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Assessing the Gender – responsiveness of NBSAPs

CBD Women's Caucus

The KMGBF, in particular its Section C and Targets 22 and 23, as well as the Gender Plan of Action (GPA) mark a turning point in global environmental governance by explicitly linking biodiversity conservation to human rights, equity, and gender justice. Translating these global commitments into national action through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) is therefore a critical test of implementation.

To evaluate whether and how gender equality and human-rights principles are being incorporated, the CBD Women's Caucus conducted an in-depth review of thirteen NBSAPs submitted by April 2025. The study applied a two-part methodology combining the gender-integration continuum framework with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to assess each NBSAP against eighteen human-rights dimensions, including participation, tenure security, access to information, and protection of environmental defenders.

The results show encouraging conceptual progress but weak operationalisation. While many NBSAPs now acknowledge that biodiversity and social justice are interconnected—and some include gender-responsive or human-rights language—most references remain aspirational. Few plans specify actions, indicators, budgets, or accountability mechanisms. Embedding these elements throughout planning, implementation, and monitoring processes is essential to turn rhetoric into measurable progress.

Closing these gaps will require strong political will, predictable financing, and sustained capacity-building at national and local levels. International and domestic funders can play a catalytic role by prioritising long-term, systematic support for gender equality in biodiversity governance. Ultimately, gender-responsive and rights-based approaches are foundational to the success of the KMGBF, and their limited consideration in many revised NBSAPs reflects persistent knowledge and capacity gaps that must be urgently addressed.

To translate commitments into practice, Parties should, among other things, apply gender and power analyses to address structural inequalities; align biodiversity planning with international human-rights frameworks such as CEDAW; and institutionalise gender equality through responsive budgeting, sex-disaggregated data, and dedicated capacity-building.

Embedding gender justice and human rights at the core of biodiversity governance and action will unlock the full potential of the KMGBF—building more just, inclusive, and resilient societies while safeguarding the planet we share.

More info: coordination@cbdwomenscaucus.org

Scan to read the full assessment – available in five languages!

Moratorium on genetically engineering wild species in natural ecosystems – IUCN membership split down the middle

Helena Paul, Econexus

Should IUCN support synthetic biology or oppose it, or remain neutral on its use and potential impacts on nature and nature conservation? A question accompanying IUCN since 2016. Whilst a policy was being devised aiming for neutrality, many members felt that one high risk category should be treated separately. They made a case for pausing genetically engineered wildlife releases to safeguard nature's integrity and tabled motion 133. The message was clear:

Biodiversity is declining at unprecedented rates, driven by human activity that erodes the very foundations of life on Earth. Yet while extinction accelerates, a new trend is emerging: proposals to genetically engineer nature itself. These include eradicating mosquito, mouse or rabbit populations, altering invasive species, making endangered animals disease-resistant, and even reviving extinct creatures like the mammoth or the dire wolf. None has yet succeeded, but the ecological and ethical risks are immense.

The release of genetically engineered organisms into natural ecosystems carries irreversible consequences. Once released, they cannot be recalled. Their interactions with other species are unpredictable, and they could permanently disrupt already fragile ecological networks. The science of ecosystem interactions remains too incomplete to allow confident manipulation, becoming even more unpredictable by the effects of climate change. Moreover, the current biosafety frameworks—designed for crops and livestock—are wholly inadequate for the complexities of wild systems. There are no effective international mechanisms to address cross-border liability or damage.

Another grave concern is that genetic engineering of wild species alters the spiritual, cultural, and ecological connections of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' with the ecosystems in their territories, thereby undermining their rights.

Introducing genetic engineering into conservation marks a paradigm shift: from protecting nature for its intrinsic value to redesigning it according to human preferences. Framed as "just another tool," it risks transforming conservation from safeguarding life to engineering it.

A responsible path forward requires a moratorium—no environmental releases of genetically engineered wild species, not even experimental ones—until science can reliably predict outcomes, strong regulatory systems and global frameworks exist, Indigenous rights are fully respected, and societies have reached broad consensus on ethical boundaries.

Moratoria are not new. They have long been used to prevent irreversible harm, including IUCN's moratoriums on deep-sea mining and destructive fisheries. Applying the same precautionary logic to genetic engineering of wild species is a vital step to uphold the Precautionary Principle and the intrinsic value of biodiversity.

