass for big corporations. Big polluters should not influence policy, but rather be made accountable through compliance mechanisms for the damage they cause.

Nature does not seek for investments as it is not a monetary good or business that can be traded. Instead we need **disinvestment** on and from all sectors that cause her destruction and stop trying to implement false solutions like biodiversity offsets.

We call on Parties to urgently approve and apply the procedure for avoiding and managing **conflicts of interest**. The focus should be on preventing private, financial and vested interests which conflict with the public interest.

Inequalities and power asymmetries caused by our

development system cannot continue deepening. The **post-2020** process must be led by rights and stake holders that include women, indigenous peoples and local communities, youth and all those already taking action and that are suffering the impacts of our lack of action that deserve restorative justice.

The **precautionary principle** must applied before the implementation of new technologies.

We demand a full stop to any release of the genetic extermination technology called **gene drives** and the strengthening of prior and informed consent related to this new and dangerous technology.

We call on parties to reestablish an **AHTEG on risk assessment** and expedite the work on organisms including engineered gene drives, genome edited organisms and LMO fish.

The use of **digital sequence information** without benefit sharing is inequitable and a long term threat to this very convention. We urge parties for an equitable system that ensures benefit sharing of DSI.

An estimated 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is found in the territories and lands of **Indigenous peoples and local communities**. We have to do much more to back communities in their own efforts to collectively govern, manage, protect and conserve their territories of life.

Global warming threatens seed vault

"The Svalbard Global Seed Vault [...] was opened in 2008. As a backup facility to support the work of seed banks around the world, the Svalbard location is doubly suitable. [...] Buried beneath the permafrost, the vault is also a natural deep freezer: powered by locally mined coal, it's refrigerated to minus 18 degrees Celsius, and even if these machines were to fail, the local bedrock remains below freezing all year round. [...]"

The year 2016 was the hottest ever recorded - for the third time in a row, with research indicating that the earth hasn't been this warm for 115,000 years. In November, scientists reported that Arctic temperatures were up to 20 degrees Celsius higher than average, with sea ice levels 20 per cent below their twenty-five-year average. In Svalbard, heavy rain fell in place of light snow, and the permafrost started to melt. An inspection of the vault in May of 2017 found that the entrance of the tunnel had been flooded by meltwater, refreezing as it fell below the surface to form an indoor glacier that had to be hacked out to access the seedbank. Intended to function for a long periods without human intervention, the vault is now under twenty-four-hour watch, with emergency waterproofing being added to the entrance tunnel, and trenches being dug around the site to channel meltwater away."

from New Dark Age. James Bridle, 2018

Mainstreaming Action at COP14

Helena Paul (EcoNexus)

We know that our economic model of endless growth and high energy use cannot be reconciled with ending the destruction of biodiversity. We need to completely rethink what we mean by development and end high energy use. That is why such a profound transformation is required.

...Yet fragmentation for 'development' continues

In the UK, for example, plans for a new railway line threaten several **important biodiversity sites**, while the third runway at Heathrow and that railway will cause irreparable damage to a river valley and related park.

Meanwhile the host for COP15 China develops the **Belt and Road**, probably the biggest infrastructure project ever devised - yet the COP over which China will preside is meant to agree a 'New Deal for Nature'...

Avoidance is the first step in the mitigation hierarchy

Until governments begin to cancel projects because they fragment and degrade ecosystems and do not address climate change, we will continue the headlong race towards **destroying the conditions that have allowed humans to develop and flourish until now**.

The message is clear

We humans – businesses, governments and individuals have to reduce the impact we are having on the biosphere and we have to do it now. It cannot be put off until 2020, 2030 or 2050.

...At the same time we must mainstream implementation

Governments must also prioritise the implementation of previous CBD decisions as a vital part of this process. We should hold governments to account for this.

Fine words must be accompanied by decisive action. This is the major challenge for COP14, and the path to COP15.

Geoengineering: Ignoring CBD decisions at the United Nations Environment Assembly?

