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From Biodiversity Loss to Pandemic Risk: Addressing the Root Causes

Vince Cinches & Shuang An (World Animal Protection)

Preventing the next pandemic requires more than stronger healthcare systems. How we use wildlife, manage land and produce food also affects the health of people, animals and ecosystems. At COP17, governments can strengthen pandemic prevention by protecting biodiversity and improving animal welfare.

Biodiversity loss and disease emergence share several drivers, including habitat destruction, land-use change and wildlife exploitation. As habitats disappear, interactions between people, wildlife and domestic animals change.

Capturing, confining, transporting and trading wild animals can also create conditions for pathogens to emerge and spread, particularly where animal welfare is poor. Human, animal, and ecosystem health are connected, yet much attention remains on detecting and responding to disease after it emerges. This is why *One Health* matters.

If we are serious about preventing pandemics, we need to address the conditions that create these risks in the first place.

The KMGBF provides opportunities to do this. Target 5 provides an opportunity to reduce the risk of pathogen spillover by using a precautionary *One Health* approach that integrates animal welfare. Targets 4 and 9 also offer opportunities to improve wildlife management and human-wildlife interactions, with animal welfare and precaution reflected in implementation.

The *Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health*, adopted at COP16, provides a basis for connecting these commitments with health policies. At COP17, governments should focus on putting the plan into practice,

particularly by addressing wildlife exploitation, habitat destruction, and other drivers of disease emergence.

These efforts also connect with the *WHO Pandemic Agreement*, adopted in 2025, which recognises *One Health* and the importance of addressing the drivers of disease emergence at the human-animal-environment interface.

The 2026 *UN General Assembly's Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response* further call for coherence and mutual support between the WHO Pandemic Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The challenge now is to turn these commitments into coordinated action, rather than treating biodiversity protection and pandemic prevention as separate agendas.

This also means recognising that *One Health* is about equity and social justice. A whole-of-society approach which includes community engagement, especially at the human-animal-environment interface (a frontline of disease outbreaks), is essential to equity and effective pandemic prevention.

Prevention efforts must respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, support their stewardship, empower them to identify high risks, and ensure they benefit from the solutions being developed.

Governments should therefore invest in habitat protection, stronger animal welfare measures and alternatives to wildlife exploitation, while supporting communities through just and equitable transitions.

Pandemics are not simply events we need to prepare for. We must also work to prevent them.

A Field Guide to COP17's Financial Wildlife

Laurel Sutherlin (Rainforest Action Network)

Attention, COP17 delegates: a new species has been spotted in the halls of the CBD. Actually, several of them. They travel in flocks, turn up reliably in policy discussions, and have developed an impressive array of songs, ranging from “mobilization” and “de-risking” to “investability” and “innovative finance”. They are, of course, the familiar narratives of biodiversity finance.

For a limited time only, you may soon encounter some of them in physical form, thanks to Rainforest Action Network's *Illustrated Field Guide to Biodiversity Finance Narratives*, which is being passed around COP17 as a deliberately different kind of intervention in the biodiversity finance conversation. The ‘Field Guide’ is a somewhat cheeky, but fundamentally serious, invitation to rethink some of the dominant narratives weaving through current policy discourse, and to look beyond some familiar buzz words towards some of the deeper questions they may be obscuring.

The guide is based on the recognition that biodiversity finance is still too often reduced to how we can mobilize more money for nature. When conjuring up the next financial instrument, it is worth asking what the money in play is already doing, who is setting the rules governing it, and which unspoken assumptions are being allowed to determine what counts as a “solution”.

The field guide, modeled in a Victorian-era naturalist aesthetic style, introduces nine familiar “species” that populate biodiversity finance debates, including the *Gap Warbler*, *Mobilization Magpie*, *Disclosure Owl* and *Debt-Swap Kingfisher*. Each artistically illustrated card examines why a particular narrative is so appealing, what it might be covering up, and what other questions policymakers should be asking before allowing the narrative to fly away with the conversation.

Take the familiar claim that there is simply “no public money” available for biodiversity. Or the increasingly common assumption that private capital is the only realistic route to closing the finance gap. Or the proposition that better disclosure will, by itself, cause markets to change. These ideas may contain elements of truth, and some financial instruments may have a useful role,

but they can also narrow the policy space by making certain approaches seem inevitable while leaving other questions off the table.

For example: if public and private financial flows vastly exceed the amounts currently being mobilized for biodiversity, why is the conversation so often focused on finding new money rather than changing where existing money goes? If financial institutions are financing activities that drive deforestation and ecosystem destruction, should the policy response really stop at asking them to disclose those risks? And if nature must become “investable” before it can attract capital, what happens to the values that cannot, or should not, be reduced to an investment opportunity?

These are not just semantic questions. The language used in these negotiations helps define the policies that are considered possible. The field guide invites delegates to turn the question around: not only how can biodiversity serve finance, but how can financial systems be made to serve biodiversity and the people who protect it?

That means looking beyond individual instruments to the rules, incentives and institutions shaping financial flows in the first place, including financial regulation, tax and debt reform, stronger public-interest institutions, protections for Indigenous Peoples' rights and gender-responsive governance. It also means confronting the much larger financial flows driving biodiversity loss rather than assuming that additional conservation finance can somehow compensate for them.

