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Elephant in the spotlight:

Market-oriented instruments for biodiversity finance facilitate biodiversity destruction

Mirna Fernandez (Third World Network)



Elephants in the room

At COP17 many of the discussions focused on ways to close the biodiversity finance gap, an estimated USD 700 billion annual shortfall in the resources needed to protect and restore nature. To close this finance gap, target 19 of the GBF aims to mobilise a total of USD 200 billion per year for biodiversity, and highlights the importance of ‘innovative finance schemes’, such as *Payment for Ecosystem Services* (PES), green bonds and biodiversity offsets and credits.

All these schemes apply different components of the market logic, which are flawed when applied to nature. The main problem is that these mechanisms all consider nature as an asset to be sold, exchanged, or invested in, and that market prices will incentivise the protection of biodiversity. The most obvious shortcoming of this logic is that the market does not care about nature, threatened species or fragile ecosystems. Markets favour projects that generate attractive financial returns, whereas many of biodiversity’s benefits are public goods that cannot easily be captured as revenue. This logic is especially useful for biodiversity-destructive sectors as it allows them to continue destroying ecosystems while claiming they are doing their part, either by offsetting, purchasing credits or investing in nature protection elsewhere. Meanwhile, the urgent regulation and restriction of biodiversity-destructive activities continues to be postponed.

These schemes respond to the push for private finance to replace the public funding needed for biodiversity protection, but by doing so, they reduce political pressure for stronger regulation and public investment. They

also add pressure on recipient governments that face unstable revenue streams and fluctuating conservation incentives while being expected to provide the institutional infrastructure for the mechanisms to function.

As market rules legitimise and enable further destruction, financial benefits flow mostly to intermediaries who identify, aggregate, package, certify and market biodiversity conservation and restoration activities as investable assets, capturing fees and other forms of aggregated value at several stages of the transaction. By contrast, rights-holders, such as Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers and local communities, only get a small fraction of the revenues, and often face the impacts of the implementation of mechanisms with poor social and environmental safeguards, including displacement, land conflicts and loss of their means of life. The environmental impacts of these mechanisms are also vastly documented, leading to lack of additionality and permanence of the conservation gains, leakage of impacts, monoculture risk and greenwashing.

While it is true that current global biodiversity finance remains insufficient, and that Global North governments have failed to live up to their financial commitments, this is not the only gap that should be addressed. There is also a justice gap, which results in an unequal distribution of benefits, exclusion and underfunding of biodiversity stewards on the ground. Therefore, the aim must not be to make nature attractive to financial markets, but to make biodiversity protection a non-negotiable public responsibility and to ensure that those who steward it have the resources and power to do so.

Assess pollution as biodiversity experiences it

Julie Sohier (POLLINIS)

Chemical assessments divide pollution into substances, uses and exposure scenarios. Living organisms encounter none of these divisions. They experience cross-contamination across landscapes and throughout their entire life cycle, alongside other pressures. Biodiversity protection can fail in the distance between these two realities.

COP17 has an opportunity to narrow that gap. The discussion on pollution and biodiversity should deliver the expertise and practical support needed to assess contamination through its consequences for species, ecological connectivity and ecosystem functions.

Pollinators show why this matters. A bumble bee moves between crops and uncultivated areas, drinks water and collects pollen and nectar. Its exposure can involve several substances, recur over time and cause harm without immediate death. More flowers do not necessarily provide a safer habitat if those flowers are contaminated.

“Recognizing that pollution is one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss” would be a great start. But assessments that overlook mixtures, chronic exposure, sublethal effects and cumulative impacts risk missing pressures that undermine populations. These pressures also interact with habitat loss, climate change and other drivers of biodiversity decline. Studying each separately cannot fully explain their combined consequences.

Target 7: Reduce Pollution to Levels That Are Not Harmful to Biodiversity

Reduce pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources, by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, considering cumulative effects, including: reducing excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half including through more efficient nutrient cycling and use; reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half including through integrated pest management, based on science, taking into account food security and livelihoods; and also preventing, reducing, and working towards eliminating plastic pollution.

Under Target 7, Parties have committed to reduce pollution to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity by 2030, considering cumulative effects, and to reduce the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half. Delivering that commitment requires assessment methods that reflect the conditions organisms face in the wild.

It should examine how organisms are exposed to pollution, through sources, pathways, repeated exposure and mixtures. It should also address how that exposure harms biodiversity through sublethal and cumulative effects and interaction with other drivers. This work should lead to practical action: preventing pollution at source, monitoring contamination, reducing exposure and restoring contaminated environments. Such action needs measurable objectives, clear timelines and adequate resources.

Whether through an *Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Pollution and Biodiversity* or the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution*, the support of other agencies and relevant conventions and organisations should strengthen this work and avoid duplication. Such cooperation must serve a clear responsibility within the Convention: identifying what biodiversity protection requires and translating that knowledge into recommendations.

Stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and Local communities, women, youth and civil society must have an explicit opportunity to contribute relevant expertise. Recommendations should set measurable objectives, clear timelines and the resources needed for implementation.

Uncertainty about the full consequences of chemical pollution on biodiversity makes stronger and scientifically grounded expertise essential. We cannot postpone measures against harms already established.

COP17 should establish the expert group and give it a mandate grounded in the reality of contaminated ecosystems. Restoring habitats while allowing contamination to persist undermines the protection those habitats are meant to provide.

Beyond the Negotiating Table

Whose Voices Are Being Heard at COP17?

Vince Cinches (World Animal Protection)

One and a half week into COP17 in Yerevan, one thing stands out: what happens outside the negotiating rooms matters just as much as what happens inside them. By the time country delegations arrive at COP, priorities have been identified, positions developed and negotiating instructions agreed.

