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Precaution and integrity at stake in the guidance materials on risk assessment of LMOs containing engineered gene drives

Eva Sirinathsinghji, Third World Network

Living modified organisms containing engineered gene drives (EGD-LMOs) are a new form of genetic engineering (GE) application that raises a host of concerns spanning biosafety, socio-economic, ethical and cultural dimensions due to their explicit design intention of spread and persistence. Compounding these concerns is the inability to recall or reverse a gene drive release if the technology goes awry.

Due to the fundamental challenges they raise to the ability to conduct robust and reliable risk assessments, an AHTEG was set up to draft additional voluntary guidance materials. Such guidance materials should set out a precautionary approach, as set out in previous decisions (14/19, CP-9/13 and XIII/17).

Unfortunately, the new guidance materials that will be considered in Cali do not advance a precautionary approach. Instead, the use of a new approach ('pathways to harm' under a 'problem formulation approach') for conducting risk assessments has been introduced. It narrows the risk assessment framing and scope, minimises data requirements for assessing risks and fails to address the central and most controversial risks and uncertainties of EGD-LMOs – their uncontrolled spread and persistence. This raises challenges for alignment with specific aspects of the Cartagena Pro-

ocol on Biosafety. Instead, the approach aligns with industry methods of streamlining risk assessments that have been long promoted for GE crops, and thus is not well equipped to deal with the risks and uncertainties associated with EGD-LMOs.

Most concerningly, the prominent role played by a member of the AHTEG who is affiliated with an entity that is considered one of - if not the - leading gene drive projects globally, raises doubts regarding the integrity of the guidance materials. This member played a prominent role in advocating for the adopted methods as well as taking lead roles in early drafting of sections of the document that relate to project of the developer. This regrettably casts doubts over the integrity of the guidance materials. This case has been highlighted at SBI-4 (paras 13-15 of CBD/SBI/4/11/Add.1). It has also, in part, led to proposed amendments to improve the procedure for avoiding or managing conflicts of interest in expert groups, which will be considered at COP16.

The guidance materials are not yet ready to be welcomed by Parties. They should instead, be subject to independent review before they can be put to use. Precaution and integrity cannot be compromised at the hands of industry.

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Don't let big banks write our laws on biodiversity & finance

Tom Picken, RAN

First, some facts:

- The world's biodiversity needs protecting, but destruction is still accelerating;
- Developing countries host most biodiversity but are least able to afford its protection;
- The global extractivist resource economy is thriving, driving the destruction of nature;
- IPLCs protecting land and forests are facing increased violence and murder;
- The financial sector is effectively free to fund destructive activities with impunity.

While resource mobilization and reforms to the financial mechanism of the GBF are critical, so too is the need to stop big business and banks from writing COP16 decision text. The decisions reached here in Cali are supposed to deliver on the objectives of the GBF. It is not supposed to be a business opportunity to perpetuate financial sector impunity from biodiversity destruction and related human rights abuses.

All parties to the Convention have an obligation to negotiate in good faith for the benefit and security of humanity and the ecosystems on which we depend. Parties must not betray us by advancing the interests of big business at the expense of nature and people.

A 3-point common-sense appeal to guide negotiations on biodiversity and finance

1 Recognise and engage in good faith the need to significantly increase the mobilization of public sources of finance for the realization of GBF goals. Consider equity and ambition as Parties address the proposals and needs of developing countries, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This must include appropriate consideration for the establishment of a dedicated Global Biodiversity Fund that better represents these needs.

2 Require central banks, financial regulators and supervisors to fully incorporate biodiversity and human rights into their mandate, including outcome-oriented policies in line with the goals of the GBF. This is critical to shift the real-world economy away from biodiversity destruction and towards regenerative, community-centered solutions. Conversely, international biodiversity credit and offset markets should have no place in the achievement of GBF goals. These are merely gifts to the private sector which delay and distract from real solutions.

3 Strike out references to flawed initiatives that have been developed by corporations, for corporations. Specifically, there is no place for the *Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures* (TNFD) in the COP16 decision text. The TNFD is neither compatible with the goals and targets of the GBF nor with the principles of UN participation, having been devised by a decision-making body composed solely of 40 global corporations. There already exist more comprehensive and effective financial sector disclosure standards, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

We urge Parties to step up to these challenges and fulfill your obligations under the CBD and GBF. We also ask you to give less credence to those industries and lobbies profiting from biodiversity destruction while purporting to know how best to protect it.



A purpose-oriented, multi-stakeholder and multi-evidence-based biodiversity global review

Juliette Landry, IDDRI

The GBF and the multidimensional approach for planning, monitoring, reporting and review adopted at COP15 marks a significant step to close the “implementation gap” by enhancing the coherence between international ambitions and national efforts. Review mechanisms give the global community the tools to measure and track progress and course correct as needed before the 2030 deadline, thereby reinforcing accountability and enhancing global biodiversity governance. **A review with purpose: more than just tracking progress**

A meaningful review process doesn't just track numbers. It identifies solutions, uncovers barriers (for instance regarding international cooperation), and highlights transformative pathways for achieving the GBF. The goal is to learn from each step, making necessary adjustments to keep pushing forward, without resorting to a punitive approach.