So, as the biodiversity finance discussions continue, keep your eyes open. If you see a *Gap Warbler* fluttering through a panel discussion, a *Mobilization Magpie* collecting every shiny new financial instrument in sight, or a *Disclosure Owl* insisting that transparency is the destination rather than a means to accountability, the field guide may be useful.

The biodiversity finance debate does not suffer from a shortage of jargon, but sometimes it can suffer from a shortage of better questions.

www.ran.org/biodiversity-finance-field-guide

Offsets Cannot Redeem the Irreplaceable

Uli Arta Siagian (WALHI/Friends of the Earth Indonesia)

Biodiversity offsets and credits fail because nature is not interchangeable. Damage in one place cannot be balanced by protecting or restoring nature elsewhere. Habitats, species, and ecological functions are tied to specific places, histories, and social relationships.

Scientific reviews show ecosystems are partly irreplaceable and offsets risk weakening regulation (Moreno-Mateos et al., 2015). Friends of the Earth International (2024) argues these schemes drive ecosystem damage and violate Indigenous Peoples' rights. Just one example: the Martabe gold mine in Batang Toru shows how offsets enable destruction while others bear the cost.

In North Sumatra, the Batang Toru ecosystem holds the Tapanuli orangutan, the world's rarest great ape, with fewer than 800 individuals left. Its forest provides water, farmland, and incense resin for nearby communities. WALHI reports that the Martabe gold mine's work area overlaps the headwaters of five major river basins supplying nearly 100,000 people.

PT Agincourt Resources (PTAR), the mine's operator, claims mining and conservation can coexist through the mitigation hierarchy and a biodiversity offset, including a planned protected area of around 5,700 hectares. Yet civil society's review of the environmental impact assessment states that the planned tailings storage facility covers 583 hectares, including 195.2 hectares of green land where 185,884 trees would be lost. The document acknowledges a very high potential for habitat fragmentation.

Offsets are legitimate only for residual impacts after harm has been avoided and minimized. For a Critically Endangered species in a Key Biodiversity Area, some losses cannot be compensated: hectares elsewhere cannot replace specific habitat functions. Offset locations and metrics remain undisclosed, making the "no net loss" claim unverifiable. Gold is extracted in years, while forests need generations to recover.

Field interviews indicate that land in several South Tapanuli villages has been secured through purchases and long-term leases amid economic pressure. Some villagers reportedly were not informed that their land

would serve as an offset or who funded it. Communal land often lacks legal title, leaving communities with social ownership while outsiders bring cash and legal certainty. In one customary community, a lease offer divided people defending their territory. This is not free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

Indonesia's 2024 Conservation Law introduces "preservation areas." Under Article 9, landholders unwilling to undertake conservation activities must release their land rights with compensation. Parts of the offset area have been proposed for this status. WALHI fears forest guardians could become threats on their own land while companies claim conservation benefits. This precedent could spread among extractive companies, contradicting the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's principles of rights, participation, and policy coherence.

Protecting biodiversity means stopping the sources of its destruction

Protection requires addressing extractive industries and development that consume space and violate human rights. As long as these continue, offsets justify new harm. Stop the damage first.

Funding must come from public budgets and the polluter-pays principle, not companies causing harm and claiming compensation. Funds must go directly to Indigenous Peoples and local communities who protect forests, alongside recognition of customary territories, community-managed areas, Indigenous knowledge, and traditional practices.

The government should halt new clearing, publish all offset data, and refrain from designating preservation areas on customary land without genuine consent. Funders should suspend financing until these conditions are met.

What cannot be replaced cannot be redeemed by an offset. A forest cannot be conserved by taking it from the people who have kept it standing.

Download
Offsets cannot redeem the Irreplaceable



Ancestral Knowledge Is Not a Footnote to Conservation

Recognizing rights is not enough if decision-making power stays in the same hands

Instituto Alana & Geledés – Instituto da Mulher Negra

At COP16 in Cali, Decision 16/6 recognized people of African descent in connection with the Article 8(j), alongside Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Its meaning now depends on what follows: territorial protection, direct funding and real influence over decisions affecting their ways of life and the intergenerational knowledge that keeps nature standing.¹

This agenda requires environmental justice that addresses the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, territory and age. Children, especially girls and Indigenous, Afro-descendant, Quilombola and peripheral children, are among the most exposed to environmental risks and unequal access to nature yet are rarely recognized as rights-holders in biodiversity decisions.²

At COP17, recognition must become access, resources and rights. Implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework requires meaningful intergener-

ational participation, confronting environmental racism and bringing to the table those whose solutions sustain biodiversity today and those who will inherit the future we shape. Decision 16/6 must be defended within Article 8(j), embracing, in all their diversity, the more than 200 million people of African descent worldwide.

Conserving biodiversity with justice means protecting territories, valuing those who care for them, investing in ancestral knowledge and nature-based education, and guaranteeing the right to live and learn with nature.

¹ Sushma Shrestha Sangat et al., "Afro-descendant lands in South America contribute to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation", *Communications Earth & Environment* 6, 458 (2025)

² INSTITUTO ALANA. COP for Children. [s.d.]. Disponível em: <https://linktr.ee/copforchildren>



**Root risk assessment in Annex III of the Cartagena Protocol!
Drop industry aligned 'pathways to harm' under a problem formulation approach,
contained within Biosafety Technical series 7 on gene drives!**

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Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.

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