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Developed countries should repay their colonial and ecological debt

Third World Network

Discussions in the Contact Group on Resource Mobilization yesterday evening pivoted around the issue of “*broadening the contributor base*” to provide biodiversity finance, specifically in relation to sovereign contributors.

Sharp divergences emerged over a joint proposal made by Canada on behalf of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, that Parties classified as “high-income” under the World Bank 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.

Eighty-three developing countries, including the 54 countries of the African Group, firmly rejected this proposal. In a statement made by Brazil on their behalf, they pointed to the absurdity of using an income metric as a proxy for development, which is multidimensional in nature. Moreover, the provision in Article 20(2) clearly states that the process is voluntary. As such, the developing countries rejected the proposed automatic trigger based on the high-income classification, especially as it could redefine legal obligations under the Convention.

The developed countries claimed that their proposal was not intended to dilute or diminish their obligations as developed countries Parties. But they called for a review and amendment of the list as “it is currently necessary and overdue as it has been 20 years, economic realities have shifted, and we need to increase the sources of biodiversity finance”.

In fact, recent empirical evidence shows that the conventional narrative that poorer countries are “catching up” with richer countries is wrong. The opposite is occurring: the absolute income gap between advanced economies and the emerging and developing economies has actually increased since 1960, by 170–270% depending on the currency comparison used.*

Further, Article 20 is clear: there are common but differentiated responsibilities, with obligations on developed countries to provide financial resources to developing countries. Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development clearly states that this is “in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command”.

Additionally, as developed countries bear historical and continuing responsibility for global ecological breakdown, there is actually an ecological debt owed to developing countries and the Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth who steward biodiversity.

As such, instead of looking to expand the donor base on the basis of flawed and arguably Convention-contravening logic, developed countries should repay the colonial and ecological debt they owe to developing countries and their peoples. And they must fulfil their obligations under the Convention and Target 19(a) of the KMGBF to provide the financial resources to developing countries. This is a moral and legal imperative.

**Hickel, J., & Sullivan, D. (2026). The myth of catch-up development: trends in core-periphery inequality from 1960 to 2023. New Political Economy, 1–27.*

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2026.2659076>

Moving beyond disclosure: regulation for destructive sectors and drivers

Theiva Lingam, Sahabat Alam Malaysia - Friends of the Earth Malaysia

In the implementation of the KMGBF, a key but neglected aspect is the role of sectors, corporations, financial institutions, and supply chains driving biodiversity loss. The Global Review should explicitly name the activities of destructive sectors as root causes of ecological destruction. This issue is not sufficiently addressed in the Global Review, which mirrors the lack of ambition in Target 15.

As currently framed, Target 15 requires governments to ‘encourage and enable businesses, particularly large and transnational corporations and financial institutions, (...) to progressively reduce negative impacts on biodiversity and increase positive impacts...’ through self-assessments, monitoring, and disclosure. Evidence shows that voluntary self-reporting often lacks clear data, common standards, independent checks, and proof that companies are actually reducing harm. We cannot disclose our way out of ecological collapse.

What is urgently needed are binding national laws, under international coordination, that legally obligate businesses and financial institutions to prevent, mitigate, and remedy biodiversity harm across their operations, subsidiaries, and supply chains. Where companies seeking profit destroy ecosystems, threaten key biodiversity areas, or violate the rights of indigenous peoples, governments must act decisively by denying permits, suspend-

ing operations, imposing meaningful penalties, requiring ecological restoration and rehabilitation, and securing reparations for affected communities. These measures must be accompanied by robust participatory processes and the guaranteed right to free, prior and informed consent.

Target 15 must also be read in conjunction with Targets 18 and 19. Governments cannot ask companies to disclose their impacts and risks while continuing to subsidise environmentally destructive industries or failing to finance genuine alternatives. Harmful subsidies, tax incentives, and other forms of public support for destructive activities must be phased out, while public finance is redirected toward agroecology, ecosystem restoration, community-based conservation, and indigenous and local governance systems.

The biodiversity crisis will not be solved through better reporting alone. It demands that governments confront concentrated corporate power, regulate destructive sectors, end unsustainable extractive models, and place justice, human rights, and ecological integrity at the heart of implementation. Only then can biodiversity policy move beyond compliance and become a genuine force for transformation.

DSI Database Study Requires Greater Scrutiny

Nithin Ramakrishnan, Third World Network

The study on DSI databases (CBD/SBI/7/INF/15) should not yet become the basis for policy decisions at COP17, without greater scrutiny, including through peer review.

Decision 16/2 decided to explore tools and models, such as databases, for making DSI publicly available and accessible in a transparent and accountable man-

ner “to all Parties”, and requested the Secretariat to commission a study to support this process. This work is central to the implementation of the CBD’s multilateral mechanism for fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of DSI, including the Cali Fund.