Diverse voices and data, stronger outcomes

By bringing together different knowledge systems (scientific, technical, and local perspectives) the review becomes more robust. Civil society, indigenous com-

munities, and local groups must have their voices heard. It will also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the progress, challenges, and opportunities in implementing the GBF, at all levels. Institutionalizing the inclusion of these inputs and these dialogues ensures an inclusive and participatory approach to biodiversity governance.

Filling the gaps: anticipating challenges

For the review to be truly effective, we must anticipate potential gaps, whether in data collection, national reporting, or stakeholder engagement. Proactive efforts to address these issues will be key to ensuring the review process delivers on its promises.

By promoting a culture of continuous improvement and transparency, Parties and stakeholders can strengthen the overall effectiveness of the review process and enhance global biodiversity governance.

Join us for a discussion on this issue:
Thursday, 24 Oct, 15:00, Cano Cristales



Full report

Some side events today

NBSAPs tracker presentation

14:00 – Greenpeace | WWF – Nature positive pavillion

Current guidance on risk assessment with focus on gene drive organisms is unfit for purpose

16:30 - ENSSER | TWN | EcoNexus | VDW - Academia & Research tent

Climate geoengineering and biodiversity - why the CBD needs to affirm precaution

16:30 - ETC Group | HBF | TWN | IEN | CIEL | CoA – CEE tent

Women Environmental Defenders and the GBF Monitoring Framework

18:00 – FARN and other organisations – CEE tent

CLIMATE GEOENGINEERING
and biodiversity

WHY THE CBD NEEDS TO AFFIRM PRECAUTION

Presentations about proposed experiments and risks

Wednesday, October 23

CBD Side Event
Cano Cristales
CEE Meeting Room
Plaza One

4:30 pm

ETC Group | HBF | TWN | IEN | CIEL | CoA-College of the Atlantic

Debt and tax justice required for KMGBF implementation

Biodiversity Capital Research Collective

Amidst all the debate about how to raise money for KMGBF implementation, some crucial flows of finance risk being left off the table. According to research by Tax Justice Network, countries are losing \$480 billion USD per year due to global tax abuse. IMF research finds another \$44 billion USD is being left on the table by under-taxing extractive sectors – the exact sectors who should be contributing their fair share to KMGBF implementation.

Unprecedented global debt distress is also draining government budgets and driving extractive land use; in 2023 “3.3 billion people [were] living in countries that spend more on interest payments than on education or health.” This massive outflow of capital is the outcome of high interest rates on debt issued in foreign currencies. Consider, for example, that developing countries are borrowing at rates up to 12 times more expensive than those in developed countries and this debt is issued in mostly US dollars. Because debt is issued in foreign currency, the value of these debts can increase without governments lifting a finger: recent US interest rate hikes, for example, resulted in an increase of African countries debt by 10% of GDP from January 2022 to March 2023. In the constant, uphill battle to earn foreign currency to repay these debts, governments are incentivized, and sometimes mandated, to hasten their production of extractive exports.

These conditions not only deepen countries’ reliance on extractive exports, but limit their ability to direct public finance towards social and environmental priorities. As such, the resource mobilization conversation ought to pivot from a focus on private finance to a focus on public finance, and the necessity of tax justice and debt relief to relieve the pressures on biodiversity-rich countries to expand commodity production, and increase public revenues to meet KMGBF targets.

These unequal conditions of access to debt financing needs to be championed as a broader constraining condition on KMGBF implementation. So far, debt shows up mostly in relation to debt-for-nature swaps, which, while potentially an important stop-gap measure, will ultimately not be able to provide substantial debt reduction, nor create sufficient fiscal space for Global South countries to tackle biodiversity, climate and other SDG objectives.

Research shows that public finance will necessarily form the foundation of financing CBD targets (1, 2 3, 4). Recent increases in overall financial flows have come mostly in the form of loans, rather than grants, and, overall, private flows of biodiversity finance remain marginal in size with unproven (if not deleterious) impact. This reality points to the importance of increasing public finance for biodiversity action and lessening fiscal pressures that increase countries’ dependence on activities that harm biodiversity. These flows of public finance should recognize the ecological debts that the Global North has accrued, advance Rio principles of common but differentiated responsibility, and obligations under Article 20 of the CBD.

Key points on finance to be championed at COP16:

- ◆ Increased public finance as a necessity for KMGBF implementation
- ◆ Private finance as insufficient for KMGBF implementation
- ◆ Debt restructuring and cancellation beyond debt-for-nature swaps
- ◆ Tax justice to open up new sources of public finance for KMGBF
- ◆ A loss and damage approach accounting for compounding ecological debts



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