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Monday, 21 October – Friday, 1 November 2025

Cali, Colombia

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We honor environmental defenders murdered and disappeared, and demand the killings to stop.

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In this issue

Equity and ambition needed in resource mobilization

Lim Li Ching, Third World Network

Agreement on the resources needed for taking action to address the biodiversity crisis is crucial at COP16. With over 400 square brackets to resolve, these discussions will be very contentious, and will quickly become entrenched in the North-South fight over monies owed. When we view it from a global justice lens, we understand that it really is about equity.

Developing countries hold most of the world's biodiversity, so bear the bigger burden to take action. Developed countries bear greater responsibility due to "the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command."

This is the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Article 20 clearly obliges developed countries to provide financial resources to developing countries so that they can effectively implement their commitments. Developed countries have not delivered on their commitments.

Further, developed countries bear overwhelming current and historical responsibility for ecological breakdown. They owe an ecological debt to the rest of the world, which far surpasses the financial resources currently provided by developed to developing countries.

Developed countries' contributions to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) so far is less than $250m. The KMGBF target for flows from developed to developing countries is at least $20bn per year by 2025, and at least $30bn per year by 2030. (Assuming 2023 as the start year, by 2025, the total provision should be at least $60bn, and at least $210bn by 2030.)

Developing countries want a dedicated Global Biodiversity Fund established at COP 16, that is under the authority of the COP and responsive to their needs and priorities. Currently the GBFF, under the GEF, has a governance structure that favours developed countries.

This is being strongly resisted by developed countries.

Instead, they have passed on their responsibilities to corporate interests under the guise of "all sources". References to private finance, blended finance and innovative financial schemes, including market-based mechanisms such as biodiversity offsets and credits, are all over the text.

But these are false solutions, and will harm peoples and biodiversity. At the very least, their mention should be coupled with requirements to assess their impacts on biodiversity, gender equality and human rights. Brackets on references to environmental and social safeguards, and a human rights-based approach – principles accepted in the KMGBF – must be lifted.

Instead, collective actions, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, Mother Earth-centric actions and non-market-based approaches, are the best means to protect biodiversity. These approaches are recognised in the text, but there is no agreement on whether support should be scaled up for them.

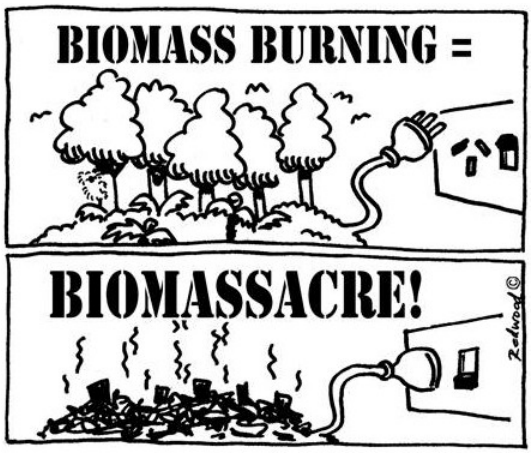
The scale and justice aspects of the resource mobilization discussion need to vastly increase. This must include the amounts flowing directly to rightsholders - indigenous peoples, local communities, women, youth – who are the best stewards of biodiversity.

How False Finance Destroys Biodiversity

Simone Lovera, Biomass Action Network

Now it is *Action Time* for biodiversity policy makers, who are coming together at COP 16 for the first time since the adoption of the historic *Global Biodiversity Framework* in 2022, and the big question on the table is: "Do we have the resources we need?" Delivering finance for conservation will be at the heart of North-South negotiations the coming weeks, and the demand of developing countries that developed countries pay the new and additional costs of biodiversity conservation in light of historical injustices is fair and square.

The good news is that there is a lot of money - but much of it is being spent the wrong way: The recently released Banking on Biodiversity Collapse 2024 report* of the *Forests and Finance Coalition* shows how 77 billion USD was invested in forest risk commodities between January 2023 and June 2024 alone. Even climate finance continues to be spent on policies that destroy biodiversity – despite the essential role healthy ecosystems like forests play in climate mitigation and adaptation.



A new report by a group of Asian NGOs* including several *Biomass Action Network* members on the devastating impact of subsidized industrial bioenergy production demonstrates how misguided incentives destroy precious ecosystems in the name of climate action. In 2023 alone, wood pellet demand in Asia surged by no less than 20%, with South Korea and Japan being the lead importers. This demand is driven by lush subsidy schemes and other incentives like the Japanese Feed-in-Tariff system, despite growing scientific evidence that bioenergy is not only a disaster for biodiversity but also triggers more greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuels, per unit or energy. The Korean government supported biomass burning with more than 33 million USD per year between 2015 and 2022. Meanwhile, Indonesia's own climate strategies, which include an aggressive co-firing scheme that is seen as a survival strategy for the coal industry itself, will trigger an additional demand of more than 8 million tonnes of biomass.* This is threatening at least 10 million hectares of undisturbed forests, and includes massive expansion of monoculture tree plantations which already comprise 1.2 million hectares only a few years into this plan - which will replace forests and other ecosystems.

That is why today's **International Day of Action on Big Biomass** will focus on the devastating impacts of industrial bioenergy production on biodiversity - and the false finance that supports this industry, including harmful subsidies.

It is clear that we do not simply need to "mobilize" resources, in large part we need to redirect funding to ensure it contributes to conservation instead of destruction. Another new report by the Forest and Finance Coalition "*Regulating Finance for Biodiversity*"[4], shows exactly how this could be done. It is high time, developed countries put their money where their mouth is, reform subsidies, and regulate the financial sector to ensure public and private investments contribute to biodiversity conservation, instead of destruction.

* See the online version for links to the reports.

The CBD's Role in Securing Multilateral Regulation for Biodiversity: doing better than past Mainstreaming Processes

Helena Paul, Econexus

The planet is losing biodiversity at alarming rates. Planetary boundaries are breached, with serious negative implications for future generations of human beings and all living organisms and ecosystems. The main driving forces for this ongoing disaster are corporations operating in sectors such as food and agriculture, forestry, mining, energy, infrastructure, and finance, which are wreaking havoc around the planet.

Many countries—particularly those most impacted by biodiversity loss in the Global South—are unable to enforce stringent environmental regulations due to economic dependencies, including debt-related pressures. Such situations can lead to a race to the bottom in environmental regulation, which will further destroy biodiversity and have severe social impacts everywhere.

Previous efforts to address this issue were organised in the "Mainstreaming biodiversity in all sectors" negotiations. This led to documents, such as the Long-Term Strategic Approach to Mainstreaming (LTAM) and its Action Plan (AP), which contained many proposals which further undermined the environment and people's rights, and allowed corporations to continue unchecked growth and environmental degradation. These included false solutions such as Nature-based Solutions, Nature Positive, Biodiversity Offsetting, TNFD, Voluntary Certification, No Net Loss and Net Gain, multi-stakeholder platforms, and others.

In all of this process, the phrase 'Biodiversity mainstreaming' seems to have lost the link with what it should actually mean: making biodiversity and its protection central to the policy-making of all governments.

This happened as the result of an unbalanced and untransparent process, which allowed for the input of corporate actors, without Parties ever discussing the content of the resulting papers in plenaryi, and with little involvement from rightsholders or civil society in the whole process.The aim of the CBD as an institution is to ensure multilateral coordination towards strong environmental regulation. The CBD should set up a new process at COP 16, with the meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, other rightsholders and civil society, to develop global policies that ensure all countries apply robust regulations to prevent further biodiversity destruction in a multilaterally coordinated way. The objective and suggested name of this process would be "ensuring coherent multilateral regulation to protect biodiversity".

Stating that the Global Biodiversity Framework already addresses mainstreaming does not take into account that the GBF itself has gaps, weaknesses and internal contradictions. Therefore, it does not fully reflect what the protection of biodiversity as a major priority should actually entail.

True biodiversity protection is an urgent priority that should be fully discussed and developed in plenary with Parties and Observers, in a new process that learns from the procedural and content shortcomings of the mainstreaming process.

Biodiversity Offsets and Credits

A Mirage Destined to Undermine Earth's Future

Nele Mariën, Friends of the Earth International

In a world where economic growth is sacred for most decision-makers, and where profit-making is the mandate corporate CEOs have, biodiversity is constantly under threat. Significant parts of the economy rely upon the continued possibility to implement “development projects” in areas with valuable ecosystems.

Yet, at the same time, the global recognition of the biodiversity crisis is strong, and for most actors, it is clear that “something” needs to be done. Enter biodiversity offsets and credits, presented under a variety of names and concepts that would make anyone confused, and make a global overview impossible.

The idea behind biodiversity offsets is that it is ok to destroy a natural area, as long as this impact can be compensated elsewhere with a similar amount of nature. However, in practice, these "similar" ecosystems are rarely replicated successfully, even as many are destroyed under the false promise of compensation. Biodiversity credits are often used as tools for greenwashing, but more commonly for offsetting. Both biodiversity offsetting and crediting fundamentally conflict with the integrity of ecosystems, resulting in the loss of key habitats, degradation of ecosystem services, soil erosion, disruption of water cycles, and the spread of invasive species.

Over the past period, carbon markets have displayed a huge amount of serious problems regarding environmental integrity, with multiple scandals being revealed. Such problems are bound to be repeated by biodiversity markets. In fact, the inconsistency becomes even more pronounced, as measuring biodiversity is even more challenging - if not outright impossible - than measuring carbon.

Biodiversity Offsets were included in the GBF as a source of finance. Yet, financial flows from biodiversity crediting are very insecure and unpredictable. Furthermore, this type of finance inevitably is linked to the destruction of biodiversity and can, therefore, not be called a contribution to biodiversity. Nevertheless, biodiversity offsetting and crediting markets are under constant development, a lot of it without public scrutiny.

Biodiversity offsetting and crediting justify the encroachment by corporations and conservation NGOs into the rich historical biodiversity in Indigenous Peoples´ territories by transforming biodiversity into exchangeable units. It further impacts gender equality and human rights by opening the floodgates for forced evictions, arbitrary detentions, land grabbing, various forms of gender-based violence, food insecurity, destruction of livelihoods and traditional practices.

279 Civil society Organisations and Academics have signed a statement which warns about the dangers of biodiversity offsetting and crediting for our common future. Find the statement and other relevant information on https://www.biodmarketwatch.info *

A recent report “The Biodiversity Market Mirrage” by 6 civil society organisations elaborates on all of the aspects laid out in this article: https://www.foei.org/publication/biodiversity-offsetting-crediting-report *

* See the online version for links

Biodiversity Offsets and Credits: examining risks and challenges

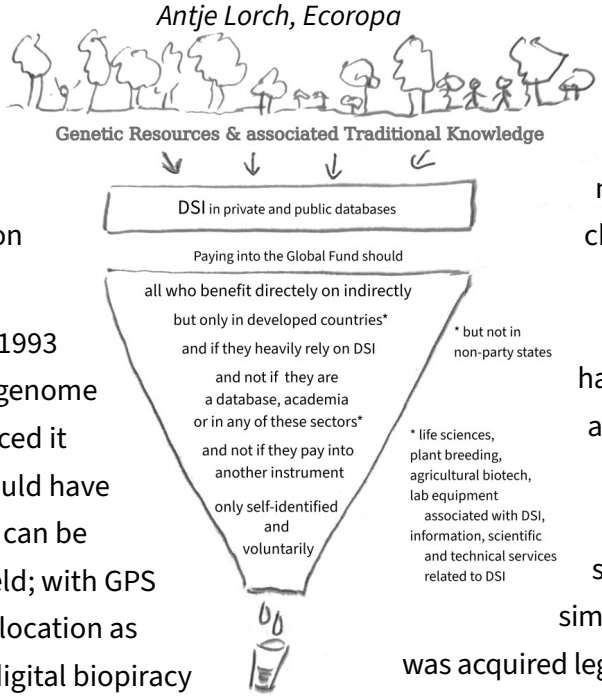
Side event by TWN | GYBN | FOE | GFC

Today, Monday, 21 October, 18:00, Malpelo - Contact Group 1 meeting room

Open Letter to the Executive Secretary

DSI: An obligation or a mere trickle of funds?

