ECO
www.cbd-alliance.org
Volume 74, Issue 6
Friday, 7 Aug 2026

In this issue
- Biodiversity finance
- World Bank country classification
- Mainstreaming
- Resource mobilisation

The 200-to-1 problem that biodiversity finance is avoiding

Tom Picken, Rainforest Action Network

There is an overlooked implication hidden inside this year's *State of Finance for Nature* report. Much attention has rightly been given to its headline finding that finance harming nature outweighs nature-positive finance by around 30 to 1. But that comparison combines public and private finance. The report's own breakdown of those totals tells a different story. Looking only at the private finance figures, financial flows classified as nature-negative outweigh those classified as nature-positive by more than 200 to 1.

State of Finance for Nature 2026
(US$ annual flows)

	Nature-positive	Nature-negative
Total	220 billion	7.3 trillon
Public	197 billion	2.4 trillion
Private	23 billion	4.9 trillion

Source: UNEP, State of Finance for Nature 2026. Based on the report's own breakdown of public and private finance. Private nature-negative finance (US$4.9 trillionn) exceeds private nature-positive finance (US$23 billionn) by 213:1.

This finding should fundamentally change how we frame biodiversity finance discussions under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Imagine a government discovered it was collecting just one dollar in tax revenue for every 200 dollars lost through tax avoidance and evasion. No finance minister would describe that primarily as a revenue mobilisation challenge. They would recognise it as a governance failure and ask why the system was allowing such enormous losses in the first place.

Yet in biodiversity finance we increasingly do the opposite. Faced with private financial flows harming nature that exceed positive private finance by more than 200 to one, much of the discussion centres on mobilising additional private finance rather than governing the vastly larger financial flows already driving biodiversity loss.

None of this diminishes the importance of long-overdue public finance commitments, which remain fundamental for both equity and implementation. Nor is it an argument against genuinely positive private investment. It is an argument about priorities. If private finance is already influencing biodiversity at more than 200 times the scale in the wrong direction, surely our first question should be why, and how to change where that finance is going.

Private finance is not waiting to be mobilised. It is already mobilised, overwhelmingly towards activities associated with deforestation, ecosystem conversion and violations of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights.

Economic development requires finance. The question is not whether finance should support development, but what forms of development it incentivises, under what conditions, and with whose interests and rights protected. Finance helps shape those pathways, yet environmental and social safeguards remain patchy, inconsistent and overwhelmingly voluntary.

Banks and investors have responded with no-deforestation policies, voluntary initiatives, sustainability reporting, new green finance products and nature-related disclosures. These developments matter, but they have not materially changed where capital is flowing. Harmful finance remains largely legal, voluntary commitments weak, and implementation weaker still.

The Global Biodiversity Framework already points in a different direction. Target 19 on finance mobilisation sits alongside Target 14 on aligning public and private financial flows, Target 15 on business accountability, and Target 18 on harmful incentives. Together they describe a coherent programme for governing financial systems, not simply raising more money.

The question for COP17 is therefore not whether private finance has a role to play. It clearly does. The question is whether Parties choose to focus primarily on mobilising a comparatively small pool of positive private finance, or on progressively aligning the vastly larger private financial flows already shaping biodiversity outcomes.

As negotiations continue towards COP17, Parties have an opportunity to rebalance that conversation. The Global Review should place harmful financial flows and financial alignment at the centre of implementation discussions. Resource mobilisation should distinguish public finance commitments, positive private finance and harmful private financial flows, while mainstreaming should bring finance ministries, central banks and financial regulators into implementation. This is not asking the CBD to become a financial regulator. It is asking Parties to implement the commitments they have already made under Target 14.

For years, biodiversity finance debates have largely asked how finance can better support biodiversity. COP17 should begin asking the more fundamental question: How should biodiversity reshape finance?

Why the World Bank country income classification is *not* suitable for CBD purposes

Lim Li Ching & Goh Chien Yen, Third World Network

The Joint Submission on behalf of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom proposes that Parties classified as "high-income" under the World Bank (WB) country income classification should be used to review and amend the list of Developed Country Parties and Other Parties that Voluntarily Assume the Obligations of Developed Country Parties, with the exclusion of Small Island Developing States.

