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NO NET LOSS or NO NEW DAMAGE

Hemantha Withanage, Centre for Environmental Justice, Sri Lanka

The zero draft available for this week discussion at the Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework promotes **“No net loss by 2030”**

We know “net loss” is a language to explain a balance sheet. However, when it comes to Nature, a balance sheet doesn't seem to apply. Ecosystems have evolved over millions of years creating many diverse conditions that no human on earth can build in order to make the same today.

Therefore, we should understand that once ecosystems are destroyed, the loss cannot be compensated at any cost. Restoration is important, but it can never obtain the same quality of ecosystems, and can never justify destruction.

It is worse still when offsets are existing ecosystems, and the offset is only a promise to protect against destruction. Bujagali Dam and Kalagala Offset in Uganda is a clear case of how a “No Net Loss” offsetting mechanism failed to protect the pristine ecosystems and created an offset, converting a pristine island and the forest into exclusive lodges and other tourist facilities. The final outcome is that one area –which was already a valuable ecosystem - now “offsets” two ecosystems that have been destroyed. Clearly, offsetting does not generate “net zero” but a clear loss.

The Executive Secretary mentioned in her opening remarks that 75 percent of the land on earth has already been altered and 90% of the ecosystems are damaged by humans. The IPBES report finds that Nature across most of the globe has now been significantly altered by multiple human drivers and biodiversity is in rapid decline.

Thus, there is nothing left on the earth to compromise for further human developments. Saving every untouched – or slightly deteriorated - ecosystem is fundamental to save the planet. There is no way that we can allow any more valuable ecosystems to be damaged for corporate profits, and restore some others in the hope of “balancing the earth account”.

In line with the first objective of the Convention, the first goal of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework should declare that no new damage to the ecosystems can be done, unless absolutely necessary for the public interest and with meaningful participation of all populations involved. On top of that, restoration of degraded environments is needed, in order to save and create habitats for other species and provide healthy ecosystems, which form the basis for the enjoyment of many fundamental human rights.

A significant increase in use of natural resources is never sustainable, even if it is called that way

Friedrich Wulf, Pro Natura

In the zero draft, much is familiar, other things are new, and some things are surprising. One of the most surprising things I learned was that biodiversity was there to fulfil a number of purposes for people:

To improve nutrition for people by X% through increased food production and the use of wild species, to increase the supply of safe drinking water by y% and to fulfil 30% of the Paris agreement.

All of this, of course, sustainably.

Most of these targets are contained in the section “Meeting peoples' needs” and address important issues – but they are not biodiversity related. In turning food production, increased use of wild species, the supply of drinking

water and carbon capture into quantitative targets, sustainable use mutates, essentially into the goal of satisfying people's needs – instead of those of biodiversity.

This should not happen. These demands are not in line with the CBD's objectives of conserving biodiversity and ensuring its sustainable and fair use. Certainly: the CBD should address interactions with other sectors, and yes, it contributes to these services. However, the CBD's task is to represent biodiversity concerns, also in line with the 2050 vision. Even an increase in production, e.g. through "sustainable intensification", can have a negative impact on biodiversity in many regions of the world and cause contradictions between the goals. These quantitative values must be deleted here. It would be better, also in the sense of the Global Sustainability Targets, to increase the share of biodiversity-compatible production in the sectors (ideally to 100%).

If the GBF doesn't address the root causes, then all our effort is in vain

Nele Marien, Friends of the Earth International

As biodiversity is disappearing rapidly, we cannot afford any longer to fiddle around with half-hearted measures. The only way of saving biodiversity is by directly tackling the root causes of its loss.

These are clearly linked to the economic activities that either over-exploit natural resources, destroy biodiversity and ecosystems, pollute, or alter genetic diversity. Obvious examples are extractive industries, industrial agriculture and fisheries, monoculture tree plantations, infrastructure, mass tourism, trade, and polluting activities, amongst others.

These activities are mostly carried out by transnational corporations which have clear interests in continuing their business and do not plan to scale down their sectors.

Yet, on a finite planet, already suffering from over-use of resources, scaling down will be needed, alongside a significantly better distribution of the resources and benefits of biodiversity.

Hence, in order to save biodiversity, the Global Biodiversity Framework will need to address the excess exploitation of resources, land and pollutants. Root causes need to be addressed by setting clear sectoral targets, limiting the impacts of each sector so that in aggregate they stay well within planetary boundaries. A GBF without sectoral targets is an incomplete GBF.

Those entities that will see their profits affected by these rules cannot be the ones having a voice in the definition of the GBF, as they would not counter their own interests. Therefore, clear restrictions on corporate lobbying, as well as stronger conflict of interest rules, need to be established.

The fact that the current draft does not address any of these root causes may well be linked to the corporate presence here. This needs to change.