Antje Lorch, Ecoropa



The third objective of the Convention is an obligation to "the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources".

The world was a different place in 1993 when this was decided. When the genome of whole organisms where sequenced it was a mile stone, but not many could have envisioned a point where samples can be sequenced and uploaded in the field; with GPS coordinates of the exact sampling location as additional metadata - and where digital biopiracy would be possible without physical material leaving the country.

And even now, the idea that this information can be shared across databases, seems to be settling in only slowly. Even harder to grasp is the idea, that these databases can include tools to find similar sequences, to include metadata such as use, traditional knowledge and locations, and to take that information and generate a new sequence from it: a digital sequence that might not exist in nature, but that is *only* possible because so many genetic resources and additional information were collected and added.

But while science has developed fast and far: the obligations of the Convention still stand.

Searching for sequences, comparing them with others, generating new ones: none of this is a goal in itself. It can result in ideas that can be marketed, into products that can be sold, and it requires equipment and services that users pay for. Even running the databases can be a business in itself. All of this is benefiting from the use of digital sequence information of genetic resources. And these benefits have to be shared with those that provided them, with those who conserve biodiversity and protect it against many forms of destruction, espe cially with IPLCs as stewards of biodiversity. But the current negotiations on DSI are not just chipping away on the obligation to share benefits: they take a sledge hammer to it. On one hand, access to genetic resources and thereby access to DSI is held up high: Nothing should even inconvenience science in the slightest, not even something as simple as asking whether a sample was acquired legally, or where it's coming from. Private databases are not even talked about even though they have access to all the data in the public ones, and can combine it with other DSI as well as additional information that they keep to themselves and their customers.

But on the other hand, the draft decision excludes an evergrowing number of those who benefit from DSI a from the obligation to share benefits: users in developing countries, users that rely on DSI but not heavily, whole sectors such as databases, academia, life sciences, plant breeding, agricultural biotechnology, laboratory equipment required for DSI, or information and technical services related to it. So will we be left with just a few users in developed country parties, from sectors that heavily rely on DSI, voluntarily contributing based on their self-identification? Probably hoping that their shareholders don't objects to such voluntary contributions when so many other businesses won't be contributing to the Global Fund.

And then in four years the COP might look at whether this actually worked... Four years during which more and more genetic resources will have been fed into the databases, will have been consumed by AI tools - and will never come out of the databases again - even if the benefit-sharing did not function at all.

Horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment
Fundamental in ensuring equity and precaution in synthetic biology development

Eva Sirinathsinghji, Third World Network

Novel synthetic biology applications, such as those designed to possess self-spreading capabilities, to perform wild ecosystem-wide engineering, or to use the world's genetic biodiversity for the production of AI-generated artificial genetic sequences, pose serious challenges to biosafety regulations and risk assessments. Such conceptual and biological novelties raise a wide range of ecological, health, socio-economic, cultural and ethical concerns. Significant hype also surrounds the industry, warranting careful scrutiny over which are the most viable, locally appropriate and less risky approaches for protecting biodiversity and human well-being.

Novel 'synbio' technologies urgently require a precautionary approach to their regulation, including *broad and regular horizon scanning and in-depth assessments* of their potential impacts on biodiversity.

Broad, multidisciplinary expertise, including of rights-holders, are required to assess the full range of potential biosafety, socio-economic, ethical and cultural risks, as well as provide broader scientific assessments e.g. of cumulative/long term impacts, efficacy, veracity of claims of benefits. Such assessments can *complement, not duplicate the work under the Cartagena Protocol.* They can also include interrelated issues such as fair and equitable benefit sharing arising from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources.

Lessons can be learnt from the parallel situation with LMO crop technologies. After three decades of LMO crop commercialisation, there is an accumulation of evidence linking them to adverse socio-economic impacts on farmers' livelihoods, repeated technology failures, pesticide-associated health impacts, and potential biodiversity loss. Calls for more holistic assessments have ensued.

Without the *capacity for countries to be able to horizon-scan, monitor and assess novel and potentially risky synthetic biology technologies*, countries may be exposed to bearing the brunt of risks, and potentially paving the way for inequitable *'technology dumping'* of ineffective technologies.

Capacity building and development, access to and transfer of technology, and knowledge sharing, and the proposed *thematic action plan* in section (A) of the draft decision, needs to thus be developed in the context of precaution, by incorporating elements of Section (B), to include on broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment, with a *thematic action plan* developed in this context. Technologies assessed and transferred need to be *locally appropriate and environmentally-sound, in accordance with Article 7, 14, and 19, paragraph 4.*

A continued *broad and regular horizon-scanning, monitoring and assessment process* (Section B) is also required through re-establishment of the multidisciplinary AHTEG, and adopting the recommendations of its recent work to perform in-depth assessments of the prioritised topics of self-spreading vaccines for wildlife, the integration of AI and machine learning with genetic engineering, and engineered gene drives. Otherwise the process risks becoming empty.

For precaution and equity to prevail, balance between capacity building for R&D, and the capacity to assess against risks, must be restored.

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Traducción español online

In this issue

President Petro is Right

COP16 must and can act on Artificial Intelligence threats to biodiversity.

Jim Thomas - Friends of the Earth US

At the COP16 opening ceremony on Sunday night, Colombian President Gustavo Petro launched a clear series of warnings on the growing threat posed by the Artificial Intelligence (AI) industry to biodiversity, climate and society. He warned that fossil fuel -powered expansion of the sector and technological elites driving the technology could propel the world towards "armageddon". He called on the international community to take urgent measures to regulate the development and use of artificial intelligence, stressing that without concerted global action, the effects of AI and climate change could be irreversible. *"It is necessary to build public, rational and collective regulation to avoid collapse,"* he said.

President Petro has bravely opened the door to a conversation that parties at COP16 urgently need to engage in. A global rush is underway to build AI hyperscale data-centers whose heavy computation gobbles up catastrophic amounts of electricity, water (for cooling) and extracted minerals. The climate footprint of data center energy use now outweighs the aviation sector - leading to reopening of coal plants and nuclear facilities. The trade of minerals for AI is driving a disastrous mining boom on indigenous and biodiverse lands. Every chatGPT or similar AI query is equivalent to pouring away half a liter of fresh water - far exceeding water-take of most nations. As Indigenous Dine activist Janene Yazzie of NDN Collective reminds, *"Indigenous rights are a safeguard to prevent further environmental exploitation and destruction to support the data centers and energy needs for AI. Yet, threats to our lands, territories, and ecosystems are increasing as a result of the drive to build this infrastructure."*

Yet the next phase of AI expansion (beyond manipulating text and images to using AI for environmental management, agriculture and genetic engineering) stands to dwarf these already heavy impacts. Unsurprisingly AI is now appearing in the negotiation text.

Synthetic Biology and "Generative Biology": The multidisciplinary expert group (MAHTEG)on Synthetic Biology have clearly signaled how the next phase of biotech uses massive AI models , powered by digital genomic sequences to design novel DNA, proteins and lifeforms. Despite biosafety concerns, this 'generative biology' industry (also dubbed 'black box biology') is just getting going. It is led by the world's largest companies (Google, Microsoft, AliBaba, Nvidia and Amazon). Language in the Annex to the Synthetic Biology draft decision would authorize the mAHTEG to do a deeper assessment of how the integration of AI into Synthetic Biology affects the goals of the Convention. But at SBSTTA, even such sensible and urgent knowledge-gathering and analysis was being blocked by Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Japan and Australia. Those brackets have to go.

Digital Sequence Information: The new regime and fund being negotiated on DSI mentions (but mostly

continues next page ./.

appears blind to) the massive change underway from AI-driven biotechnology. While the text concerns itself with public DSI databases, it doesn't recognize that the world's existing DSI is already incorporated into private AI training sets intended to generate new commercial proteins or molecules. The world's richest data companies are already boosting their valuation as a result of this - long before consumer products. The need for more DSI data to train AI models is also reigniting a digital bioprospecting rush. The DSI fund has to explicitly include Artificial Intelligence and private digital bioprospecting companies among those who must already pay into the fund while tracing the source of their DSI use.

In the years to come AI will move to the center of many biodiversity debates as AI titans aim to reshape landscapes, oceans, fields and forests and to capture,extract and industrialize genomes, cultures and ecosystems. President Petro is starting a discussion that we will likely reckon with for decades. The sooner and more seriously we start to engage in this topic the better.

Read more in the report
'Black Box' Biotechnology – Integration of artificial intelligence with synthetic biology

Time for Action: Finance, biodiversity and the risks of deep sea mining

Andy Whitmore, Deep Sea Mining Campaign

The Deep Sea Mining Campaign has published a briefing paper for financiers on deep sea mining's (DSM) biodiversity risks and the potential impacts that investing in the sector could bring.

The COP agenda is increasingly recognising how central the question of finance is, both in terms of the 2022 framework having called for $700 billion per year for nature protection and restoration, alongside attempts to increasingly involve private finance in nature-based solutions. While this is a controversial area, one relatively easy decision that financiers and insurers can make is to avoid those sectors which carry the greatest risks for biodiversity.

The proposed new extractive industry of deep sea mining is a great example of a sector which can easily be avoided. DSM would result in a loss of biodiversity that would be irreversible on multi-generational timescales. The consequences for ocean ecosystem function, planetary systems, and for humanity, could be vast. Yet the level of risk associated with DSM cannot be fully understood yet thanks to a lack of research, which could take decades to close the scientific gaps.

Deep sea miners argue they need to push forward rapidly, despite the knowledge gap, in order to satisfy the world's demand for minerals, particularly for the energy transition from fossil fuels. However, that is an assertion that is refuted by an evidence review from the European Academies Science Advisory Council.

The UNEP FI published an opinion that there is no foreseeable way in which the financing of DSM activities can be viewed as consistent with the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles.

As a new industry current financial exposure is likely to be limited, so it is easy for financiers to exclude it from their portfolios. The finance sector is increasingly acknowledging DSM's biodiversity risks, with to date 15 financial institutions – including some of the world's largest banks and insurance companies – having published policies which explicitly exclude DSM activities. Yet more have signed up to the 'Business statement supporting a moratorium on deep sea mining.'

It is clear that DSM represents an unnecessary threat to ocean biodiversity. It can be avoided before it starts, which is a decision that responsible financiers with a concern for biodiversity can easily make.

Check the online version for links to the reports

“Green Paradox”: subsidising biomass to destroy biodiversity

Souparna Lahiri

Indonesia, under their Just Energy Transition Plan (JETP) proposes and has already initiated transforming coal power plants (CPPs) to co-firing with biomass comprising around 5%–10% of annual generation from coal power plants over 2030–2050, acting as a complementary strategy to reduce emissions from existing plants.

Biomass co-firing results in more greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than fossil fuels per unit of energy produced. Co-firing prolongs the time required to phase out the coal plants and are artificially prolonging their life cycle. Without subsidies in different forms, either for biomass for electricity generation or biofuels production, biomass would not be a feasible economic choice.

The projected demand for biomass, supported by governmental subsidies, is likely to exceed the supply of residues and waste biomass, which leads to a high risk of processing valuable wood for biomass and additional deforestation. The projected demand for biomass connected with deforestation will likely have negative impacts on the biodiversity of forests. Extensive logging for wood pellet plants results in increased levels of deforestation, carbon loss, GHG emissions, and decreased forest carbon stock with resultant loss of biodiversity at a very large scale.

