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## Harmful subsidies, debt and financing for biodiversity in Africa

### Just transition pathways for CBD's COP 16 and beyond

*African Centre for Biodiversity*

As governments meet in Cali for COP16, the challenge of financing biodiversity conservation remains at the forefront of discussions. The Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted at COP 15, emphasises the need for action on harmful environmental subsidies, especially under Target 18, which calls for eliminating, phasing out, or reforming these subsidies while scaling up positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The goal is to reduce harmful subsidies by USD 500 billion annually by 2030. Subsidies account for much of the funding that could otherwise be directed toward biodiversity protection. Harmful subsidies amount to over USD 2.6 trillion per year, with 40% going to fossil fuels and 23% to agriculture. These funds dwarf the estimated USD 722 billion to USD 967 billion needed annually for comprehensive biodiversity protection. Alarming, actual funding flows for biodiversity range from just USD 124 billion to USD 165 billion a year, leaving a shortfall of more than 83%.

While it seems logical to reorient harmful subsidies to fund environmental protection, the issue is complex. Subsidies vary significantly in their impact, with some benefiting corporate profits while others ensure access to essential goods like energy and food for marginalised groups.

African governments face the dual challenge of addressing environmental harm while managing immense economic pressures. Public spending in Africa



often subsidises synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds to drive agricultural productivity. These farm input subsidy programmes (FISPs), introduced as part of Africa's Green Revolution, may boost short-term crop yields but come at a high environmental cost, damaging soil health, biodiversity, and water resources. At the same time, fossil fuel subsidies globally continue to undermine biodiversity goals by encouraging the overuse of natural resources and driving climate change. Reforming these subsidies is essential, but any transition must be fair and equitable, particularly for small-scale farmers and small businesses that rely on these subsidies for survival.

However, Africa's economic challenges extend beyond subsidies. The continent is caught in a debt trap, with foreign debt repayments draining resources that could

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be used for social investment and biodiversity protection. Many African nations are forced into austerity measures as a condition for receiving loans, which further limits their capacity to invest in environmental protection. This debt burden, compounded by the pressure to subsidise corporate extractive activities to generate foreign exchange, reflects deep global inequalities that keep African economies in a subordinate position.

Moreover, illicit financial flows (IFFs), tax evasion, and profit repatriation lead to a significant loss of wealth from Africa, further depleting the continent's ability to invest in sustainable development. Despite mainstream narratives that Africa is a drain on global resources, the reality is that net wealth extraction from Africa continues year after year. These factors must be addressed to ensure that Africa can fund its own biodiversity and development goals.

To solve these challenges, a holistic approach is needed. First, harmful subsidies to corporate entities must be removed. These funds could be redirected toward environmentally friendly practices, such as agroecology and renewable energy.

Second, consumer subsidies for resource-poor individuals and households must be protected to ensure that marginalised populations retain access to essential goods and services like food and energy. A just transition requires that we prioritise the needs of these groups, ensuring that they are not disproportionately affected by the shift away from harmful practices.

Lastly, addressing Africa's unjust debt burden is essential for financing biodiversity. Writing off odious debts, restructuring the global financial system, and tackling tax avoidance and IFFs are crucial steps. Reparations for centuries of extraction and exploitation should fund Africa's sustainable development, not foreign debt repayments.

Ultimately, financing biodiversity requires more than just finding new funding sources—it demands a rethinking of how global economic systems function. By tackling harmful subsidies, restructuring debt, and addressing global inequalities, Africa and the world can take meaningful steps toward a future where biodiversity thrives and economies grow sustainably.

Read the full report at  
<https://acbio.org.za>



## CBD Alliance Forum

**Multistakeholder Auditorium, Friday 25 October, 14-18:00**

### **14 – 16:00: Finance and biodiversity in a bigger picture**

- x Reforming the international financial architecture for biodiversity: debt and tax justice for KMGBF implementation
- x Financial Regulations for Biodiversity & COP16 resource mobilization discussion
- x Task Force on Nature-related Financial Disclosure (TFND), corporate capture & COP16 resource mobilization discussion
- x What DSI outcome do we need at COP 16 for finance and equity?
- x The need to defund agribusiness and mobilize resources for sustainable food systems
- x Financing Forest Fires: Agrobusiness driving biodiversity destruction
- x Input from the Ayoreo people on community impacts

### **16-17:00: Inadequate policy**

#### **proposals that further undermine Biodiversity**

- x Nature-based solutions
- x Geoengineering
- x GE trees
- x Biomass Energy

### **17-18:00 Stocktake of the week**

#### **on biotech related issues**

- x Synthetic Biology
- x Risk assessment
- x Gene drives

# The emergency of genetically modified trees

Heather Lee, *Global Justice Ecology Project*

Brazil's approval of genetically modified (GM) eucalyptus trees for commercial production represents a serious threat to biological diversity, ecosystem function and human rights. The approval runs counter to and undermines COP decision IX/5 (2008) which reaffirms the need to take a precautionary approach to GM trees. Brazil's decisions threaten to open the door to the large-scale release of GM eucalyptus and to the approval and use of other GM trees, such as GM pine, around the world.