Protect Human Rights to Protect the Planet

PRESS RELEASE Excerpt / 24 February 2020 – Rome, Italy

Indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, researchers and UN agencies alike are sending a clear message to governments that to stem the environmental and ecological crises facing the world, they must focus on protecting human rights.

Activists and community leaders are being targeted, harassed and even killed for defending nature and their communities' territories against industrial threats such as mining, monoculture plantations and mega-infrastructure. Well-known international NGOs are under fire for alleged human rights violations in the name of conservation. On the other hand, major reports show that supporting indigenous peoples and communities to secure rights, governance and stewardship of their collective lands and territories is one of the most effective means of ensuring nature conservation. Public and political awareness about the interlinkages between human rights and the global biodiversity crisis are rising.

Key messages, gaps and opportunities to strengthen human rights in the zero draft include the following:

- In order to bend the curve of biodiversity loss, we need to bend the curve of inequality. The post-2020 framework must better integrate governance, human rights and equitable sharing of benefits and costs.

- The zero draft framework takes an overly utilitarian approach, viewing nature in terms of “services” and “benefits”. It should instead be guided by the diverse worldviews, values, ethics and spiritual beliefs that embody our reciprocal relationships with the rest of the planet and should include a goal that addresses the mutual and interdependent wellbeing of nature and people.

- The zero draft framework does not sufficiently address the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. It should include a target on halting unsustainable industries and inequitable models of economic growth that harm both biodiversity and human rights.

- The post-2020 framework should include a new target on providing a safe and enabling environment in which environmental defenders, with particular attention to indigenous peoples, local communities and women, can operate free from threats, harassment, intimidation and violence.

- Target 2 in the zero draft, focusing on area-based conservation, includes a concerning sub-target on “strict protection”. This should be deleted to avoid continued and repeated human rights violations in the name of conservation. In addition, this target should include a clear reference to equitable governance of protected areas and other effective conservation measures and recognition of self-declared territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.

Legal experts argue that “the time has come” to integrate and recognise human rights in multilateral environmental agreements such as the CBD – not only as a matter of justice but also as a matter of efficacy. Most countries recognise the right to a healthy environment in their constitutions, and governments, judges and activists alike are bringing human rights to bear on environmental issues. As the first UN Special Rapporteur on the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Professor John Knox, noted in his final report in 2018, “The interdependence of human rights and the environment is an idea whose time is here.”

“A rights-based approach to conserving biodiversity can be a catalyst for the transformative changes needed to address the global environmental crisis,” says Dr. David Boyd, current UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment. “History proves that human rights can trigger sweeping societal changes such as the end of slavery, the equality of women, the end of apartheid and the increasingly influential Indigenous rights movement.”

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Bending the curve of biodiversity loss needs gender justice

Excerpt from Opening Statement of the CBD Women Caucus

KEY COMPONENTS COMPRISING THE INTERNATIONAL GENDER-ENVIRONMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK INCLUDE:

Gender equality is a human right that is enshrined in a number of declarations and conventions, including the **legally binding** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979).

Agenda 21 (1992), Earth Summit marked a **pivotal moment embedding gender equality consideration in environmental decision-making on the global stage**, with regards to crucial issues such as land ownership, resource stewardship, education and employment.

CBD (1993): The first of the three Rio Conventions, has **preamble text** “affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of **policy making and implementation** for biological diversity conservation,” as well as many subsequent decisions of Parties that include gender considerations. In 2008, the Parties to the **CBD adopted a Gender Plan of Action**, making it the **first Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA)** to do so and it was updated for the period of 2015-2020.

SDGs (2015): Gender is a **standalone goal (#5)** in addition to being cross-cutting issues across the other 16 goals.

Sendai Framework (2015-2030): The Sendai Framework for Action for Disaster Risk Reduction calls for **stronger women’s leadership and participation** in disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Gender equality works for all

Gender inequality (gender-based oppressions) is one of the most pervasive threats to sustainable development. It has **negative impacts on access to, use of and control over a wide range of resources**, and on the ability to meet human rights obligations with respect to enjoyment – by women and men – of a clean, safe, healthy and sustainable environment and addressing structural (including gender-based) violence in current patterns of environmental degradation;

Gender injustice is intersectional and magnified by other social positions. Multiple and multiplying layers of inequality are experienced by **women who are indigenous; or members of sexual, racial or other minorities; or the elderly and the poor**. As pervasive as gender differences and inequalities are, they are often hidden. In line with this, there is an emerging issue of **Gender Based Violence (GVB) in the environmental context**. In a recent publication by *IUCN in January 2020 “Gender-based violence and environment linkage - the violence of inequality”*, establishes that these patterns of gender-based abuse are observed across environmental contexts, affecting the security and well-being of nations, communities and individuals, and **jeopardising meeting sustainable development goals (SDGs)**. While linkages between GBV and environmental issues are complex and multi-layered, **these threats to human rights and healthy ecosystems are not insurmountable**.

#Women4Biodiversity

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