Indonesian conglomerate, Medco Group constructed a biomass power plant in the ancestral territory of Marind people living in Zanegi villagem in Papua, that makes electricity from burning wood. Medco has already cleared large tracts of rainforest, establishing timber plantations in its place. In 2017, the Indonesian government provided $4.5 million in “project financing” for the power plant. As of 2024, the total funding has reached more than $9 million. And that’s one plant only.

Trend Asia, an Indonesian NGO, calculated the land area to fulfil wood pellet material needed for 107 Steam Power Plant units. The need of plantation has potential of deforestation of 1,048,344 hectares by 2024. Meeting the demand for both biomass fired energy and co-firing with coal would require at least 2.3 million hectares of land to be converted to plantations – an area half the size of Denmark.

Total co-firing biomass emission of 107 Steam Power Plant units from upstream to downstream, start from deforestation to wood pellet production is 13,224,680 tonnes CO2e. The co-firing biomass coal policy, instead of reducing carbon emission in energy sector, will add carbon emission in forestry sector, while extending Steam Power Plant operational age.

Such a JETP policy could lead to the so-called “Green Paradox,” where subsidizing biomass causes the increased use of fossil fuels, especially coal, resulting in continuing deforestation and loss of biodiversity in tropical Indonesia.

Such harmful subsidies which destroy biodiversity, therefore, have to be eliminated immediately and should be part of the country commitments in NBSAP.

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.
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Northern forests need protection too

Wendel Trio, Northern Forests and Climate Change Project

Forests host over 80% of terrestrial biodiversity, store over 850 gigatonne of carbon - equal to almost a century of fossil fuel emissions - and are home to 300 million people, many belonging to vulnerable communities and indigenous nations. While overall the rate of forest loss has been reduced, we are still losing approximately 10 million ha of forests each year. Similarly the amount of carbon stored in forests is going down and recent studies indicate that trees and lands nowadays emit as much carbon as they absorb.

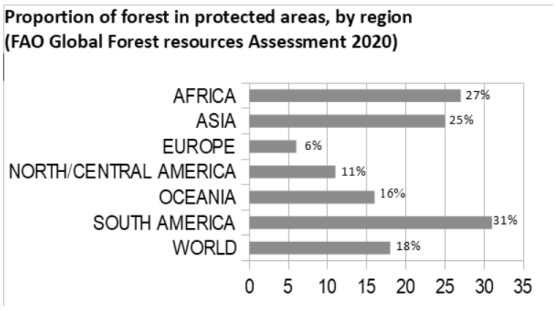
Contrary to popular belief, while the carbon stored in tropical forests is growing, the decline is mainly in what we call northern forests, the boreal and temperate forests of North America (Canada and the US) and Europe (including Russia and the former Soviet Union member states). These northern forests make up a large part of the world's global forests as they represent over 40% of global tree cover. Russia, Canada, the US and the EU make up 95% of all northern forests. Thus preserving northern forests is mostly a responsibility of industrialised countries. And a responsibility they must urgently take up.

Northern forests hold among the last large stretches of primary, old-growth, and mature forests. These forests have never been industrially logged or otherwise disturbed and have a unique and irreplaceable value for global biodiversity. These forests also hold nearly half of the global carbon stock. Furthermore, numerous indigenous peoples depend on and survive in northern forests and multiple studies have indicated that forests controlled by indigenous peoples are better protected and have more carbon stored, with the level of protection increasing when forest ownership gets legally recognised.

Northern forests are experiencing some of the world's fastest degradation, due in large part to industrial logging in primary, old-growth, and mature forests. Logging in northern forests is the world's single largest industrial driver of gross tree cover loss. As a result, northern forests are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as increased forest fires and insect outbreaks. This in turn is reducing the amount of carbon stored in northern forests. While northern forests accounted for 40% of forest carbon removals in 1990, this has dropped to 24% today. Even more, some countries, such as Canada, Finland and Germany have seen their forests turn from being a carbon sink (absorbing more carbon than they emit) into a source (emitting more carbon than they absorb).

Protecting and restoring forests, and in particular the remaining old-growth and primary forests, must be a priority for northern forest countries. Protecting and restoring forest ecosystem integrity is the fastest and most cost-effective way to deliver win-win outcomes for climate, biodiversity, and indigenous peoples. Protected areas, and in particular those managed by indigenous peoples have proven to be highly effective and provide complementary approaches for protecting and restoring ecosystem integrity.

Despite all this, northern forests are poorly protected. While on average, more than 25% of forests in Africa, Asia and South America fall under one or the other protected status, only 11% of North American and only 6% of European forest are protected. This is far from the world average and even further away from the commitments made in the Global Biodiversity Framework.



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In this issue

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 Protocol 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.

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.

***Email:** lorch@ifrik.org or eco@cbd-alliance.org*

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 communities, 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

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

See the online article for links to sources

ECO

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Volume 70, Issue 4

Thrusday, 23 Oct. 2024

In this issue

TNFD is NOT aligned with the GBF

Shona Hawkes, Rainforest Action Network

The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) is heavily promoted at COP16. The taskforce is made up solely of 40 corporations. It has no scientists, government officials, Indigenous peoples, CSOs or academics. TNFD's reporting framework is not 'aligned' with the GBF.

GBF Target 15(a) calls for businesses to 'transparently disclose', including their 'impacts'. The TNFD's recommended baseline is to report how biodiversity impacts a business. It is not that a business should report its impacts on nature.

TNFD is not *'transparent disclosure'.* Company TNFD reports won't disclose their supply chain or investment chain, so that impacted people seeing abuses in their area typically don't even know of the company or bank's involvement. Nor does TNFD recommend disclosing any serious complaints a company is facing. Real transparency is also necessary for consumers to make sustainable choices under Target 15b.

Target 15 also states that an objective of a) and b) is for companies to 'reduce negative impacts', yet there's no evidence TNFD reports will change corporate practices. Many of the world's biggest fossil fuel companies publish similar reports under the TCFD on climate. The TNFD does not challenge the ability of corporations to profit from environmental or human rights harms.

What do TNFD reports tell us?

Warnings about TNFD's greenwashing risks are sadly proving true. Mining company Vale's TNFD report is full of glossy graphics but doesn't mention that it had to pay $55 million over misleading disclosures, it faces protests from Indigenous Peoples or has been struck off by investors in 9 countries. The *Banking on Biodiversity Collapse* report recently concluded that a basic google search was more informative than agribusiness trader Bunge's TNFD report.

An initiative for corporate reporting on biodiversity impacts already exists

The *Global Reporting Initiative* (GRI) already has a biodiversity standard, long pre-dating the TNFD. GRI is adopted by thousands of companies, incorporated into many policies and evolved from a more robust decision-making structure than the TNFD. While far from perfect – including on issues raised above - the GRI is a better option.

Strike TNFD (and ISSB!) from the Resource Mobilisation text

Currently TNFD is bracketed in the Resource Mobilisation, Annex 1. This could encourage the adoption of TNFD reporting into national laws to show that parties are meeting their Target 15 obligations. This is a backdoor way for corporations to write their own regulations! Text referencing the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) should also be dropped because it doesn't even have a biodiversity standard.

Biodiversity and energy transition: running counter to the GBF

Maria Laura Castillo, High Andean Wetlands Program at FARN

The narratives of the Global North's energy transition model promote lithium mining as a solution to the climate change crisis, based on the use of this mineral in batteries for renewable energy storage. However, the greatest demand for lithium comes from the car industry, to power individual electric vehicle batteries.

Today, the geopolitical race for control of the supply chain of minerals for such transition increases the pressure on the countries that possess them, and is jeopardizing the integrity of the ecosystems in which they are found, their associated biodiversity, and favoring dynamics of human rights violations.

The *International Energy Agency* projects that the demand for lithium for battery production will increase up to 42 times by 2040 compared to 2020, while the Inter-American Development Bank forecasts that it will be 1036% higher than 2020 levels. These estimates, however, are not clear, and focus mainly on individual mobility, leaving aside public transportation.

In this regard, the transition model does not question the hyper-consumption paradigm that has generated the current multiple crises. High-income countries consume about twice the world average of energy and minerals per capita, yet no urgency in reducing demand for environmental goods is raised.

Neither does this model adequately address the impacts it generates on the environment and human rights. Projections show that meeting the extraordinary demand for lithium will require a massive acceleration of its production and processing in a short period of time, which exacerbates environmental pressures on ecosystems and communities.

A key fact: more than half of the minerals considered "critical" are on or near indigenous lands.

Andean wetlands in Argentina, Chile and Bolivia - which together account for around 53% of the world's lithium brine reserves - are home to indigenous communities that have inhabited them since ancestral times based on "Buen Vivir" (good living) and play a key role as guardians of biodiversity.

These fragile ecosystems are located in arid zones with a negative natural annual water balance, where water is the element that defines life. Due to their function as water regulators, they are key to adaptation to climate change. Likewise, through vegetation and microorganisms adapted to their extreme conditions, they sequester and store CO2, which is central to climate change mitigation.

Paradoxically, in the name of an alleged fight against climate change, lithium mining - classified as water mining - directly undermines these contributions, and may even release greenhouse gasses stored in wetlands.

The GBF sets clear targets to address biodiversity loss, which must be acted upon in a participatory manner and in consultation with indigenous communities. However, lithium mining is advancing in several cases against these precepts, without information, without participation, without adequate environmental impact assessment processes, and without the consent of indigenous communities.

The global climate, biodiversity and pollution crises demand a comprehensive approach that modifies the unsustainable patterns that perpetuate environmental degradation and the subjugation of human rights.

States should establish clear commitments and move forward with concrete actions to advance towards comprehensive socioecological transitions built participatively, based on the pillars of human rights and in full respect of planetary boundaries.

Debt for nature swaps: proceed with caution (and low expectations)

Patrick Bigger, Climate and Community Institute

Debt for nature swaps are poised to be a key topic regarding resource mobilization for biodiversity action during COP 16.

The concept of a debt for nature swap is straightforward. Countries carrying heavy debt burdens generally have little public fiscal space to invest in critical priorities, from education, to healthcare, to environmental protection. Worse, the need to make debt payments denominated in global reserve currencies like US Dollars puts pressure on these governments to accelerate destructive economic practices like export-oriented agriculture, mining, or gas development. **Debt swaps aim to alleviate these pressures by offering some level of debt relief in return for commitments to devote freed up financial resources toward achieving environmental objectives.**

Modern debt swaps are often complicated feats of financial engineering, involving a range of investors and creditors bound by dense legal arrangements. The devil is truly in the details. Given the urgency of action, a major limitation is that debt swaps have been extraordinarily slow to deploy for limited funding and impact. For example, the much-vaunted 2015 debt for marine conservation swap between the Seychelles, private creditors, and the Nature Conservancy took four years to assemble, resulted in only US$21.6 million in restructured debt at only a 6.5% reduction in nominal value, and ultimately did little to reduce the Seychelles overarching debt burden - with unclear environmental impacts.

The IMF itself states that swaps are much (much!) too small to restore fiscal solvency for countries, and that "it's more effective to address debt and climate or nature separately." Most concerning, there is evidence that debt for nature swaps contributing to funding protected areas played a significant role in facilitating Indigenous and small holder dispossession. This is linked to questions about conditionality, or the policy demands that Northern Governments or NGOs make of Southern governments in return for debt restructuring or cancellation; done poorly, the imposition of conditions for debt relief are replay neocolonial structural adjustment policies, impinging on Southern sovereignty and limiting effectiveness as communities are left out of planning and implementing conservation plans. And there are serious concerns that Northern governments could use debt swaps to get around their obligations under Article 21 of the CBD, and under the Rio Principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities, not to mention their vast ecological debts.