In the first place, the provision in Article 20(2) clearly states that the process is voluntary. There should not be an automatic trigger based on "graduation" to the high-income category. Especially one that could redefine legal obligations under the Convention. Using the WB classification would be erroneous and illogical.

The classificatory bands of low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high-income countries are for the Bank's administrative purposes of allocating funds and the provision of technical assistance and advisory services. This should not be confused with the complex question of whether a country is, or is not, a developing country. Nor should an administrative measure be turned into a threshold to make this determination.

Further, the GNI per capita measure alone says little about the resilience of a developing country's economy. It may have unequal distribution of income due to structural adjustment and international economic rules, or it might be heavily dependent on one or two sectors, or worse, one or two export commodities. As such, its economy might be fragile and vulnerable to pandemic, energy, climate, regulatory and policy shocks.

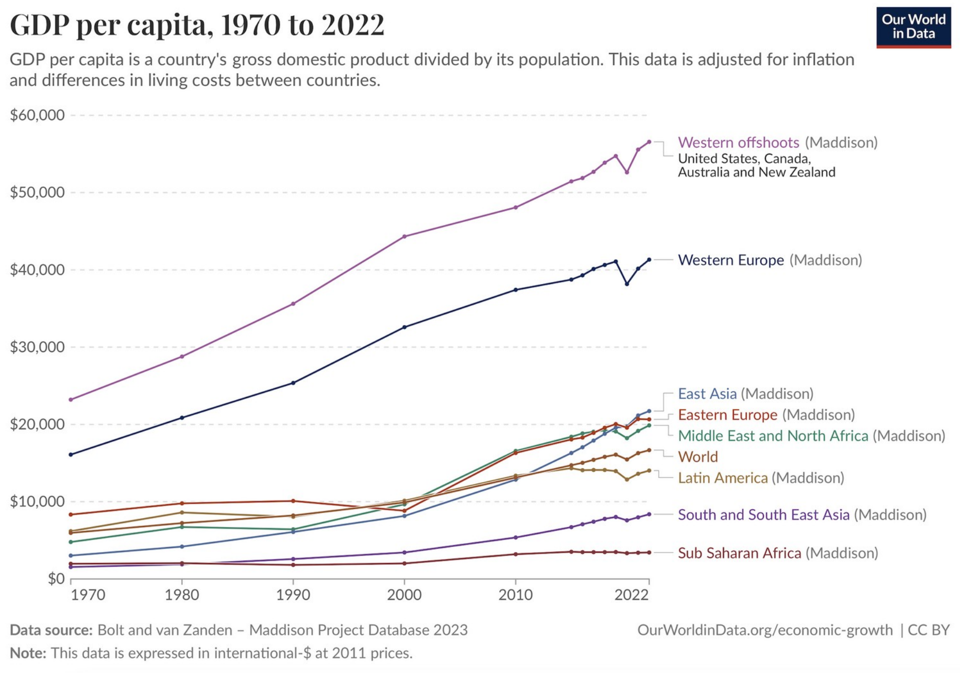

Figure 1. Source: https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/gdp-per-capita-maddison-project-database?tab=line&time=1970..latest

There is a discernible and growing gulf between groups of countries and that gap is not closing (see Figure 1). These countries can be bifurcated broadly as between developed and developing countries. Just as the USA's astronomical GDP per capita, apex currency and cutting-edge technology does not make Western Europe "developing", nor should the improved economic performance of a small handful of developing countries suddenly make them "developed".

The World Bank high-income threshold is $14,375 for FY 2027. Most developing country economies above this threshold earn under half the OECD average ($50,697). And catching up would take generations (see Figure 2). An economy at the high-income threshold growing 1.5 percentage points a year faster than the OECD needs roughly 86 years to reach today's OECD average. At 2.5 percentage points higher, historically rare and rarely sustained, it needs 52 years. If crossing the high-income threshold signalled arrival as a 'developed country', the true arrival would still take two to three generations.