But these negotiations are not set in stone.

Negotiations are about listening, understanding interests and finding common ground. But whose interests are being heard, and whose are missing? This is an important question for negotiators, particularly when decisions made here will shape biodiversity policies back home.

Biodiversity loss is not happening in isolation. It is connected to how we produce food, exploit wildlife, use land and distribute resources. These affect people, animals, and the planet. Yet, we often negotiate them as separate issues, addressing symptoms while leaving the root causes largely untouched.

And there is another worrying development: Big corporations have learned from the UN climate negotiations. Biodiversity negotiations are becoming another opportunity to influence policy, greenwash business practices and promote questionable solutions. Corporate funding and partnerships can create conflicts of interest, including within civil society, while frontline communities struggle to get their voices heard.

Negotiators need to ask whose interests these solutions serve, who benefits, and who bears the cost?

Listening should go beyond government counterparts, official delegations and familiar organisations. It should include those challenging dominant approaches, especially indigenous peoples, local communities, women, young people and persons with different disabilities whose lives and livelihoods are affected by

biodiversity loss.

Many cannot afford to be here. But their absence from the negotiating rooms should not mean their exclusion from the decisions.

This is where organised civil society and counter-power become crucial. Not simply to secure speaking slots, but to challenge corporate influence, question false solutions and bring community perspectives into negotiations.

Civil Society also has work to do. Conservation, Animal Welfare, food systems, climate justice, health and human rights groups need to share information, connect their agendas and build common positions more. We cannot ask governments to connect the dots if we are not doing it ourselves.

I recognise how demanding these negotiations are. Delegates (and observers) work late into the evening and through the weekend, often trying to reconcile competing interests and reach agreements that serve the public good. But meaningful participation should not depend on catching a negotiator in a corridor.

Governments need to engage civil society upstream, while national positions are being developed, not only when those positions arrive at COP. And that engagement must continue throughout negotiations.

My appeal to negotiators is simple: Listen beyond the negotiating table. Questions whose interests are shaping the solutions being proposed. Make room for perspectives that challenge your positions, not just those that reinforce them. Because protecting biodiversity requires confronting the systems driving its destruction, not simply negotiating how to manage the damage.

The agreements we reach must work for people, animals, and the planet, not just those with resources to influence them.

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Artificial Intelligence & datacenters: another threat to nature

Ana Di Pangracio (FARN) & Antje Lorch (Ecoropa)

AI is destroying biodiversity through its datacenters: through their water, energy and land use, their greenhouse gas emissions, their increase of local temperatures; their demand for critical minerals and the electronic waste they are producing. Their extraction and processing can contribute to biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, pollution and violations of human rights, particularly in countries of the Global South.

These impacts cannot be overlooked in a Convention committed to addressing the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss and transforming unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

The use of AI also raises serious questions about corporate concentration, technological dependency, unequal access to information, and the use of data and know-

ledge, including that of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

AI is offered as a tool for biodiversity evaluation, monitoring and reporting, but technological optimism must not replace precaution, independent scrutiny, democratic oversight, and accountability.

Any discussion of AI at the CBD process should consider its entire lifecycle, its implications for human rights, and its compatibility with the goals of the KMGBF. Protecting biodiversity requires more than smarter technologies. It requires confronting the economic and political systems driving ecological destruction.

For sources see:
<https://cbd-alliance.org/en/2026/ai-and-data-centers>



Data centers as infrastructure

*Quoted from : Environmental Cost of AI's Energy Use: Carbon, Water and Land Footprints.
United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (2026)*



"In 2025, global data centers were estimated to consume 448 TWh of **electricity**. If data centers' electricity use were considered a country, it would have ranked 11th globally by electricity consumption.

The energy consumed by data centers in 2025 was enough to supply the annual **residential electricity needs of the entire population of Sub-Saharan Africa**, 1.3 billion people, for 2.6 years.

Data centers' electricity use in 2025 had a **carbon footprint** of 189 million tonnes of CO₂e, which would require 3.2 billion tree seedlings grown over 10 years to offset, roughly the total number of trees in the entire United Kingdom.

Data centers' 2025 electricity consumption had a **water footprint** of 4.5 trillion liters of water - enough to fill 1.8 million Olympic-sized pools or meet the **annual basic domestic water needs of over 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa**.

The **land footprint** of 2025 data centers' electricity demand was 6,900 km², nearly 4.5 times the size of Greater London.

AI workloads accounted for roughly 20% of total data centers' electricity use in 2025 and **are projected to grow to 40% by 2030**.

If AI's share of data center energy rises to 40%, electricity consumption could reach 378 TWh - over 9 times the electricity consumption of Nigeria (world's 6th largest nation by population, with 224 million).

Projected global data centers' electricity consumption could exceed 945 TWh by 2030, accounting for almost 3% of projected global electricity use - enough to supply residential electricity to all 1.3 billion people in Sub-Saharan Africa for about 5.5 years.

If treated as a country, 945 TWh would rank 6th globally by electricity consumption.

The associated water footprint of projected 2030 electricity consumption of data centers is 9.3 trillion liters, or enough to meet the minimum annual domestic water needs of all 1.3 billion residents of Sub-Saharan Africa for a full year.

The associated land footprint of data centers' expected electricity use in 2030 would be over 14,500 km², roughly 10 times the size of Mexico City or about twice the Jakarta metropolitan area, home to over 32 million people.

The physical lifecycle of AI hardware presents a growing crisis. AI infrastructure could generate up to 2.5 million metric tons of **e-waste** annually by 2030, equivalent to discarding nearly 250 Eiffel Towers every year."