It is clear that securing human rights and planetary health requires structural reform to the international financial architecture causing so much debt distress and attendant biodiversity loss. But in the absence of this, debt swaps could be a stopgap measure, if structured democratically. The Latin American Network for Economic and Social Justice and Center for Economic and Social Rights have proposed a draft of "High-Integrity Principles for Debt Swaps" that foreground 4 key points: transparency and accountability, inclusive governance, environmental and social safeguards, and global collaboration.

Article with links

Report

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.

Submissions *are welcome from all civil society groups.*
Email: *lorch@ifrik.org or eco@cbd-alliance.org*

The need to recognise Afro-descendant coummunities in the CBD

Friends of the Earth Colombia, Brasil and International

In Latin America, Afro-descendant communities play an important role in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Thanks to these communities, forests and territories, cultures and knowledge have been conserved.

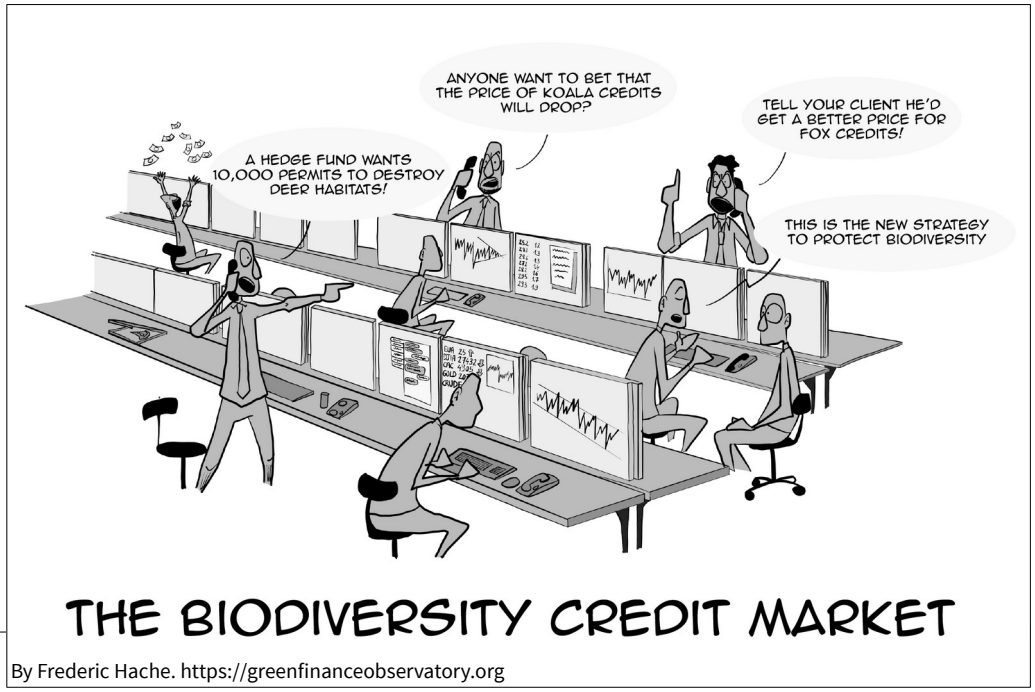
This recognition can be seen as an evolution that also entails the recognition, reparation, respect, implementation and defence of their rights. At first and thanks to their struggles, Indigenous Peoples have obtained a status at the international level. Peasant communities managed to obtain a declaration recognising their rights after years of intense work at the United Nations (which should also be reflected in the CBD). Afro-descendant communities have made similar achievements in some countries and their emancipatory struggles in the face of the dehumanisation of colonialism and the enslavement of the peoples of the African continent are historic in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Today in countries such as Costa Rica a day is dedicated to the celebration of their culture, in Honduras the role they play in the protection of biodiversity and in science and technology is undeniable, and Colombia and Brazil have presented a proposal to recognise them as subjects of rights within the framework of the CBD. However, beyond this legal recognition, social movements and organisations in the region, such as the Proceso de Comunidades Negras in Colombia, have historically demanded 'the recognition of environmental damages and losses as a legacy of colonialism and enslavement'.

Such a step is sorely needed because acknowledgements at the national level are not enough. Their role, although more visible at the national level, is fundamental for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity at the global level. This recognition is fundamental for the recognition and respect of their lands and territories, their culture, their forms of organisation, their collective rights, their ways of being and existing, their memory and spirituality. This recognition is also important to safeguard them against the criminalisation they have been suffering when defending their rights and their lands, including religious racism.

Is necesary to take a further step that will benefit us as a global society. The recognition of communities that, thanks to their culture, identity and daily activities, show us once again that without them, today's biological diversity would be less. This is about justice, reparation and strengthening ancestral practices that have nurtured life.

Afro-descendant communi-ties deserve this recognition, which will help to make the human and peoples' rights approach more and more a reality.



ECO

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Friday, 23 Oct. 2024

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In this issue

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. Alarmingly, 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

continues next page ./.

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

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

16-17:00: Inadequate policy proposals that further undermine Biodiversity

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

17-18:00 Stocktake of the week on biotech releted issues

- ✗ Synthetic Biology
- ✗ Risk assessment
- ✗ 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 arial 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 crossbreed 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

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.
Submissions *are welcome from all civil society groups.*
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Volume 70, Issue 6

Monday, 28 Oct. 2024

In this issue

Toxic Talk Poisoning Progress on the Monitoring Framework

Jago Wadley, Pesticides Action Network UK

On Friday, critical Contact Group negotiations over the *GBF Monitoring Framework* immediately turned toxic: stumbling on just one headline indicator - the *'Aggregated Total Applied Toxicity'* (ATAT) indicator recommended by the AHTEG for pesticide risk, under Target 7.

While the majority of Parties expressing views supported its adoption into the Monitoring Framework, a few did not, with some proposing to revert to the *'Pesticide Environment Concentration'* (PEC) indicator proposed at COP15, which had been referred to the AHTEG because it had no workable methodology. Reasons for rejecting ATAT mainly focused on suggestions that reducing the use of pesticides was the only way to reduce risk under it. But that's mistaken.

ATAT does not measure the volume of pesticide use. It calculates the *'total applied toxicity'* by multiplying the volume of each pesticide active ingredient used nationally by their eco-toxicity. Reducing or phasing out use of the most toxic pesticides generates huge risk reductions under ATAT, which, depending on the overall use-mix, can even occur when overall volumes used increase.

It's not surprising some Parties unwittingly misunderstand ATAT. The powerful pesticide lobby has been actively mischaracterizing it ever since the AHTEG proposed it, following its selection by a group of global experts and CBD Parties convened by the CBD and FAO in early 2024. CropLife International's comments on ATAT falsely argue that only volume reduction can reduce risk – knowing full well that is not accurate, because they were in the expert group that developed it.

It seems the pesticides lobby has also been spreading poisonous falsehoods about how the CBD Secretariat and FAO ran the process of developing ATAT, characterizing the meeting as inaccessible. That's also not true.

The CBD invited all Parties to nominate experts in 2023, with a selection process fairly screening technical expertise, resulting in a productive and representative mix of Parties, experts, and industry reps making up the group. Reports detailing the discussions were peer reviewed by expert group members, ensuring the proceedings and methodology were fairly represented. Parties were then given ample opportunity to comment on the methodology, with those inputs being taken into account at all stages. ATAT's development was procedurally robust. And yet pesticides industry representatives have been planting pernicious perceptions that it was not, and these appear to have poisoned its progression in the Contact Group.
But truth and science can still prevail!

Despite some Parties urging the deletion of ATAT, many more have defended it. ATAT now still sits alongside the unusable PEC in the Annex of indicators under negotiation – in square brackets. Parties still have a chance to see beyond the toxic industry talk, adopt the ATAT, and save the Monitoring Framework from years of further delay. Doing so would have considerable benefits to CBD Parties, nearly all of which also

continues next page ./.

adopted the *Global Framework on Chemicals* (GFC) in 2023, and its Target A7 to phase out *Highly Hazardous Pesticides* in agriculture. ATAT has the co-benefit of reflecting in national risk reduction measures for Target 7, any action Parties take to phase out use of the most toxic pesticides, when delivering on GFC Target A7.

This efficient coherence in the implementation of obligations under various multilateral environment instruments is clearly called for in UNEA Resolution 6/4. Text on Agenda Item 13 (Cooperation) likewise explicitly calls for pathways to ensure implementation of Target 7 on pollution is 'coherent with the Global Framework on Chemicals'.

ATAT will provide that pathway, if only Parties can resist the toxic talk of the pesticide industry.

Complaint filed to UNEP about TNFD; Indigenous-led protest targets Green Zone event

Jeff Conant, Friends of the Earth US

Last week 10 civil society and rights holder organizations filed a complaint to the *United Nations Environment Programme* (UNEP) grievance mechanism. The complaint alleges that in co-founding and continuing to champion the *Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures* (TNFD) - UNEP has breached its own policies on environmental defenders, gender equity and access to information. Most egregiously, by setting up a corporate-only taskforce that includes many of the very corporations that are failing to act on environmental or human rights abuses. At least 45% of the 40 taskforce company members face serious environmental and human rights concerns, including legal cases, OECD complaints, investor exclusions or fines.

The complaint follows years of efforts to raise the alarm about the TNFD's greenwashing risks. The TNFD's baseline recommendation is only that companies report on how biodiversity impacts on business, but not the company's impacts on nature. It does not recommend companies list complaints they face. Nor does it adopt transparency that allows communities to identify the companies sourcing from their areas or banks that finance them, nor to fact-check TNFD report claims. The TNFD also does not challenge the ability of corporations to profit from environmental or human rights harms. The complaint highlights that UNEP has undermined environmental defenders, amplifying the views of corporations - instead of the solutions that Indigenous Peoples, women and local communities are advocating for.

The complainants call on UNEP to suspend its support for the TNFD while the complaint is investigated.

Meanwhile at COP 16...

On Friday, theTNFD chose to put notorious mining company *Vale* on a panel. Vale's role in mining dam collapses in Brazil in 2015 and 2019 devastated nature and killed hundreds of people. In 2023 Vale paid $55 million to the US SEC to settle a case of misleading disclosures, and investors in nine countries have excluded it. Meanwhile, Vale's TNFD report includes claims such as: *"for each 1 hectare affected/impacted in the world, we protect 11 hectares."*

During a demonstration at the Green Zone event, Shirley Krenak, a leader from an Indigenous community impacted by the 2015 Mariana disaster and still fighting for justice, protested Vale and TNFD, alongside allies. She delivered a powerful speech about how the disaster killed the river, killed the fish, that polluted land and water in turn pollutes her people's flesh. She recounted the harsh day-to-day reality of ecological devastation. She warned: 'This is a false solution'.

Africa calls for "a Penny for Biodiversity", micro-investment, to end digital biopiracy

Nithin Ramakrishnan, Third World Network

As the negotiations for the multilateral mechanism for benefit sharing from the use of *digital sequence information* (DSI) falter at COP16, it is important to know what the demands of the African Group are and why the world must pay attention to them.

Here are Africa's demands: 1. Users who make monetary gains mandatorily share 1% of their gains to the Global Fund; 2. The establishment of a safe, secure and trustworthy DSI database accountable to Parties; 3. The establishment of sector-specific frameworks for non-monetary benefit sharing such as technology transfer and capacity building by COP17; 4. The promotion of networks of CBD-friendly databases that are interoperable with each other and accountable to Parties.