This need for restraint was recognised in IUCN Motion 133, brought to the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2025. The motion called for a "precautionary deferment of the release of genetically engineered wild organisms into natural ecosystems." Although 55% of all members supported it, the motion ultimately failed because the IUCN requires approval from both a majority of organisational members and of government members. Motion 133 fell short of the latter by a single government vote — a narrow margin with far-reaching implications.

It is up to the CBD now to protect against the negative impacts of engineering nature.

More info: https://engineeringnature.org/

Social and Environmental Safeguards in the CBD: A Test for Credibility

Mirna Ines Fernandez, Third World Network

Social and environmental safeguards have become a recurring theme in discussions under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Their inclusion in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), particularly in Target 19 on financial resource mobilization, reflects growing awareness of the risks associated with "innovative finance" mechanisms such as biodiversity credits, offsets, green bonds, and payments for ecosystem services. These instruments promise resource mobilization for biodiversity, but without robust safeguards, they risk becoming vehicles for greenwashing, as well as nature and human rights violations.

Safeguards are also mentioned in discussions on biodiversity and climate, as in relation to the implementation of Nature-based Solutions (NbS). These were introduced without clearly defined criteria, standards, or guidelines—neither within the CBD nor in other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Their definition, adopted at UNEA-6, left vast interpretative gaps that can be used to trade further ecosystem destruction permits branded as NbS. As safeguards are discussed in more decisions—particularly in the forthcoming supplement to the voluntary guidelines on ecosystem-based approaches—the question becomes unavoidable: what do safeguards actually mean, and why have previous ones failed to deliver?

Lessons from the Past: Why Safeguards Have Fallen Short

Experience from other Rio Conventions and MEAs offers lessons to consider. REDD+ safeguards under the UNFCCC, though intended to prevent social and ecological harm from forest carbon projects, relied heavily on self-assessment and voluntary reporting—tools that proved largely ineffective. UNEA and CBD safeguards have suffered similar weaknesses: they depend on the goodwill of states and private actors, lack enforcement mechanisms, and rarely exclude harmful activities or the offsetting of those. The system offers the appearance, not the reality, of accountability.

What Would Effective Safeguards Look Like?

For safeguards to work, they must move beyond voluntary approaches. They should be binding, not optional, and explicitly exclude activities that undermine human rights or ecological integrity. They should ensure the implementation of the KMGBF does not legitimize further destruction nor replace urgent biodiversity and climate action. Effective safeguards would also ensure that biodiversity finance does not flow to destructive industries or projects. Independent monitoring, public transparency, and meaningful participation—especially of Indigenous peoples, local communities, women, and youth—must be ensured by these.

Can Safeguards really "save" people & nature?

At present, it is difficult to say. If the CBD simply replicates the weak, voluntary safeguards of past environmental agreements, they will do little to guarantee that the KMGBF upholds ecological integrity or human rights. The only real hope lies in **redefining safeguards altogether**—restoring their binding nature and linking them to effective mechanisms of accountability and penalties for any violations.

Beyond Safeguards

Ultimately, safeguards alone cannot ensure the responsible implementation of the KMGBF. Complementary measures—such as community-based monitoring, participatory national assessments, independent evaluations of private sector impacts and regulatory measures—are crucial. Without these, even the best-intentioned safeguards risk becoming empty promises, failing both people and the planet.

Key Questions on Biodiversity Offsets Explained

Green Finance Observatory, TWN, FOEI, IEN, GFC, RAN, SOMO

Biodiversity offsets and credits are being promoted as mechanisms to channel financial resources towards biodiversity protection. But a growing body of evidence shows that biodiversity offsets, which are modelled after problematic carbon markets, could lead to significant social and environmental harm. Moreover, biocrediting systems are unlikely to be effective in terms of either protecting ecosystems or raising reliable additional funding for biodiversity conservation.

These mechanisms raise many concerns, and include greenwashing, human rights violations, conflicts over tenure rights, land grabbing, community displacements, and impacts on ecosystem integrity and food sovereignty. At the same time, market-driven failures are perpetuated, with little or no revenue accruing to communities on the ground. Instead of these false solutions to address the biodiversity crisis, what is needed is the prioritization of transformational change in tackling the underlying causes of biodiversity destruction.

Several organizations present a "frequently asked questions" document, explaining further the concepts, assumptions and key features of biodiversity offsets and credits.

More info: biodmarketwatch.info

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***Submissions** are welcome from all civil society groups.*
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