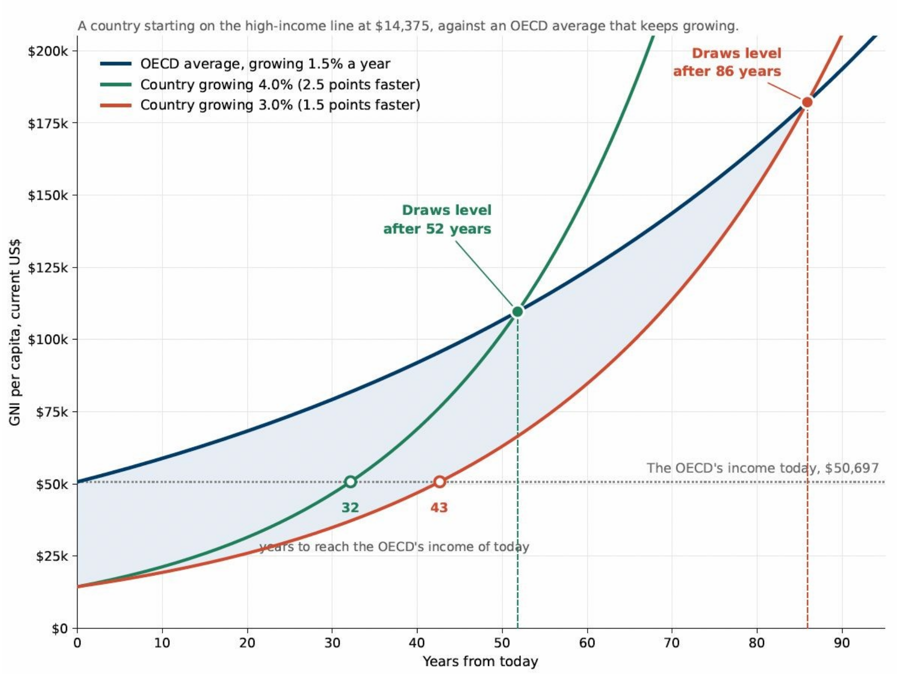

Figure 2. Source: Third World Network.

Assumptions: OECD average grows 1.5% a year throughout; the country grows 3.0% or 4.0%. All figures are GNI per capita on the Atlas method in current US dollars, so growth here includes inflation differentials and movement against the dollar, not real output alone. A 1.5-point premium is common over a decade and almost unknown over eight.

What is preventing biodiversity from coming first in economic and sectoral decisions?

Nele Marien, Friends of the Earth International

As biodiversity loss accelerates across the globe, the need to mainstream biodiversity as a central consideration in all public policy decisions has never been more urgent. The impacts of major economic sectors on nature remain unacceptably high and continue to grow. To safeguard the Earth's life-support systems and our collective future it is essential to make biodiversity a priority in all decision-making, particularly in economic, fiscal and financial policies.

Yet despite growing recognition of the need for policy alignment, significant barriers and challenges remain. Across sectors and levels of governance, governments continue to face obstacles in integrating biodiversity into decision-making, while ineffective approaches often persist. To make meaningful progress, Parties, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, rights holders, and civil society should work together to identify barriers, challenges and unhelpful approaches, which should provide the basis to develop future work to address them.

A second critical issue is ensuring clarity about where responsibility lies. Businesses may develop voluntary biodiversity initiatives, and while these could complement broader efforts, they are often constrained by limited transparency, inconsistent implementation, and a lack of accountability. What is more critical, overreliance on voluntary measures leads to a substitution of the robust policy and regulatory action needed to address the drivers of biodiversity loss.

The primary responsibility for aligning economic policies and development pathways with biodiversity rests with Parties to the Convention, which have both the mandate and the obligation to establish the policy and regulatory frameworks necessary to achieve the goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Given the global nature of economic activity, national regulation is only effective when anchored in internationally agreed regulatory baselines and frameworks. The CBD has a critical role to play in supporting this work.

The urgency of the biodiversity crisis demands nothing less.

☑ *Side event*

The Debt–Biodiversity Nexus and Resource Mobilisation in the Global South

Rising debt burdens in developing countries undermine efforts to address the biodiversity crisis effectively. Limited fiscal space restricts the ability to fund biodiversity action and support those directly protecting ecosystems. As countries seek foreign currency to service their debts, this also deepens dependence on commodity exports, especially from extractive industries and large-scale agribusiness, thereby further weakening biodiversity.

In this context, debt-for-nature swaps have gained renewed attention as tools for linking debt relief to environmental outcomes. However, experience to date has revealed several key limitations.

- ▹ Organised by FOE | TWN | SAM | CENSAT | ECONEXUS
- ▹ Friday, 7 August, 18:15
- ▹ CR-9, African states meeting room, 2nd floor