These are essential conditions for an effective COP16 outcome that respects their rights under the CBD. However, scientific lobbies funded by European countries, and industries from the developed countries, which hold the world's biggest DSI databases and have unsavoury legacies of biopiracy, have attempted to spread misconceptions and scepticism about Africa's demands.

One key point of contention is Africa's demand for a 1% contribution to the Global Fund, which critics dismiss as a random number. However, according to a study commissioned by the Secretariat, a 1.28% levy on annual revenue of just five key sectors identified in the draft decision could contribute about $20 billion per year, which is 10% of the resource mobilization target of the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* of $200 billion annually. Assuming that about 25% percent of products of these sectors come from biological resources, the multilateral mechanism might achieve an amount of $3.9 to 5.5 billion annually.

The demand for a trustworthy DSI database has also met resistance. Critics argue that it would be costly, duplicative, and ineffective. However, currently, no database is accountable to Parties. On the contrary, they undermine the rights of Parties, indigenous peoples and local communities. This situation leaves the door wide open for digital biopiracy. Using the figures from the Secretariat-commissioned studies, our estimation is that such a database would cost between 0.26% and 1.54% of the anticipated monetary gains - a minimal amount compared to its potential benefits. It could be even as low as 0.05%, if one accepts the "$20 billion dream" in exchange for surrendering national sovereignty over genetic resources.

A safe and secure database could reduce data fragmentation and promote interoperability. It has enormous potential to induce a set of globally respected standards to existing DSI sharing practices, and organically cater to build a network of databases that respects the rights of the Parties and peoples under the Convention. Such a system - the other key demand of the African Group - can effectively counter widespread, yet often invisible, digital biopiracy. Additionally, a CBD-led sequence database would help rebuild eroding trust in scientists, serving as a node in the DSI sharing process that infuses accountability in sharing benefits as well as utilization of DSI.

Africa's fourth demand, for sector-specific frameworks, is also crucial for non-monetary benefit sharing. Africa also advocates for policy space allowing international organizations like the WHO and FAO to develop their own binding *access and benefit-sharing* (ABS) frameworks for DSI.

Each sector has unique requirements: in pharmaceuticals, for example, the focus may be on diversifying health product manufacturing to developing countries, while in agriculture, the emphasis might be on protecting farmers from industrial seed encroachment. A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient, which is why Africa calls for frameworks that address each sector's unique needs.

COP16: An opportunity to reinforce precaution on geoengineering

Kavya Chowdhry, ETC Group & Coraina de la Plaza, Hands Off Mother Earth! (HOME) Alliance

In the race to save the planet, some have found what they think might be a clever shortcut: geoengineering. Geoengineering refers to the large-scale manipulation of the atmosphere and marine and terrestrial ecosystems to try to address some symptoms of climate change. So why tackle the root causes of climate change when you could modify the atmosphere or oceans and sell carbon credits by manipulating nature on a massive scale?

Geoengineering proponents say we can absorb CO2 or reflect sunlight back into space—all while continuing to rely on fossil fuels. If deployed at scale, these technologies could have profound, unpredictable and potentially irreversible impacts on biodiversity and further pose a range of unprecedented geopolitical, human rights and environmental risks. It is impossible to test geoengineering technologies for their intended impact on the climate without large-scale outdoor deployment, risking lock-in of harmful or even irreversible effects and turning the Earth into a laboratory.

The risks of geoengineering have been acknowledged by UN bodies, especially the CBD, multiple times. In 2008, by consensus of all Parties, the CBD took a groundbreaking decision on ocean fertilization which explicitly ruled it out for commercial purposes.

In 2010, CBD took decision X/33 8w, which called for a *de facto moratorium* on the deployment of all geoengineering activities until a set of conditions are met-all of them remain currently unmet. Other bodies like the *Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee*, the *London Convention/London Protocol* (LC/LP), the *International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea* (ITLOS), and have also addressed the impacts of geoengineering.

Despite the de facto moratorium on geoengineering and the concerns expressed by scientific and other UN bodies, geoengineering projects and experiments, including many with commercial aims, are rapidly multiplying, with potentially severe impacts on biodiversity in forests, coastal zones, seas, and the deep ocean. For instance, there are over 40 companies, mostly private and most of them based in the US, that are already doing or planning to do dozens of open-sea marine geoengineering experiments and projects, some of them at a very large scale.

That is why the CBD COP16 presents a crucial opportunity to call for the strengthening, implementation and enforcement of critical prior decisions of the CBD to help prevent the erosion of the de facto moratorium. At COP16, Parties to the CBD should:

- ✔ Reaffirm decision X/33 8 (w) on biodiversity and climate change;
- ✔ Recognize the ongoing work at the *London Protocol/London Convention* on geoengineering techniques that affect the oceans;
- ✔ Ensure that solar and marine geoengineering open-field experiments are not permitted;
- ✔ Ensure that geoengineering activities are excluded in the implementation of the KMGBF;
- ✔ Require all CBD parties to regularly report on any geoengineering initiatives in or by their countries;
- ✔ Mandate the CBD Secretariat to proactively reach out to all other UN bodies that are discussing geoengineering (i.e. ongoing negotiations on a new carbon regime under the UNFCCC) requesting they honour relevant CBD decisions.

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.
Submissions *are welcome from all civil society groups.*
Email: *lorch@ifrik.org or eco@cbd-alliance.org*

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In this issue

DSI, AI and technology titans

Jim Thomas, Scan the Horizon

One of the most striking features of AI-driven SynBio is that much of the work is being led by the largest technology companies in the world. Most of these new AI/SynBio leaders are digital titans, with no previous experience in biotechnology or stewarding biodiversity but extensive experience in implementing monopolistic business models and skirting regulations. They are striking joint agreements or acquiring smaller biotechnology startups.

This is relevant for the discussions on Synbio and on risk assessment. But it also relevant for DSI, because these *private* databases, datasets and services use huge amounts of DSI, and the companies operating them intent to make money from them.

Google/Alphabet – Google DeepMind (AI research laboratory) developed the high profile Alphafold program. Google has a joint venture with leading SynBio company Gingko Bioworks to generate novel proteins. They have also created their own biotechnology company called Isomorphic Labs, which is using AI to generate new drug compounds for major pharmaceutical companies.

Microsoft – The CEO of Microsoft AI, Mustafa Suleyman, recently published a high-profile book (called *The Coming Wave*) on how the convergence of SynBio with AI will transform society (and create new risks). His firm is developing several generative AI tools for SynBio, including a generative medical platform called BioGPT.

Amazon – In June 2024, the world's largest provider of data cloud services announced it was collaborating with a company called EvolutionaryScale to host ESM3 – a generative biology AI platform trained on "billions of protein sequences spanning 3.8 billion years of evolution". According to Amazon, ESM3 can understand complex biological data from various sources and generate entirely new proteins that have never existed in nature. Meanwhile, the Bezos Earth Fund (associated with Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and his girlfriend) has launched a 100 million dollar 'AI for Climate and Nature' program that focuses on using generative AI for alternative proteins and other materials. Amazon is reportedly also interested in brain organoid biocomputation.

NVIDIA – The world's largest AI chipmaker is also out front in generative biology. Their GenSLM AI platform has been trained on hundreds of thousands of genomes to generate novel microbial and viral genomes. They have particularly been developing candidate COVID sequences for vaccines and appear to have successfully predicted some new Covid variants. Nvidia is also collaborating with Amazon's ESM3 platform.

Meta (Facebook) – In 2022, Meta unveiled its ESMfold platform as a rival to Google's Alphafold. Meta claimed that ESMfold housed more than 600 million protein structures and was 60 times faster than Alphafold. However, the project was shut down in 2023 amidst large staff layoffs at Meta.

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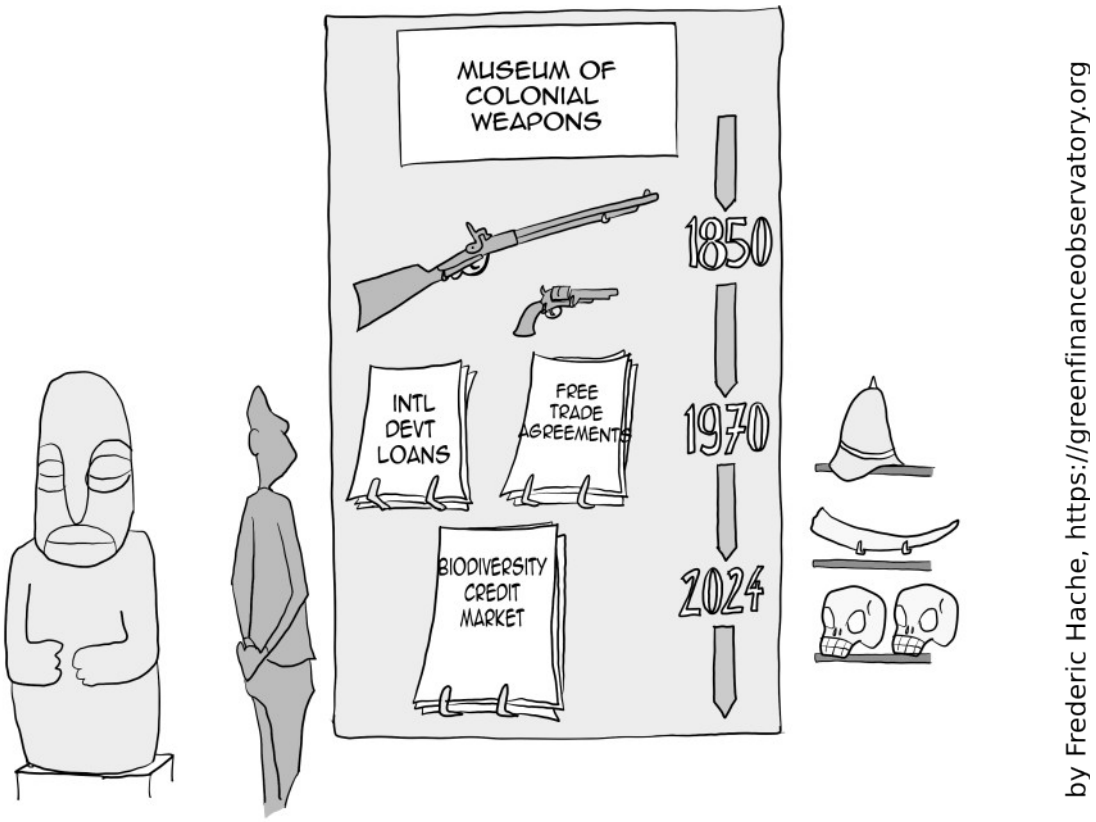
Salesforce – This leading US data cloud company has developed ProGEN, an AI large-language model for generating novel proteins. ProGEN was trained by feeding the amino acid sequences of 280 million different proteins into a machine-learning model. As a proof-of-concept, Salesforce then tuned the model by priming it with 56,000 sequences from just one class of protein: lysozymes (used for food ingredients).

Alibaba – In 2023, scientists at the leading Chinese technology giant, Alibaba, published results from its LucaProt AI platform, which was trained to identify RNA viruses. According to the researchers, LucaProt identified 161,979 potential RNA virus species and 180 RNA virus supergroups. They asserted, "This study marks the beginning of a new era of virus discovery, providing computational tools that will help expand our understanding of the global RNA virosphere and of virus evolution."

For sources, check the report "Black Box Biotechnology" at https://acbio.org.za



by Frederic Hache, https://greenfinanceobservatory.org

Implement non-market approaches to the global biodiversity targets!

Joanna Smallwood, University of Sussex & Jeremie Gilbert, Client Earth

COP16 of the CBD's 196 Parties comes at a crucial time to assess and turn the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (KMGBF) into a reality, yet the negotiations have been dominated by a focus on the false solutions of market-based mechanisms such as biodiversity credits. Following the failure of the carbon credit system, is it not clear that such a system will not work for complex biological system?