Jeanne Pasteur

Tomorrow, CBD delegates will focus on the theme of the CBD's *Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives*. There is good reason to do so: One CBD landmark decision, the 2010 *de facto* moratorium on climate-related geoengineering,¹ is peculiarly absent in discussions in many international fora and institutions.

C2G2, an initiative that aims to promote geoengineering governance discussions, has been pushing for the *United Nations Environment Assembly* (UNEA) to take up the issue of geoengineering. And indeed, it now seems that Switzerland is willing to table a resolution at the upcoming UNEA meeting in March 2019. This resolution, according to C2G2,² would set up an expert group and call for a state-of-play report on geoengineering.

Most of the current debates on geoengineering governance, including those led by C2G2, are strangely silent on the work that the CBD has carried out over the past decade. They fail to acknowledge the significance of the CBD decisions on geoengineering as well as that of the regulation of marine geoengineering that is in place under the London Protocol of the London Convention. CBD delegates should be aware that the important work they have accomplished under the CBD – the moratorium decision that is also an important point of reference for international civil society – is potentially being undermined in other international fora and processes, and make sure that CBD decisions remain the starting point of any geoengineering governance discussion, including in UNEA.

Delegates should also take note of the *Hands off Mother Earth* (HOME) Manifesto released in October 2018 by 23 international organizations, six "Alternative Nobel Prize" recipients, and 87 national organizations from five continents calling for a halt to testing and political consideration of climate geoengineering. Opposition to geoengineering is also expected at Climate COP 24 in Poland later this year.

1 COP10 Decision X/33 www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12299

2 www.c2g2.net/talking-about-governance-in-china

The peasant's movement La Via Campesina is urging for a moratorium on gene drives

Genevieve Lalumiere (Via Campesina)

Item 27 of the CBD on *Synthetic Biology* is a crucial point for peasants, rural communities, indigenous peoples and family farmers. The *International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty* and the international peasant organisation *La Via Campesina* are strongly urging the parties to insist for the refrain of the release in the environment of organisms containing gene drives, whether it is for research or commercial uses.

It is imperative to understand that gene drive causes serious and unrepairable risks of contamination, loss and destruction of biodiversity, as they are designed and engineered to spread among entire populations. They are also a false solution presented by the industry for agriculture, as these new biotechnologies are threatening and endangering peasant agriculture by making them dependant to industrial technologies. It threatens traditional knowledge and know-how and annihilates all peasant holistic practices of food production and land conservation. Loss of biodiversity is occurring since we are permitting industrial technologies to take over traditional practices.

The current process of the development of gene drive organisms is totally colonialist, as there is NO free prior informed consent. Local communities don't want nor need gene drives organisms and industry is pushing hard to convince them. The hypothetical benefits on human health or conservation do not justify the real threats on biodiversity and human health.

We need to build a real global transparent regulatory process, as for now some groups of interests are pushing for this technology to make agri-buisness products and bioweapons. For example, research to solve malaria with extinction of entire populations of mosquitoes with gene drives is only a great excuse to use Africans as guinea pigs and test the technology. We are urging parties to insist on a moratorium on gene drives, for the sake of peasant and indigenous people, keepers of biodiversity.

Herbivory: critical to coral reef health

*Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense
(AIDA)*

The health of many of the coral reefs has declined significantly over the last several decades. In particular, the reduction of coral cover has been associated with the overexploitation and lack of legal protections for parrotfish and other herbivorous fish; the lack of integrated watershed and coastal management strategies; and the ongoing effects of climate change.

Conservation of these important ecosystems is imperative, specially following the IPCC's report that predicts a loss of 70-90% of coral reefs in the next few decades due to the increasing global surface temperatures of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. International platforms argue, however, that reducing the non-climate threats has the potential to improve the recovery of these ecosystems and help conserve reefs around the globe. AIDA, including many other organizations, believe that safeguarding herbivorous fish is crucial to allow coral reef ecosystems to recover. These fish graze on the algae that can asphyxiate reefs, by reducing the supply of oxygen and light, which inhibits corals' growth and their ability to withstand the damaging effects of climate change, such as bleaching.

