



In this issue

- **Synthetic biology**
- **Monitoring framework**
- **Hopes toward the Global Review**

Why we must not gamble away biodiversity on speculative and risky synthetic biology

Eva Sirinathsinghji, Third World Network

The synthetic biology field is still largely confined to the research and development phase. It is not yet deployed at scale, particularly with regard to environmental release applications. Yet industry promises are increasingly broad-ranging and speculative: from widely debunked ‘de-extinction’ conservation projects, to ‘predictive’ targeting of self-limiting engineered insects to single neighbourhoods, hospitality venues or military installations, to ‘safely’ releasing living modified microbes despite the lack of any proven ability to control their capacity for survival, transboundary spread or evolutionary adaptation.

A field associated with strong commercial interests and hype warrants careful scrutiny over which are the most viable, locally appropriate and less risky approaches for protecting biodiversity and human well-being. Crucially, its relevance to the Convention and the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*, both positive and negative, needs to be carefully assessed.

As such, the thematic action plan to support capacity-building, technology transfer and knowledge sharing in the context of synthetic biology needs to be rooted in sovereignty, precaution and equity. It is critical that developing countries’ capacities are built for independent and sovereign assessment, governance and regulation of synthetic biology. This will ensure that they are robustly equipped to make sovereign decisions on synthetic biology applications and development trajectories, while not left bearing the burden of risk management, clean up, liability and costs associated with any damages or technology failures.

Moreover, equitable participation in research and development in the field should not automatically equate to an enabling environment for the deployment of synthetic biology applications that remain unproven and largely experimental. Research collaborations and capacity-building efforts should also be independent and free of conflicts of interest, so that such efforts are not driven by profit incentives.

Anticipatory and timely horizon-scanning and monitoring can also assist Parties in staying abreast of novel developments within the field. This can allow for effective oversight to assess safety, suitability and efficacy of novel technologies, including biosafety, socio-economic, cultural and ethical dimensions.

The draft decision on synthetic biology should therefore:

- Focus the thematic action plan on the assessment, governance and regulation of synthetic biology, especially for developing countries.

- Re-emphasise the need for a process that is flexible and forward looking with respect to future developments, with anticipatory horizon-scanning and monitoring mechanisms for timely identification and assessment of potential positive and potential negative impacts, in line with a precautionary approach.
- Ensure that assessment is on a multidisciplinary and inclusive basis to contribute to participatory decision-making, in accordance with the precautionary approach and national priorities and circumstances, and in consultation with indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth, with their free, prior and informed consent.
- Keep research and capacity-building initiatives free of profit-driven conflicts of interest and extend the procedure for avoiding or managing conflicts of interests in expert groups to consultants.

Side event

Synthetic Biology at the CBD: Precaution before promotion

- ▷ Organised by CBD Alliance | TWN | ETC Group | ACB | FGS | FOE | POLLINIS
- ▷ Monday, 27 July, 8:15
- ▷ CR-10, Grulac meeting room, 2nd floor

What the Monitoring Framework Still Can't See

Rainforest Action Network

As SBSTTA-28 considers both the *Global Review* of collective progress and the further development of the monitoring framework for the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (KMGBF), delegates face an important but easily overlooked question: What aspects of implementation are actually being made visible?

The Framework rightly seeks to monitor biodiversity finance, harmful incentives and corporate disclosure. Yet a critical blind spot remains. It still provides only a limited ability to assess whether Parties are progressively implementing Target 14 by aligning public and private activities, and fiscal and financial flows, with the goals and targets of the Framework. One important reason is that we continue to have only a partial picture of the much larger public and private financial flows that continue to drive biodiversity loss.

This matters because counting more money labelled for biodiversity cannot, on its own, tell us whether financial systems are becoming more consistent with the goals of the Framework. Even substantial increases in biodiversity finance may not correspond to overall progress if much larger financial flows continue to incentivise ecosystem conversion, deforestation and environmentally harmful production.

Target 14 commits Parties to progressively align public and private activities, and fiscal and financial flows, with the goals and targets of the Framework. Achieving that ambition requires more than mobilising additional finance. It also requires visibility of the financial flows that remain inconsistent with biodiversity objectives, together with the policy and regulatory measures being used to address them.

Target 15 has rightly increased attention on corporate and financial institution disclosure. But disclosure is not an outcome in itself, and selective disclosure risks obscuring what is actually happening. Monitoring should therefore help us understand not only whether institutions disclose biodiversity-related information, but whether those disclosures support better decision-making, meaningful reductions in harmful impacts and progress towards the objectives of the Framework.

