

Open Letter on the process to adopt a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

On behalf of:

CBD Alliance (CBDA) / Women's Caucus / Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)

This letter is written in response to the current process underway to peer review draft documents related to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) for the twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 24), and in light of the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter does not address substantive concerns about the content of the draft post-2020 GBF, which civil society will continue to address.

Summary of proposals and recommendations:

- **We demand an urgent response from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its bodies on the most relevant way to react to the COVID-19 pandemic. Current national and international strategies for economic recovery may disregard, threaten or bluntly counteract ecological and social recovery. The post-2020 GBF has to reflect the profound and long-term implications and urgent challenges of this new reality through an inclusive and equitable process for a rethink and restructuring of both the content and process of the post-2020 GBF.**
- **Any virtual or online processes carried out under the CBD has to take into account the realities, needs and priorities of the global South and rights holders. It should be standard procedure to conduct such meetings and provide documentation in all six UN languages.**
- **With regard to the peer review process, we insist on the need to allow comments on the updated goals, milestones and targets, and that this must happen before continuing discussion on the monitoring elements, indicators and baseline data.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is directly linked to biodiversity issues

Since the second meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (OEWG 2) in February in Rome, we are now in the midst of a pandemic of unprecedented magnitude and virulence. The pandemic and the response to it has exposed gross inequalities and inequities within and between countries, and peoples. It has had profound impacts especially on Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), small-scale food producers, migrant workers, women, children and many other marginalised groups.

The pandemic has underscored the absolute necessity to address the growing inequality and inequity, and to protect against the further destruction of nature. It has clearly demonstrated that systemic change is necessary to address the root and structural causes of biodiversity loss and unsustainable production and consumption.

There is urgent need for a priority agenda for the CBD to address increasing destruction of biodiversity and forests, climate change, unsustainable agricultural practices, exploitation and expropriation of nature and wildlife – factors that are driving the emergence, evolution and spread of zoonotic diseases, as the recent UN Environment publication “Preventing the Next Pandemic” suggests. Implementation by Parties, of the CBD articles and COP decisions, would greatly help to address these issues.

The need for course correction given the new normal

The CBD with its three objectives – conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable benefit sharing – is uniquely placed to address many of the issues that the pandemic has brought to the fore. This must be urgently and correctly done.

The current attention to the post-2020 GBF presents a unique opportunity for the international community to build back in a sustainable and transformative way, with communities caring for biodiverse ecosystems. In particular, it offers the opportunity to provide a biodiversity framework that will put the health and well-being of nature, animals and people at its centre, ensure rights and justice, whilst protecting against future shocks and pandemics.

As civil society we have participated and will continue to participate in good faith in the negotiations of the post-2020 GBF. However, these negotiations cannot and must not continue as if we are still living in the pre-pandemic world.

In terms of the content and the process moving forward, we demand urgent, inclusive and equitable consultations and discussions to re-examine, re-strategize and re-structure for course correction. At this juncture, the current preparations for the important discussions on the post-2020 GBF at SBSTTA 24 and SBI 3, are simply not good enough.

The insufficiencies and inequities of virtual processes

Many governments, particularly in the global South where the pandemic is currently accelerating, are overwhelmed with the death toll and weakened communities, the crisis of their health systems and loss of traditional healers, and economic survival. People everywhere are struggling with livelihoods and basic necessities amidst political turmoil and violence. Given this scenario, it is unrealistic to expect full and sustained participation in a timetable driven by the same deadlines that operated in a pre-pandemic world.

While turning to online methodologies is unavoidable, access to technology and stable and sufficient internet connectivity particularly in the global South must be addressed and accounted for. Interpretation into all six UN languages for any and all virtual or face-to-face meetings, as well as translations for all documentation are necessary, now more than ever. Not addressing these issues regrettably consigns these discussions on issues that affect all of us, to the privileged few.

The negotiations for the post-2020 GBF must remain a Party-driven process, with full and inclusive participation of civil society, IPLCs and small scale producers. They must not default into a process which – claiming overriding time constraints – becomes driven by the Co-chairs of the OEWG and the Secretariat only.

Concerns with the current sequencing of the peer review process

With regard to the peer review process for selected SBSTTA documents currently underway, and despite explanations from the Co-Chairs of the OEWG and the SBSTTA Chair, we remain deeply concerned about the planned sequencing to first discuss the components of the goals and targets, monitoring elements, indicators and baseline data, when the goals, milestones and targets themselves have not yet been agreed on and prioritized by Parties.

Focussing first on the components of the goals and targets, monitoring elements, indicators and baseline data risks pre-judging and pre-determining the goals, milestones and targets. It will inevitably hamper SBSTTA 24 from carrying out a proper scientific and technical review of the updated goals and targets, as per its mandate, and worse, will leave Parties little room to properly negotiate the goals, milestones and targets.

Moreover, the goals and targets have been updated since OEWG 2 and Parties will need to carefully examine them to ensure their positions are adequately reflected. The mandate for SBSTTA from OEWG 2 included the scientific and technical review of the updated goals and targets. We strongly ask for this mandate to be respected.

We remain deeply concerned that the reference point for the updated goals and targets appears to be a pre-pandemic world and does not represent the urgent need humanity is now facing for a deep system change. We are particularly disturbed at the way the role and rights of women, environmental defenders, IPLCs and small scale producers, who are central to biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use, are marginalised. The need for a course correction has never been more urgent, in order to address the new realities and the flaws in the current processes.



Women's Caucus
www.women4biodiversity.org



CDB Alliance
www.cbd-alliance.org



Global Youth Biodiversity Network
www.gybn.org