



Snowman to snow-mess: negotiations at COP15 are opening doors to risky technologies

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An avalanche of heated discussions accompanied the first snowfall of this winter in Montreal. Regarding synthetic biology and target 17, the texts currently being discussed fall short on establishing robust international rules to govern biotechnology.

The inability to reach consensus, coupled with biased steering from those chairing discussions has severely weakened the text. While the government of Canada hosts a snowman building competition, negotiators of target 17 replace the “spirit of compromise” with a messy snowball fight of finger pointing.

As a result, several of the concerns raised by civil society organisations working on the issues of synthetic biology and biotechnology remain unresolved. For example, the lack of a biotechnology related target that establishes a process for horizon scanning, technology assessment and monitoring and considers socioeconomic impacts of synthetic

biology reinforces the need for a global moratorium on the environmental release of gene drives.

It seems that the GBF as it stands today is blindfolded. It will not be able to see further and enable the assessment and monitoring of the potential adverse impacts of biotechnology and synthetic biology. In the case of gene drives, that once released, cannot be controlled, contained, reversed or recalled, this lack of international agreement poses critical threats to biodiversity and human rights.

It seems that the GBF will guarantee neither that new technologies are approached with precaution, nor that countries are equipped with the right tools to assess them. Therefore, their release must be halted. For more information, access the text of the manifesto for a global moratorium on the environmental release of gene drive organisms here: <https://www.stop-genedrives.eu/en/manifesto/>

DSI decision should not undermine the scope of the CBD

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While there are rays of hope around the draft decision on Digital Sequence Information (DSI), a very few developed countries continue to forward hardline positions without remorse. These countries have continuously attempted to get a decision that states that DSI is not covered under the scope of the Convention. The current version of the draft decision contains this view in brackets: “Recognizing that there are divergent views on digital sequence information on genetic resources [with regards to its scope under] [in relation to its scope in] the Convention on Biological Diversity”.

A worst case interpretation is that this paragraph gives recognition to a view that there is divergence regarding the scope of the Convention, as to whether it deals with DSI or not. This has never been the case. Decision 14/20 only points to divergence regarding the views relating to benefit sharing arising from the

use of DSI, and there was a commitment to resolve such divergences. The draft decision, unfortunately, may accept an even graver form of divergence with regards to the scope of the Convention and whether it covers DSI.

To have such an outcome, for a promise of a future fund, of which details are unknown at this stage, is risky for developing countries. It may undermine their positions in many other forums such as the WHO, ITPGRFA and UNCLOS, where they are demanding fair and equitable benefit sharing from the use of the DSI based on the obligations of the CBD. The invitation to the users of DSI to contribute funds voluntarily to the proposed fund adds to this uncertainty. This may unfortunately open the door for users to contribute charity to the fund, but discharge their obligations under the Convention.

CBD Alliance’s High Level Segment Statement

16 December 2022

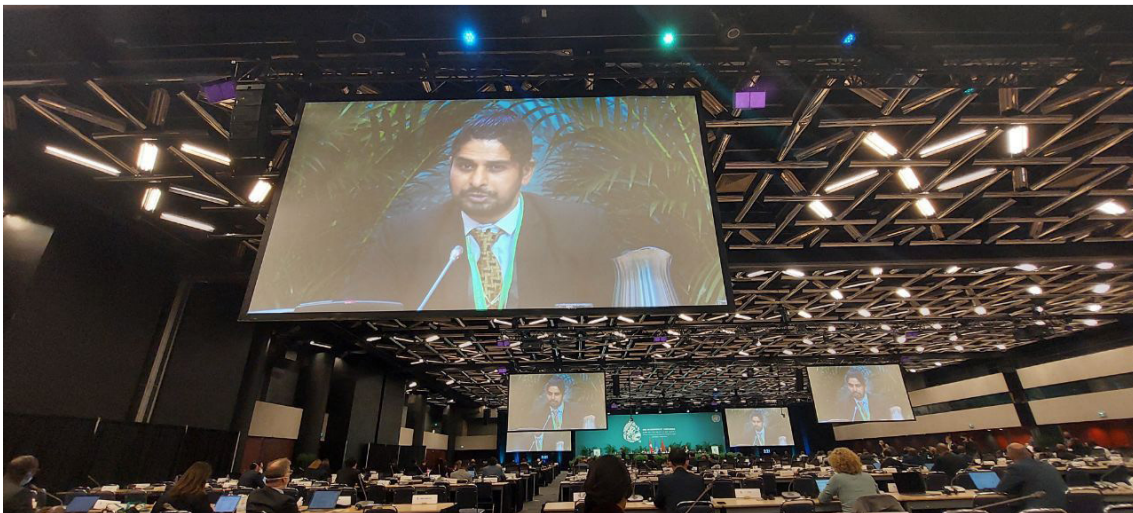
We look to the commitment of you, ministers, to elevate human rights to the level they deserve, in the relevant goals and targets and with relevant indicators that are firmly based in social science and gender-differentiated. The current section B-bis can at most be complementary to this. We particularly insist on guaranteeing protection of human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women and local communities in target 3, and a specific reference to respect for their territories and customary lands, and we need to have clear headline indicators on this. The GBF has to be based on the principles of Equity and Common but Differentiated responsibilities. High-income nations bear the overwhelming responsibility for global ecological breakdown, and need to urgently reduce their overexploitation of resource use to fair and sustainable levels. We strongly support the new EU regulation on deforestation-free commodities in this respect, we call for its expansion to cover human rights, other ecosystems and the financial sector, and we call on other countries with a significant ecological footprint to adopt similar legally binding regulations.

Developed countries owe an ecological debt to the rest of the world and must provide the necessary finance to developing countries in line with their legal obligations under the CBD. We firmly reject the notion of “all sources of finance” as this might include very harmful sources of funding like carbon offsets, biodiversity offsets or mass tourism. We cannot end up in a situation where 30% of the planet is being protected through financial resources earned through destroying 70% of the planet.

We reiterate our opposition to the use of terms like “nature-based solutions” and ‘nature positive’. These are merely slogans which replace ‘biodiversity’ with meaningless, unmeasurable terms, and invite endless greenwashing and false ‘solutions’ rather than meaningful science-based action to protect biodiversity. It should have no place in the GBF.

The three objectives of the Convention need to be implemented equitably and in a balanced manner, as none can be achieved without the other. In this light we reiterate our call for an equitable, gender just and effective benefit sharing mechanism for DSI.

Thank you Mr. President



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