The risks of biodiversity credits

Risks of biodiversity credits include: the failure to recognise intrinsic or relational values of nature, lack of self-determination from indigenous peoples and local communities, difficulties predicting what benefits from financing through credits will be "additional" to what would have happened anyway and lack of baselines to measure from, the high risk that credit trade simply displaces deforestation pressure to other

areas, and double counting. A biodiversity credit system does not facilitate change but supports business as usual.

An alternative option under the KMGBF is the possibility for developing more effective, transformative non-market based mechanisms. COP16 could mark itself as a pivotal moment to turn away from tried and failed market-based approaches to embrace the principles of respecting 'nature's' intrinsic value'. Non-market based approaches such as Mother earth centric actions are embedded in the GBF (Section C, Targets 14, and 19f Non-market mechanisms have been championed by Bolivia and supported by other Parties at COP 16 and are subject to further negotiation.

Financial Mobilisation

Action Target 19 focuses on the ambitious call for financial mobilisation of $200 Billion per fear for biodiversity but also references the value of ecocentric collective actions. Target 19f states that *"Enhancing the role of collective actions, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, Mother Earth centric actions and non-market- based approaches including community based natural resource management and civil society cooperation and solidarity aimed at the conservation of biodiversity."*

Mother Earth-centric actions

Mother Earth-centric actions are defined in a footnote as: Ecocentric and rights-based approach enabling the implementation of actions towards harmonic and complementary relationships between peoples and nature, promoting the continuity of all living beings and their communities and ensuring the non-commodification of environmental functions of Mother Earth. Action target 19f recognises not only the intrinsic value of nature but also the indispensable role of IPLC and other groups who act for biodiversity, and Parties can implement co-beneficial actions for biodiversity and improve IPLC rights

Mainstreaming multiple values of nature

Target 14 calls for the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values, into decision-making at all levels and across all sectors, thus promoting a voice for nature in all decision making that impacts biodiversity. Elevating the voice of those with less power in decision making such as IPLC, women, youth and others who represent nature, to enable their full and effective participation, could mainstream intrinsic and relational values of nature into decision making.

Parties can make use of these targets that provide a clear hook for countries to encourage implementation of ecocentiric approaches. As well as the rapidly growing Rights of Nature movement across the world, where nature's rights are embedded in laws from constitutional to local levels, there is also the opportunity for Parties to report on the implementation of non-market approaches in their NBSAPs. New Zealand notes in its biodiversity strategy that *"Species and ecosystems are valuable in their own right and have their own right to exist and be healthy and thriving now and in the future, regardless of human use and appreciation."* Non-market based approaches puts nature at the heart of decision making on finance, challenges destructive practices for biodiversity and offers a way to enable a harmonic and complementary relationship between humans and nature.

Operationalising Target 23, through the indicator on National Implementation of the Gender Plan of Action?

Meenal Tatpati, Women4Biodiversity

At COP15, Parties to the Convention adopted Target 23 on gender equality and participation, as part of *the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (KMGBF, Decision 15/4) also stresses that the successful implementation of the framework will depend on ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. At the same time, Parties also adopted the post-2020 Gender Plan of Action (2022-2030) (GPA, Decision 15/11). The 2023-2030 GPA highlights specific gender-responsive actions, deliverables, and timelines for various stakeholders, including Parties, the Secretariat, the *Global Environment Facility* (GEF), women's groups/networks, and other relevant organizations, marking significant progress from previous plans. An approach for designing and using indicators to help monitor the implementation progress of the GBF was subsequently proposed through CBD/SBSTTA/24/3 and subsequently, the *Monitoring Framework* (Decision 15/5).

According to the CBD, biodiversity indicators are information tools that summarise data on complex environmental issues to indicate the overall status and trends of biodiversity. They can be used to assess national performance and to signal key issues to be addressed through policy interventions and other actions. .

Gender-sensitive indicators are essential for measuring progress towards commitments Parties have made regarding gender-responsiveness in the implementation of the KMGBF Target. Though missing a headline indicator, a set of component and complimentary indicators were adopted at COP15. Parties will consider the recommendations of SBSTTA26 towards the development of the Monitoring Framework. SBSTAA26 has recommended a global binary indicator for Target 23 as well as a component indicator for Target 23 (23.b) on the national implementation of the *Gender Plan of Action.*

However, the component indicator while adopted, lacked a robust methodology. Women4Biodiversity and UNEP-WCMC have collaborated with several Parties and key stakeholders to develop a methodology for the said indicator that will support. Parties to comprehensively measure progress towards gender-responsive implementation of the Framework. During SBSTTA26 , Parties officially recognised the process of development of the methodology (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.10). Since then, the metadata has been co-developed with Parties, having undergone a process of peer-review and updating.

Component and complementary indicators are additional indicators that provide more detailed insights on progress towards the goals and targets of the KM-GBF. The component indicator on the National Implementation of the Gender Plan of Action is therefore crucial in the monitoring framework, enabling Parties to track progress towards Target 23 more accurately, and providing valuable information that can feed into the binary indicator for this target.

Metadata:

https://gbf-indicators.org/metadata/other/23-1-C

Calculation tool:

https://resources.unep-wcmc.org/products/WCMC_CB058

For more information on the indicator and process of co-development, please contact ayesha.wijesekera@unep-wcmc.org

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In this issue

"Dis- establish" CBD processes and decisions??! - A dangerous precedent!

Jim Thomas Friends of The Earth US

At the Contact Group on Synthetic Biology on Monday night a potentially dangerous line was crossed for the wider integrity and trust in CBD decision-making. Despite two agreed previous COP decisions on he need for and establishment of a broad and regular *horizon scanning, assessment and monitoring process on Synthetic Biology,* an unnamed party insisted on adding new text to "disestablish" this important process.

"Disestablish?? We've never heard that language in the CBD before" expressed more than one surprised participant as nervous laughter broke out in the room . Indeed it's not a term that has ever surfaced before in decision text. Apparently for this party and its industry allies it's not enough that parties spend tens of thousands of people-hours working together day and the night towards delicately balanced decisions through accountable processes of negotiation and consensus. Now it seems disgruntled parties are claiming an entitlement to cast that aside and 'disestablish' - to relitigate and pull the rug out from CBD processes that they happen to not like.

The process in question - established in decision 15/31 at COP15 is known as the *"Broad and regular Horizon Scanning, Assessment and monitoring process on new developments ion Synthetic Biology"*. It was established after long and difficult negotiations in order to help parties and non-parties see what new technical developments are occurring in the rapidly moving field of synthetic biology and to support assessment and monitoring of the positive and negative impacts of these new developments. This could help states better regulate, oversee and potentially support such technologies. The process is seen as an innovative substantiation of the Precautionary approach (also enshrined in the Convention - shall we disestablish that too?). An online open forum and a multidisciplinary AHTEG (mAHTEG) made mostly of party experts worked tirelessly across the intersessional period to design in detail such a process and to road-test its assessment approach.

The fact is, the party in question simply didn't like the outcome of the mAHTEG's expert discussions. Just like a certain US presidential candidate who has threatened to dissolve institutions that make difficult with his policies, so the small group of biotech friendly countries would rather 'disestablish' hard-fought and agreed COP decisions and processes rather than engage with the substance of what experts have to say.

This 'disestablishment' ploy is dispiriting and unsettling for all who have worked this past 15 years to come to meaningful multilateral agreement on synthetic biology but it's also potentially a wider existential threat as a precedent for other COP decisions and processes. If a party can - in a cavalier fashion - insist on 'disestablishing' a process because its conclusions are inconvenient to its industry, where else might that entitlement be wielded and with what damage? Shall we expect that at any moment a party with poor humans rights might decide to disestablish the Working Group on 8j or to disestablish the Kuala Lumpur

Protocol on Liability and Redress to grant biotech industry's impunity? Introducing this new tactical tool in an item under the convention is to start to unravel the integrity of any and every other COP decision.

We hope that the biotech industry-directed parties using this tactic to destabilize the important precautionary "horizon scanning , assessment and monitoring process" are brought to realise the wider instability their stunt is opening up - and that the rest of us who believe in multilateral processes can insist on antidisestablishmentarianism remaining as the prevailing civil norm of proceedings.

Collision between Global Biofuels Push and Biodiversity Protection

Peg Putt, Biomass Action Network of EPN International

It is well understood that the climate and biodiversity crises are interdependent, each contributing to the other. Hence care should be taken that responses to climate change do not exacerbate the biodiversity crisis, a prime example being the large-scale deployment of intensive monoculture bioenergy plantations. Reliance on large scale biomass and BECCS for energy and net zero damages nature and the climate and increases global emissions.

A first ever collaboration between IPBES and the IPCC in 2021 warned against:

- **Planting bioenergy crops in monocultures over a very large share of land areas.** Such crops are detrimental to ecosystems when deployed at large scales, reducing nature's contributions to people and impeding achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals, and
- **Planting trees in ecosystems that have not historically been forests and reforestation with monocultures – especially with exotic tree species.** This is often damaging to biodiversity,

Escalating deployment of tree plantations is already converting natural forests and other important natural ecosystems such as grasslands, savannas and peatlands.

The impacts don't stop there, and the IPCC has raised serious concerns about water, food security and livelihoods, pointing out that a land area greater than that of India is contemplated in high bioenergy cropping scenarios. We are witnessing land grabbing of indigenous and local communities' land and forests for bioenergy plantations in Indonesia (exposed in earlier ECO's), elsewhere in Asia, and across Africa and Latin America, in the name of combating climate change.

Vitally important draft text on the issue and ensuing intensification of social conflicts now is in danger, under threat from Parties that are champions of the Global Biofuels Alliance. No doubt they hope to claim such bioenergy plantations as nature-based solutions! Unless more Parties find their voices for science-based information, ecological integrity, and care for communities, reservations about monoculture mania may be abandoned. It's a worrying outlook for next year's climate COP in Belem, with disastrous plans for this false solution already being brokered.

The opinions, commentaries, and articles printed in ECO are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organisations, unless otherwise expressed.

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***Email:** lorch@ifrik.org or eco@cbd-alliance.org*

Integrating Biocultural Community Protocols into the work of Article 8(j)

Souparna Lahiri

COP16 is expected to decide on a new programme of work on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention related to indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), aligned with the KMGBF, with the full and effective participation of IPLCs, with the development of important elements, listed in the box below.

While the important issue of direct access funding to IPLCs has been taken out of the negotiated text now, we are still waiting for a final agreement to integrate the elements of *Biocultural Community Protocols* (BCP). IPLCs have their own set of rules and practices to regulate and supervise intra and inter community interactions, relationship with outsiders, and with the territories and areas on which they depend. These are mostly referred to as customary laws and rights which have protected the homelands and territories of these communities, sustaining their traditional practices, knowledge and cultural heritage for generations.

These customary laws and rights, also known as protocols, reflect a symbiotic relationship with land and a responsibility for preserving these lands for future generations. Since Indigenous Peoples often face marginalisation, displacement from their lands, territories and resources, denial of land rights, and adverse impacts from large-scale development, these community protocols can be used as participatory tools help defend their biocultural heritage against these pressures and threats such as from the impacts of mass and elite tourism, and assert their rights over resources and traditional knowledge. They communicate the importance of their lands and resources for a community's livelihoods and way of life, their roles, particularly that of women, as stewards of land and resources, and their customary rights and how these are recognised in international and national law.