Without greater transparency and accountability, the information necessary to verify the scope of use of the

DSI and to support fair and equitable allocation of funds to provider countries and communities will continue to be lacking. This is because current DSI databases generally permit anonymous access and do not verify whether DSI has been lawfully made publicly available under applicable national legislation. “Accountability to all Parties” is fundamental to the implementation of decision 16/2.

Yet the study largely overlooks this central objective.

Furthermore, provider countries, Indigenous Peoples and local communities remain unable to determine how DSI derived from their genetic resources is used.

The study identifies these important deficiencies in the current DSI database landscape, including the absence of information on compliance with national legislation, limited transparency regarding DSI use, and weak consideration of the rights of the providers of genetic resources, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities. But it does not demonstrate how its preferred solutions would remedy these deficiencies effectively.

The methodology itself warrants closer scrutiny. The study relies heavily on stakeholder interviews and surveys, while providing little explanation of how feasibility assessments were undertaken or what systematic analysis of evidence informed its conclusions. More problematically, the study treats academic researchers and private-sector entities as the sole

users of the databases, and argues that any solution should have their buy-in. Comparatively little consideration is given to the legitimate interests of provider countries or communities, who also use the databases for providing access to DSI and who seek benefits from advancement in science and research. It neglects the basic requirement that DSI databases should not only serve those who access DSI, but also those who provide DSI and the genetic materials from which DSI is taken. As a result, the survey only sought views from academia and the private sector on whether a new DSI database is needed.

The study makes little effort to identify essential features of a DSI database that would make it fully ABS-compliant and supportive of Cali Fund operationalization. Instead it dismisses measures calling for an ABS-compliant DSI database as not feasible. It doesn’t produce a realistic estimate of resources required to maintain an ideal DSI database. Neither does it take into account present resources available for bio-informatic projects, and growing acceptance of database managers to facilitate implementation of ABS regimes, in collaboration with international organisations like the WHO.

There is also a lack of transparency around the study itself. It does not disclose the consultant’s identity or institutional affiliations, nor was it subject to independent peer review. Sources indicate that the study was prepared by a member of a scientific stakeholder network that has consistently equated anonymous access with open access, a position that is difficult to reconcile with the governance principles reflected in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science. While this may not establish a personal conflict of interest, it raises legitimate questions regarding whether these institutional biases have contributed to the methodological and conceptual shortcomings observed.



Solutions to the underlying causes of biodiversity loss

Alain Branchaud, SNAP Québec

The CBD Secretariat issued important messages to Partys in the draft global report on collective progress of the KMGBF, notably the significant gap identified in addressing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. This challenge is threatening the effective **implementation** of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

SNAP Québec is committed to work collaboratively towards solutions to this issue from the local to the international level and call on SBI to send to COP17 clear messages identifying existing science-based solutions to address this gap. There is a persistent ask for an inclusive dialogue on real solutions to the

underlying causes of biodiversity from a large spectrum of organizations including, but not limited to CBDA, UNEP, IPBES, IPCC and even OECD. **COP17 will be the perfect timing and opportunity to address this gap** and showcase initiatives and solutions that realign economic and financial systems with planetary boundaries, as well as identify and promote values which sustain biodiversity and the integration of diverse knowledge systems for defining the paths to a life in harmony with nature. Consequently, **Taking action for nature** is the perfect motto for COP17 and transformative change needs to be on the agenda. In harmony with nature, in Armenia with nature...

Are CRISPR genome edited trees GMOs? Yes, says the Forest Stewardship Council.

Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, Federation of German Scientists

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international certifier for products derived from responsible forest management, excludes genetically modified trees from certification. Accordingly, a member company is [not permitted][prohibited] to grow GM trees for commercial purposes, both in certified and non-certified areas. The question arose, whether this would also cover trees that were genetically modified through the use of CRISPR/Cas – a method often referred to as gene editing. After consulting widely, FSC took a decision on the basis of received responses, including received scientific information, and publishing the outcome of their deliberations on 17 July, stating:

“Yes, the definition of Genetically Modified Organism covers also organisms in which the genetic material has

been altered using modern, CRISPR-based gene editing technologies. The definition’s element of “altered in a way that does not occur naturally” is understood to refer both to the resulting genome change as well as to the process to induce it, hence any genetic engineering technology falls within the scope of the GMO definition.”*

They further state that the decision was also “guided by the precautionary principle in alignment with FSC’s mission to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests.”

* *Forest Management Interpretations document, page 32 under the code INT-STD-01-001_19. <https://connect.fsc.org/document-centre/documents/resource/381>*

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