Brazilian pulp company Suzano (and its subsidiary FuturaGene) has received permission from the government of Brazil to release nine varieties of GM eucalyptus trees for commercial production. These GM trees, not yet in commercial production, have been modified to tolerate spraying by the toxic herbicide glyphosate, produce a toxin to kill certain insects (Bt), and to grow faster. The deployment of these GM traits would further exacerbate the devastating social, ecological and socio-economic impacts of current extensive industrial eucalyptus monocultures.

**Toxic treadmill:** Glyphosate-tolerant GM crops have led to dramatic increases in the use of glyphosate. The wide application of glyphosate, especially through aerial spraying, has wide ecological impacts, and the spread of glyphosate-resistant weeds can lead to more spraying.

**Poisoned pollinators:** GM insect-resistant eucalyptus trees would produce Bt toxins that could threaten pollinators like honeybees, butterflies and other insects critical to healthy forest ecosystems, and negatively impact local agriculture and honey production.

**Ecosystem-wide impacts:** Development of faster-growing GM eucalyptus plantations would accelerate the depletion of soils and fresh water observed in eucalyptus plantations. Their use is projected to result in

the further rapid conversion of native forests to tree plantations.

**Horizon scanning:** The genetic engineering of trees highlights the importance of horizon scanning and need for robust risk assessments. Genetic engineering can result in unintended changes at the DNA, trait and behavioural levels, which may not be noticed in initial tests and could cause serious harm in the long-term.

**GM contamination:** The use of GM eucalyptus trees in Brazil would further threaten forests, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Brazil and neighboring countries. Containment and monitoring would be difficult, if not impossible. The trees could escape and become invasive or potentially crossbred with invasive eucalyptus trees that have become naturalized, including in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, causing further harm through the spread of GM traits. As well, large-scale eucalyptus plantations grow in Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

**CBD's 2008 decision for a precautionary approach to GM trees:** Parties to the Convention should fully implement Decision IX/5 which reaffirms the need to take a precautionary approach in relation to GM trees and recognizes the risks of GM trees to global forest biological diversity and the potential for adverse socio-cultural impacts to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Parties should not permit the commercial release of GM trees until independent long-term, full life-cycle risk assessments have safely been carried out and conclusively prove that such trees will not harm forest biological diversity and ecosystem functions, nor the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Such studies do not exist at this time.

This is supported by 100+ organizations from more than 30 countries:

<https://stopgetrees.org/open-letter>



# Gender, women defenders and coastal-marine areas of biodiversity relevance

*Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales and Fundación Inalafquen*

Women human rights defenders on environmental issues are on the front line of biodiversity protection and climate action. Many of them are attacked and killed every year, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, the most dangerous region in the world in this sense. It is imperative to increase security and access to justice for people who defend the environment and the rights of their communities, especially women, whose vulnerability to threats is exacerbated by gender-based violence and, in the case of Indigenous and rural women, by the disproportionate impact they suffer from biodiversity loss and the cultural, economic and social obstacles they face in exercising their full environmental citizenship.

International policy frameworks and regional tools in line with human rights-based approaches, such as the CBD's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Escazu Agreement respectively, are of paramount importance for this. They are key tools for achieving a sustainable and just world, with full recognition of and respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities to land, territories, resources and traditional knowledge, and for the protection of environmental defenders.

Women play a critical role in the implementation of the GBF. However, the bracketed language related to

human rights, women and environmental defenders in the texts currently under negotiation on biodiversity and climate change, as well as the lack of commitment to the robust participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the conservation and sustainable use of coastal-marine biodiversity, raises concerns. This includes the recognition of free, prior and informed consent, and the effective participation of indigenous peoples, local communities, women, children, youth and persons with disabilities, which is not in line with the language already agreed to in the GBF.

Liz Assef, an environmental defender of the provincial natural reserve Bahía de San Antonio, in the province of Rio Negro, Argentina, asserts that “women do science, restoration, political advocacy, educate future generations, in the face of the extractivist advance on coastal marine areas, such as large-scale real estate development or the extraction of gas and oil in the sea that coincides with areas of high value for biodiversity that support hundreds of jobs related to tourism and the health of people and species”.

It is time to remove the brackets around the language of human rights, women and environmental defenders and elevate their role in coastal marine protection and action.

*From the corridors*

Offsets: Isn't it sad that the only money available to fund biodiversity conservation will be used to allow biodiversity destruction elsewhere?

It's good that the CBD is the second instrument to deal with credits. Maybe people have learnt from the problems with carbon credits in the UNFCCC

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