AIDA has launched a three-year project to protect populations of parrotfish and other herbivorous fish that live in the waters off Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia, with interest to expand to other Latin American. AIDA's Reef Fish Conservation project¹ aims to work with national leaders of the aforementioned countries and encourage the implementation of international treaties and regulations, and the development of national and regional regulations that protect these fish and their spawning grounds.

1 <https://aida-americas.org/en/protecting-herbivorous-fish-secure-future-corals>

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Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.
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Pressure Mounts for a Solution on Benefit Sharing for Digital Sequence Information

Edward Hammond, Prickly Research & Lim Li Ching, Third World Network Agenda Item 18 / NP17- DSI

With the rapid global expansion of large scale gene sequencing efforts like the recently launched *Earth Biogenome Project*, which aims to “sequence the genomes of all known species”, pressure is mounting on the Biodiversity Convention to create a benefit sharing solution for use of digital sequence information (DSI). Parties will take the issue up in Working Group I today.

Gene sequences in databases and other natural information are increasingly replacing companies’ need to access biological samples. Observers conclude that without systematic DSI benefit sharing, the situation is nothing less than an existential threat to the Convention. If users of biodiversity, particularly commercial entities, access biodiversity as DSI, yet don’t share benefits, then the third objective of the Convention is not fulfilled, a situation that could eventually cause the entire agreement to collapse.

For Parties, the question isn’t *if* benefit sharing for DSI must be done, but *how* to do it. Delegates may differ on the degree to which DSI falls within the scope of the *Nagoya Protocol* and the Convention, but that discussion may not be as central as it initially appears, because use of DSI is utilization of genetic resources and, therefore benefit sharing is obligatory under the *Nagoya Protocol*.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of DSI databases, such as *Genbank* (US), the *European Nucleotide Archive*, and *Japan’s DNA Data Bank* take absolutely no measures to ensure benefit sharing. These databases and their backers claim that “open access” to DSI must be paramount.

This self-interested Northern vision of “open access” posits that sequences must be given to companies (and others) without obligations, and that they may commercially capitalize on DSI, without benefit sharing. Yet this brand of “open access” is clearly flawed, as in order to be consistent with the CBD and *Nagoya Protocol*, open access cannot mean that DSI is distributed with “no strings attached”. As use of DSI is utilization of genetic resources under the *Nagoya Protocol*, benefit sharing is obligatory.

The challenge then, in Sharm El-Sheikh, is to craft an urgently needed agreement allowing DSI to be publicly

available for scientific work, but also requiring DSI users to commit to share benefits. The issue is especially important for bio-diverse developing countries, whose species are sequenced and placed in unregulated databases controlled by wealthy countries ... countries that, to date, do not expressly acknowledge the obligation to equitably share benefits.

Contemplating solutions, interested groups are studying data access and use agreements, in some ways similar to software licenses, to which database users must agree before accessing sequences. Others are discussing multi-lateral benefit sharing possibilities, an approach supported by many developing countries at SBSTTA in July 2018.

SBSTTA’s consideration of DSI stalled, however, when small advances in the contact group fell apart at the Working Group’s final meeting. European resistance to seriously discuss DSI benefit sharing was to blame for SBSTTA’s missed opportunities. Some fear that Europe will arrive in Sharm El-Sheikh again seeking to avoid resolution by saying it is “too early” and demanding more technical considerations of an issue that, in reality, is pre-eminently political.

The reasons for Europe’s position are clear. Delay strongly favors the economic interests of Northern countries, because they hope that DSI databases now being hurriedly built in the absence of a solution will not have to share benefits in the future, in much the same way that *ex-situ* biodiversity collections, such as colonial botanical gardens, have continued to mostly escape benefit sharing obligations despite more than 25 years of the CBD.

At SBSTTA, developing countries proposed that COP create an *Open Ended Working Group* (OEWG) to negotiate a DSI solution for adoption at COP 15 in Beijing. If progress is not made quickly, some developing countries propose to use new clauses in bilateral bioprospecting agreements to restrict sequencing of samples, a move that will surely get the scientific community’s attention if it is broadly implemented.