These biocultural community protocols can be further used by the communities to:

- ✓ assert and defend their customary rights,
- ✓ negotiate access to customary resources, which is gender just,
- ✓ promote constructive dialogue and equitable partnerships with others which support the communities' plans and priorities,
- ✓ improve organisational and social dynamics between communities, and
- ✓ establish local governance mechanisms, with equitable participation of women, in relation to access and benefit-sharing (ABS) arrangements provided for under the CBD.

To promote and support the conservation, protection and restoration of biological diversity led by IPLCs;

To promote, encourage and ensure the sustainable use of biological diversity, inter alia, to respect and protect the customary sustainable use by IPLCs;

Sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources and digital sequence information on genetic resources, as well as traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources;

To support the transmission and protection of traditional knowledge, including to future generations, and ensure that traditional knowledge and other knowledge systems are valued equally;

To contribute to the implementation of the KMGBF through the full and effective implementation of decisions, principles and guidelines of relevance for IPLCs, and to strengthen the integration of Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention:

To enable the full and effective participation of IPLCs, including women, girls and youth from IPLCs, in decision-making related to biodiversity and the implementation of the KMGBF.

To contribute to the enhancement of the rights of IPLCs for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, in line with a human rights-based approach; and

Enabling direct access to funding for IPLCs for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The CBD as a vehicle to promote biotechnology?

Franziska Achterberg, Save Our Seeds

As biotechnology reaches ever greater capabilities to "re-design" nature, some want to turn the CBD into a place for the promotion rather than regulation of biotechnology. Parties to the Convention cannot let this happen, warns German-based NGO Save Our Seeds.

When the CBD was first written, biotechnology was – rightly – seen as a threat to biodiversity and its sustainable use. The Convention's text focusses on the risks arising from the use and release of genetically engineered organisms, although it also talks about sharing the "results and benefits arising from biotechnologies" when they are based on genetic resources from developing countries.

Fast forward to 2024 and the situation is very different. In the CBD context, there is more and more language about the potential benefits of biotechnology, to the detriment of the precautionary approach enshrined in the Convention.

This comes at a time when biotechnology is becoming ever more powerful. Organisms are no longer just "genetically modified" but increasingly "new-to-nature". The CBD uses the term "synthetic biology" for the "further development and new dimension of modern biotechnology" based on tools such as DNA synthesis, next-generation sequencing, bioinformatics, and genome editing.

Synthetic biology tools have long been used to engineer microbes producing pharmaceuticals or food ingredients in contained facilities. However, more recent applications are also for use in open environments, such as microbes engineered to support the uptake of fertilizer in crops.

A multidisciplinary expert group (mAHTEG) of the CBD has looked into aspects such as the "integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning", "self-spreading vaccines for wildlife" and "engineered gene drives to control vector-borne diseases and invasive species" (Document CBD/SYNBIO/AHTEG/2024/1/3). The expert group was meant to look into the future and inform CBD Parties about things to come. But the future is already here. Artificial intelligence is being rapidly taken up for engineering microbes and proteins, and "self-limiting" insects have already been released in places like Brazil and the US. The experimental release of gene drive mosquitoes, originally planned for 2024, is still being pursued in Uganda and other African countries.

Such extreme forms of genetic engineering represent a whole new dimension of environmental risk. Gene drives, for one, are intended to alter or exterminate whole populations of wild species, resulting in potentially irreversible harm even beyond the country of release. The precautionary principle, enshrined in the CBD more than 30 years ago, has never been more precious and indispensable for the protection of nature and people.

But a handful of Parties such as Brazil and the UK, are intent on blocking any in-depth assessment of the issues considered by the expert group. Instead, they say the CBD should look into potential positive impacts and benefits that synthetic biology can deliver for the achievement of the KMGBF.

Biotechnology interests are also at work in other CBD workstreams. A draft paper on plant conservation (CRP 1) proposes to "support research and development … to enhance the benefits arising from the use of safe biotechnologies". Another draft on biodiversity and health (CRP 6) wants to "promote the sharing of benefits for health arising from biotechnological developments".

Luckily, not all Parties are blind to the potential problems arising from genetic engineering and a proposed non-paper on synthetic biology remains highly controversial. Let's hope that reason prevails, and the CBD will not only continue to caution against negative outcomes but manage to effectively regulate these powerful technologies.

More information about gene drives: www.stop-genedrives.eu

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In this issue

High Court in South Africa invokes the Cartagena Protocol's Precautionary Principle in revoking the approval of Monsanto's MON87460 maize

Mariam Mayet, Angelika Hilbeck & Eva Sirinathsinghji

In a groundbreaking judgement delivered on the 22 October 2024, the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) in South Africa, has set aside the commercial approval of Monsanto/Bayer's so-called "drought tolerant" genetically modified maize, finding that three layers of decision makers failed to adhere to the precautionary principle embedded in the *Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety*.

The decision followed nine years of arduous litigation by the *African Centre for Biodiversity* (ACB), and is a victory for the precautionary principle and the protection of peoples' human rights to food and environmental safety.

The ACB has consistently maintained that decision makers merely rubber-stamped Monsanto's application for authorisation, uncritically accepting its paucity of evidence that the living modified organism (LMO) poses no threat to human health or the environment, and ignoring the contrary expert evidence tendered by several ACB's experts.

The benefits under discussion by the court were solely that of ensuring the human right to an environment and food system, that is not harmful to human health and safety.

The court did not consider profits for the biotech industry, nor purported arguments of dubious yield gains by Monsanto, as being relevant in upholding compliance with biosafety law.

Rather, the SDC held that **"When regard is had to the Cartagena Protocol, which requires that claims of scientific certainty be substantiated with evidence to prove a lack of potential for scientific hazards; Monsanto's risk assessment was inadequate in identifying plausible hazards".**

The concerns raised in this case are not dissimilar to those raised in more than 60 objections filed by the ACB over the last 21 years.

Going forward, in the light that South Africa has decided to regulate all LMOs and products derived from new genomic techniques such as genome editing, all future decision making for approvals for environmental releases will also be subject to the precedent setting ruling.

More information at African Center for Biodiversity https://acbio.org.za

Bring “Peace” into CBD’s “Peace with Nature”

A Call from Okinawa, Japan

Hideki Yoshikawa, Okinawa Environmental Justice Project & Masami Mel Kawamura, The Informed-Public Project

The COP16 slogan *“Peace with Nature”* holds significant meanings in areas affected by war, armed conflict, and militarization. They destroy biodiversity and ecosystems, create pollution, and exacerbate climate change under the pretext of ensuring national interests and security. In many of these areas, these destructive forces are closely linked to systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples and local communities, leading to serious human rights violations. Thus, to make “peace with nature,” we need a global mechanism to assess, prevent, and mitigate their environmental impacts. We must also address and overcome the political and social dimensions allowing such environmental destruction. We hope CBD can take a leading role in this endeavor.

As civil society organizations based in Okinawa, Japan - a region that has experienced devastating wartime events in the past and currently faces extensive militarization - we would like to emphasize two critical points. First, the **immense destruction and lasting impacts of war and armed conflict on both people and the environment**, along with the significant energy expenditure they demand, have prompted experts to study these effects (for example, the ongoing war in Ukraine and the Gulf War of the 1990s). However, such research efforts have been limited and have encountered numerous obstacles.

The secretive nature of war, armed conflicts, and the military has made it difficult to conduct comprehensive studies (e.g., the U.S. military has not released information on its carbon footprint). Our focus on the impacts of war and armed conflicts, primarily regarding human casualties and land-based assessment, has also contributed to this gap in research. Since such studies require scientific rigor and on-the-ground research and are a relatively recent phenomenon, many regions worldwide have not seen such studies conducted.

In Okinawa, people often refer to studies that report 240,000 human lives lost and the destruction of hundreds of houses and farm fields during World War II. However, there are no quantified comprehensive studies on the environmental impacts of the war, particularly concerning the marine environment and species. The time that has passed since makes it challenging to conduct such studies. Nevertheless, it is essential to understand Okinawa's environment before the war to make “peace with nature.”

Secondly, many governments conduct studies on the environmental impacts of militarization (or preparations for war and armed conflict through building facilities, producing and deploying weaponry, and training in specific locations). However, **these studies are often used to justify militarization rather than to protect the environment.** Therefore, it is essential to question the validity of such studies.

In Okinawa, the Japanese government is constructing an air base for the US military at Henoko-Oura Bay through a landfill. This area is known for its rich biodiversity, hosting 5,300 species, including 262 endangered species within 30 square kilometers. The US military also conducts training, such as low-altitude flight exercises, in the Yambaru Forest, located in northern Okinawa Island. A portion of this forest is a UNESCO World Natura Heritage site inscribed for its rich biodiversity in 2021. Additionally, at the WNH site, there is a considerable but unknown amount of military waste left by the US military. Base construction and military training continue, and much of the military waste remains unaddressed. The Japanese government maintains that “there is no adverse environmental impact” from the construction project or the military training, asserting that “its mitigation measures are effective” in its Environmental Impact Assessment and monitoring surveys.

Local experts and NGOs have criticized the Japanese government's greenwash approach to conducting studies and raised concerns about the validity of its conclusions. International organizations like IUCN and

indigenous communities have echoed these concerns. However, the government's political power has suppressed criticism and inquiries. Additionally, because the government has exclusive access to the affected areas, NGOs and even local governments have been unable to conduct independent counter-studies.

The environmental impacts of war, armed conflict, and militarization are significant and devastating, and indigenous peoples and local communities with less political power are often placed muted on the receiving ends of such impacts. However, national governments and international institutions appear reluctant to address these issues as they are regarded as unavoidable consequences of ensuring national interest and security. This needs to change. We must address and connect these environmental issues and their social and political dimensions to peace and justice initiatives. It is important to remember that, similar to climate change, environmental concerns can unify nations, regions, and peoples rather than divide them.

We urge the CBD to develop a mechanism for assessing, avoiding, and mitigating the impacts of war, armed conflict, and militarization on biodiversity and ecosystems as it works towards its 30 by 30 goals. It is essential to incorporate "peace" into our efforts to make "peace with nature."

Collision between Global Biofuels Push and Biodiversity Protection

Peg Putt, Biomass Action Network of EPN International

It is well understood that the climate and biodiversity crises are interdependent, each contributing to the other. Hence care should be taken that responses to climate change do not exacerbate the biodiversity crisis, a prime example being the large-scale deployment of intensive monoculture bioenergy plantations. Reliance on large scale biomass and BECCS for energy and net zero damages nature and the climate and increases global emissions.

A first ever collaboration between IPBES and the IPCC in 2021 warned against:

- **Planting bioenergy crops in monocultures over a very large share of land areas.** Such crops are detrimental to ecosystems when deployed at large scales, reducing nature's contributions to people and impeding achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals, and
- **Planting trees in ecosystems that have not historically been forests and reforestation with monocultures – especially with exotic tree species.** This is often damaging to biodiversity,

Escalating deployment of tree plantations is already converting natural forests and other important natural ecosystems such as grasslands, savannas and peatlands.

The impacts don't stop there, and the IPCC has raised serious concerns about water, food security and livelihoods, pointing out that a land area greater than that of India is contemplated in high bioenergy cropping scenarios. We are witnessing land grabbing of indigenous and local communities' land and forests for bioenergy plantations in Indonesia (as exposed in earlier ECO's), elsewhere in Asia, and across Africa and Latin America, in the name of combating climate change.

Vitally important draft text on the issue and ensuing intensification of social conflicts now is in danger, under threat from Parties that are champions of the Global Biofuels Alliance. No doubt they hope to claim such bioenergy plantations as nature-based solutions! Unless more Parties find their voices for science-based information, ecological integrity, and care for communities, reservations about monoculture mania may be abandoned. It's a worrying outlook for next year's Climate COP in Belem, with disastrous plans for this false solution already being brokered.

The opinions, commentaries, and articles printed in ECO are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organisations, unless otherwise expressed.