The technical challenges are real, but they are not insurmountable. Civil society, researchers and financial analysts already demonstrate that it is possible to identify significant financing associated with high-risk sectors using publicly available data. While these approaches are necessarily incomplete, they show that improved monitoring is feasible, and that many remaining data gaps reflect transparency and policy choices rather than technical impossibility. The question is therefore becoming less whether such monitoring is possible, and more whether Parties wish to make these wider financial dynamics visible as part of assessing implementation of the Framework.

As SBSTTA considers both the Global Review and the continued development of the monitoring framework, three priorities deserve particular attention:

- Recognise the continuing gap in assessing implementation of Target 14, including progress in aligning public and private activities and reducing financial flows associated with biodiversity loss.
- Ensure that monitoring distinguishes between finance mobilised for biodiversity and financial flows that continue to drive biodiversity loss, so that progress in one is not mistaken for progress in the other.
- Avoid allowing measures of disclosure or finance mobilisation to become substitutes for measuring real-world policy change, implementation and biodiversity outcomes.

Ultimately, the success of the KMGBF will not be determined simply by how much additional finance is mobilised for biodiversity. It will depend on whether Parties progressively implement Target 14 by transforming the broader policy, fiscal and financial systems that continue to drive biodiversity loss. Monitoring should help make that transformation visible.

Hopes towards the global review

Friedrich Wulf, Pro Natura – Friends of the Earth Switzerland

The discussions at SBSTTA-26 and SBI-7 will set the stage for a very important COP. It could be – through the global report and the global review – the turning point for the implementation of the KMGBF.

The global report, based on numerous national reports, has clarified that the world is not on track to reach the targets – more and enhanced action is needed. According to the report, targets 14, 16, 19

and 22 are those with the lowest level of progress.

In other words, above all, there needs to be a push in setting up and enforcing regulations and policies that align all relevant public and private activities, and fiscal and financial flows with the goals and targets of this framework; in making consumption more sustainable and reducing the global footprint; in providing the necessary finance for implementing

the CBD, and ensuring the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity.

Target 14, along with target 18 on subsidies harmful to biodiversity, is a key element for achieving transformative change and reducing the pressure on biodiversity. It demands that governments set up legislation and planning procedures in a way that economic activities align with the needs of biodiversity. The recent IPBES business and biodiversity assessment set to be welcomed by SBSTTA-28¹ supports targets 14 and 18, requiring governments to “set up and enforce policy, legal and regulatory frameworks that incentivize or mandate actions by businesses and financial institutions for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.”², and this might be mentioned in the SBSTTA recommendation.

Identifying and pointing out the gaps in the implementation of the GBF is one of the key outcomes expected of this year’s CBD process. But it is even more important to put in place a process to fill in the gaps in collaboration with others – a single COP decision calling on parties to increase their activities is not enough. A continuous process is needed. It will be important to discuss jointly, in diverse groups and settings, what different actors can do to tackle the challenges. Two elements of this are already underway – the voluntary country-by-country peer review and the Kunming technical dialogue on implementation (7-9 September). But there are many more options, and scientists from IDDRI and PBL have published an excellent overview of possible options to frame these structured dialogues, including technical, political and mixed dialogues at different levels.

We highly recommends reading this publication³, especially chapter 5 onward.

Some of the presented options - Presidency-led senior political dialogues, targeted ministerial or cross-ministerial dialogues on a specific sectoral or finance issue, target-specific political dialogues or on a limited number of priority targets or systemic challenges, or regional or national dialogues to address specific political situations are intended to be held before or at the high level segment of the COP – not much time to organize it. It would be worthwhile if SBSTTA and SBI can prepare the ground so that these meetings will take place.

Notes

¹ Document CBD/SBSTTA/28/3, Matters related to the work programme of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

² IPBES (2026). Summary for Policymakers of the Methodological Assessment Report on the Impact and Dependence of Business on Biodiversity and Nature’s Contributions to People. Jones, M., Polasky, S., Rueda, X., Brooks, S., Carter Ingram, J., Egoh, B.N., von Hase, A., Kohsaka, R., Kulak, M., Leach, K., Loyola, R., Mandle, L., Rodriguez Osuna, V., Schaafsma, M. and Sonter, L.J. (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15369060>. – Table SPM 1, A 1.1.

³ Landry, Kok et al. (2026): Operationalizing the biodiversity Global Review to strengthen CBD effectiveness: Priorities for COP17 and beyond. <https://www.pbl.nl/downloads/iddri-pbl-2026-operationalizing-the-biodiversity-global-review-to-strengthen-cbd-effectiveness-priorities-for-cop17>

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

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