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Next stop: Nairobi. Taking stock of preparations for biodiversity COP15 (2020, China)

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As we reach the end of the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan and its Aichi Targets, international negotiations must lead to the adoption of a post-2020 global biodiversity framework during the COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which will take place in autumn 2020 in Kunming, China. Since the beginning of 2019, a post-2020 framework development process has been underway. At a time when an intense initial phase of consultations is drawing to a close, and prior to an important meeting at the end of August in Nairobi, Kenya, the following interview with Basile van Havre, co-chair of CBD's Open-Ended Working Group

on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, takes stock of the state of play and discusses the next steps. (1)

(1) As part of its Post-2020 International Biodiversity Governance Initiative, IDDRI is carrying out activities to understand the international process, through publications such as this one and multi-stakeholder events.

See: <https://www.iddri.org/en/initiative/post-2020-international-biodiversity-governance-initiative>

For context, why will COP15's results be important? What are the stakes?

Basile van Havre (BvH): A period of commitments is ending, an international framework is reaching its conclusion. It is therefore necessary to renew this framework, for the organisation of international cooperation on biodiversity. Contrary to what might sometimes be believed, most biodiversity issues cannot be solved by individual States in isolation. For example, species distributions often cross several countries, and their protection requires concerted action. On other topics, such as agriculture-related deforestation, producing and importing countries must work together to have any chance of solving the problem. The *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, produced by IPBES, has clearly illustrated the extent of the problem, showing that biodiversity is declining around the world, for reasons that are now well known, and a reinforced multilateral action framework is needed to act on these causes.(2)

Furthermore, biodiversity governance does not yet sufficiently mobilise “non-state actors”, despite the fact that their involvement is crucial for raising the level of ambition and especially because they are major actors when it comes to implementation. Additionally, there is a need to carry out coordination work with other conventions addressing biodiversity, and other governance tools that deal with the environment more generally, and with other arenas where discussions take place on the necessary transformations to halt biodiversity loss, such as in agriculture, for example. COP15 must therefore strengthen the cooperation framework between States and its implementation, but also support the involvement of other actors and coordination with other governance arenas.

Following COP14 at the end of last year, in early 2019 there were many consultations where States discussed expectations for the post-2020 framework. What did we learn from this?

BvH: Overall, the first point to note is that there is a real awareness of the need to make progress on this subject, and to do more. With my co-chair Francis Ogwal, we really felt a generally positive attitude, people were not reluctant to attend the discussions. On the contrary, there was even a certain desire to get to the practical details as quickly as possible. There is a relatively short time before COP15, which people are aware of, and we have a community of negotiators who for the most part want to move forward.

Several trends can be noted overall. Firstly, the importance of a true evolution of the framework has often been underlined, but with the need to build on the existing one. Also, there is a desire to develop a framework to achieve results by 2030, with a rationale that remains valid up to 2050, to ensure continuity and to avoid having to start over again every ten years. There is also a desire for realism, because it is well known that the current modes of economic development are hardly adaptable with actions supporting biodiversity: there is therefore a tension between the will to be very ambitious and the definition of achievable targets, and finding this balance is not straightforward. On a related matter, the issue of funding is of course a major one.

In terms of substance, two important issues clearly emerge: the renewal of the targets and the implementation framework that will accompany them, which has so far been lacking. Regarding targets, this involves in particular working on their organisation and structure, to promote their communication but also to better monitor their implementation. Several alternative models are considered, for example one that sets high-level objectives regarding the state of ecosystems, below which are targets to reduce pressures on ecosystems (for example, reducing pesticide use), and then a third level aimed at deeper and more general societal changes (education, subsidies, consumption patterns...). This example illustrates the type of ongoing discussions regarding the organisation of future targets. In terms of implementation, a significant amount of work is needed on accountability, on the monitoring of implementation, and on how States can be held accountable for their actions, towards other States but also to other actors. This would entail, among other things, going back to existing tools, such as national strategies and action plans on biodiversity, and work on their reinforcement with more rigorous reporting on progress and encountered issues, and with more accountability.

Now that these consultations are over, what are the next steps?

BvH: Following the Trondheim Conference in early July, the next step will be the first meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, to be held in late August in Nairobi, Kenya. We are expecting three things from this meeting. Firstly, a stocktake of all the regional consultations held during the year. Secondly, to agree on the structure of the framework, and particularly the organisation of targets. Thirdly, to agree on a work plan for the future. More specifically, we know that much work remains to be done on certain themes. These themes need to be collectively identified in Nairobi and will then be the subject of “thematic consultations” that will begin in autumn. These workshops will be an opportunity for interested States to exchange views and, hopefully, come up with the best possible proposals.

The next step will be at the end of February 2020, at the second meeting of the Open-ended Working Group in Kunming, China, where COP15 will be held later in the year. The aim is to progress as possible on the key elements before this meeting, particularly on the content of the targets. The other elements will have to be finalised in the following months, for the third meeting of the Open-ended Working group, to be held in July 2020 in Colombia, for which the objective is to have a first full draft of the post-2020 framework.

Of course, it will also be necessary to maximise the use of the CBD intermediary meetings, and the other major international environmental governance events during the period. The UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in September 2019 will include a segment on nature-based solutions (NBS), which will put a strong focus on biodiversity. The climate pre-COP in Costa Rica and the COP25 in Chile will also put NBS into the spotlight. The IUCN World Congress in June 2020 in Marseille will also be a significant step, both for the mobilisation of non-state actors and for the potential mobilisation of high-level political leaders, less than six months ahead of COP15.

What challenges, but also opportunities, do you see on the road to COP15?

BvH: An initial difficulty is that we continue to see these discussions as if they only affect nature, and as issues that run counter to the comfort of our economic development. Science repeatedly informs us that we cannot continue to increase the consumption of resources per capita, and fundamentally what we are trying to do is find other ways to reconcile increased wellbeing with respect for the limits of the biosphere. Ideally, we should manage to put the discussion at this level. I am convinced that we can change our development model to both address the biodiversity challenge and create a better world for people. The challenge is to enable the transition. A related challenge is that the level of public awareness is too low, even compared to climate change. Moreover, not all governments have a strong mandate on these subjects, and it has to be said that currently, for several great powers, the atmosphere is

rather unfavorable for progress on environmental issues.

More positively, however, we are talking here about a tangible subject for people: Nature affects their sensitive experience, memories, and emotions. It differs from the more statistical experience of climate change. We probably don't yet see the links between our daily actions and biodiversity, from the point of view of both dependency relationships and of responsibility in terms of impacts. But this is changing. Damages, in particular, are becoming more visible, and are increasingly perceived by economic actors as risks to their activities, as shown by the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report 2019.⁽³⁾ These subjects also have strong local and regional dimensions: a State that takes ambitious action can rapidly make a difference, which is visible to the population. Finally, I believe that there is growing recognition of the strong synergies with climate action, and this opens up the opportunity to join forces in a more effective way, and more often. Finally, we can nevertheless see the beginning of mobilisation, in communities (cities in particular) and companies. We need all these actors to organise their priorities for the next year and a half: we cannot wait for tomorrow to commit to the success of COP15, it must happen today.

(2) *Read the IDDRI Issue Brief on the Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services:*

<https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/issue-brief/ongoing-biodiversity-loss-and-how-it-can-be-stopped>

(3) <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2019>

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