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.
***Submissions** are welcome from all civil society groups.*
***Email:** lorch@ifrik.org or eco@cbd-alliance.org*

CBD Alliance statement at the meeting with the UN Secretary General

Mr Secretary General,

We are here in Cali fighting for life on Earth. But our hearts are overflowing with grief for all the lives lost in wars and conflicts. We stand in solidarity with Palestine, and all those impacted. The blatant disregard for international law puts multilateralism at risk - it erodes trust among nations, and this echoes through these halls.

The trillions squandered on wars that also destroy biodiversity is the most grotesque manifestation of political, economic and military power. The unfettered power of the global North, corporations and elites is driving the worst harms to our fragile planet. Fossil fuels, mining and industrial logging spiral us into dangerous tipping points. The same powerful interests then peddle false solutions and techno-fixes, despite existing CBD decisions on geoengineering moratoria. This must stop.

Technology is advancing at breakneck speed. We are ill-equipped to respond to its dangers. We must proactively scan the horizon to monitor the frontiers of new technology, and institute just governance over artificial intelligence, synthetic biology and emerging technologies. We also need the UN ICC to support the CBD to build a trusted and accountable genetic sequence database to prevent biopiracy.

And let's be clear - we cannot end the biodiversity crisis without addressing the structural inequities rooted in the international financial architecture - including the injustice of debt servitude that drives extractivism.

We must end financial sector impunity and a UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights is key. We need public funding for those who protect biodiversity. We hear little discussion of tax justice or 'polluter pays' - policies that could deliver funds. We must urgently redirect financial flows from harmful activities – wars, industrial agriculture and destructive subsidies. Vested interests oppose this change.

Cali aims to be the peoples' COP – yet we see unprecedented levels of corporate lobbying. Defending profits is not the same as defending rights.

Some UN agencies are promoting climate or trade policies that undermine biodiversity. Others are promoting greenwashing or biodiversity offsets. The official complaint about UNEP's role in the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) examines these challenges.

The UN system must be a guiding light in dark times. We urge you to use your voice to help us implement the transformative change we need. We must start, right now, on implementing the positive aspects of the GBF and revisit the negative aspects. Robust mechanisms for planning, reporting and review must be fair and achievable for developing countries.

Adequate funding is essential to implement the GBF. $210 billion should flow to developing countries by 2030, a fraction of the $35 trillion spent to bail out the G7's private banks after the 2008 financial crisis. Yet, developed countries have never met their financing obligations, they oppose a dedicated fund and they threaten to deny developing countries the benefits from their own genetic resources.

We are facing existential crises. But we already have many of the solutions. Small-scale farmers and fisherfolk are eager to feed the world, while nurturing the land, oceans and biodiversity through agroecology. Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant communities and local communities remain the best guardians of nature. With courage, we must finally make peace with nature, and secure a just peace amongst peoples.

Thank you, Mr Secretary General.

ECO

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www.cbd-alliance.org - linktr.ee/cbd_alliance

In this issue

Yesterday, people came together to honor environmental defenders murdered and disappeared, and to demand the killings to stop.

Biodiversity and climate change

Opportunities lost and gained on ensuring significant safeguards against False Solutions

Meenal Tatpati, Women4Biodiversity

COP 16 presented itself as a great opportunity to enhance collective action towards safeguarding biodiveristy as well as addressing climate change while tacking false and inhibitive solutions towards the same. It was to consider and adopt conclusions and recommendations provided to COP16 by SBSTTA25. It is worthwhile to note that the entire document presented by SBSTTA to COP 16 was bracketed. However it had some important considerations which highlighted the caution with which the CBD has considered the effects of, as well as the many diverse 'solutions' being considered towards adaptation and mitigation of climate change on biological diversity.

SBSTTA acknowledged that:

large-scale intensive bioenergy and monoclutural plantations have a negative impact on biodiversity since they replace natural forests and susbistence farmlands, thereby threatening food and water security, local livelihoods, and intensify social conflicts.

It encouraged Parties:

To implement strong social and environmental safe-

guards including ensuring a human-rights based approach and the full and effective participation of women and girls, children and youth and persons with disabilities, while meeting their obligations under Target 8 and 11.

And other governments and relevant organisation to access, manage and avoid the potential adverse impacts on biodiversity due to economic and sectoral transitions in land use, energy, infrastructure and industrial systems undertaken in response to climate change.

It also requested the Executive Secreatary of the CBD to:

open a call for and compile submissions by Parties, observers and other organisations on existing information on carbon and biodiversity credits and offsets and other market-based approaches and their effects on biodiversity, and to make the compilation available to the SBSTTA at a meeting before COP17.

Four contact groups later, the text stands considerably diluted on these major considerations. It has deleted the paragraph highlighting the effects of intensive, monoculture plantations on biodiversity, local livelihoods and social conflict. Apart from this, it has also deleted the call made to the Executive Secretary for an open call to collate existing information about the effects of carbon and biodiversity credits and offsets and market-based approaches on biodiversity. It has diluted the language which mentions specific sectoral transtions including land-use change, energy and infrastructure and industrial systems to access their impacts on biodiversity; and has replaced the strong and specific text calling for 'the need for a human-rights based approach and full and effective participation of women and girls, children and youth and persons with disabilities' to be considered during implementation of Target 8 and 11 with the often used and heavily diluted phrase "to be consistent with Section C and Target 22 of the KMGBF'.

While these crucial paragraphs have been deleted or diluted, the doucument has continued to maintain caution on adopting nature-based solutions by taking note of the fact that UNEA has recognised that *'Nature based Solutions'* (NbS) might contribute to climate action but the need to analyse their effects and acknowledig that they do not replace the need for deep reduction in GHG emissions. The CRP also contains reiteration of its own decisions on geoenginnering and acknowledges that climate geoengineering activities, including marine and solar geoengineering activities, could result in serious and irreversible impacts on biodiversity and the livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities, and the growth of uncontrolled geoengineering field experiments may cause harm to biodiversity and people.

There are several examples all over the world of intensive monoculture plantations, credits and offsets and sectoral changes made as a response to meet *Nationally Determined Contributions* under the UNFCCC affecting rights of indigenous communities and local people and especially women, as well as harming critically endangered species and biodiverse habitats. It is important that these paragraphs are retained to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The call for the Executive Secretary to compile available information on the effects of carbon and biodiversity credits and offsets would have been crucial to integrate into the CBD process since it has historically complied various studies and submissions on pertinent and relevant issues of importance with respect to biodiversity and climate change ever since this cross-cutting issue was included in the work under the CBD in 2004 through decision VII/15 of the COP. There is a need for strong and clear decision from CBD-COP16 to continue its cautious stand on false solutions and their effects on biodiversity and human rights.

See the online version for sources.

We thank the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung for their financial support.

The necessary recognition and respect of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the protection of biodiversity

Isaac Rojas, Friends of the Earth International

The close relationship between Indigenous Peoples and local communities and biodiversity is again recognised in the new 8j work plan, which aims to be more holistic, integrated and harmonised with the *Global Biodiversity Framework*. It also recognises, supports and values respect for their territories, traditions and traditional knowledge, so their full, effective and active participation in the implementation of the plan - and the whole CBD - is key.

The work plan would contain nine elements, each with different actions. We highlight the recognition of the importance that the territories of IPLCs are in their hands to fulfil their role in the protection of biodiversity as well as its sustainable use. The recognition and call for the protection of traditional knowledge is strengthened by highlighting the importance - and necessity - of their full and effective participation. Therefore, we believe that their rights in relation to the conservation and use of biodiversity must be strengthened, respected and implemented.

The Working Group on 8j would become a Subsidiary Body that would advise the COP and other subsidiary bodies of the Convention, which represents an important step forward.

The COP would also approve a proposal from Colombia and Brazil to recognise the contributions made by Afro-descendant communities given their lifestyles and traditional knowledge as well as their connection to their lands. This recognition is important in order not to make invisible the contributions - and rights - of those who, in their daily lives and through their culture, play a vital role in the protection and sustainable use of biological diversity.

These proposals should be approved at this COP in order to continue with the recognition of the vital role that Indigenous Peoples and local communities play in the protection of biodiversity. Through this recognition, it is evident that there is an urgent need to protect their rights so that they can remain on their lands, make decisions autonomously, organise themselves internally according to their traditions and have a role in defining public policies. Otherwise, their traditional and traditional lifestyles on their lands, as well as their culture, would be further eroded with a serious impact on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

The approval of the new work plan, form of organisation and recognition of Afro-descendant communities is evidence of the vital role played by Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the negotiations on these points, which could have more tools to defend and strengthen their lifestyles.

Implementation at the national level of all these future Convention agreements is key and should take place soon.

Finally, it is important not to forget that all this recognition, which would be reinforced at this COP16, must go hand in hand with effective protection mechanisms for human rights and environmental defenders in the face of the large number of attacks and violations of their individual and collective human rights.

Biodiversity Crisis or Business Opportunity?

Conflicting Universes in the CBD

Nele Mariën, Friends of the Earth International

Biodiversity is rapidly declining, nearing the brink of collapse, with numerous reports highlighting its critical state. In the past two weeks, 18,000 to 20,000 people gathered - in the blue zone alone - to tackle this crisis. But how did these massive crowds engage with one another? Were they all cooperating for the benefit of Nature? Were they carefully listening to one another?

At times, it felt as if multiple universes coexisted within a single space. There was the universe of negotiations, buried under brackets and late-night deliberations. The universe of Indigenous peoples, closely connected to Mother Earth and deeply rooted in spiritual values interwoven with Nature. The universe of NGOs, passionately speaking up against false solutions and injustices. And the universe of business people, speaking in polished terms about their role in "the solution." Whenever someone from one universe ventured to speak in another, they were often regarded as aliens.

Except, perhaps, for the business people, whose perspectives seemed warmly embraced in the negotiation rooms and inside delegations. We heard of a small European country's delegation that included 60 registered business representatives, invited to exclusive receptions and granted special access to the minister. Although NGOs could join the delegation, they didn´t have such privileges. This dynamic doesn't appear to be unique to that country.

This results in decision texts that put "the impact of biodiversity loss on business" at the forefront, with the impacts of business on nature only on a distant second place - after hard fights to even include them - and any regulatory measures to stop such impacts are entirely lacking.

Similarly, proposals that would permit businesses to continue expanding harmful operations s like biodiversity offsetting - have gained significant traction among official delegations.

Biodiversity is certainly not improving!

A Tale of two CBDs – Trick or Treat at COP16

"Held in the world capital for salsa dancing, the COP was […] something between an eco-jamboree, a trade fair and yes, serious diplomatic negotiations. [...] It's helpful to recognise that there was not one, but effectively two different 'spirits' occupying and animating the Cali COP during this season of spooks and spectres. **First, there's 'good old-fashioned COP'** – the spirit of CBDs past if you like. This spirit embodies the story, values, priorities, agendas and programmes that many of us CBD old-timers know too well. [...] But there was **a different kind of COP going on in Cali: COP 4.0**,a Davos-style neoliberal eco-trade fair mixed with norm-setting committees for enabling emerging biodiversity markets and next-generation high-tech gadgets. From Montreal onwards a gentrifying new crowd of younger, better funded 'green' NGOs, financiers and philanthropists seemingly 'discovered' the CBD as if moving into a run-down but pleasant neighbourhood they hadn't noticed before. They condensed around a biodiversity financialisation agenda of 'nature positive' biodiversity offsets, 30×30 conservation targets, debt for nature swaps and shiny new digital and genomic technologies (or "innovative solutions" as some prefer to tag them...

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https://abiggerconversation.org/a-tale-of-two-cbds-trick-or-treat-at-cop16