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International biodiversity negotiations: the race to Kunming speeds up

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According to the initial timetable for the negotiations leading up to the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the first draft of the Global Biodiversity Framework was to be made available in summer 2020. It was finally published in July 2021. Since the end of August, discussions involving different types of stakeholders (Parties, experts, civil society) have resumed at a steady pace, between the 3rd session of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG-3) and the IUCN World Conservation Congress. And the way ahead has now been defined: China will host a first segment of COP15 in October (11-15), followed by a resumption of face-to-face negotiations in early 2022 in Switzerland, prior to

the expected adoption of the post-2020 framework in spring. The race is now on to finalize the future global biodiversity framework, which aims for the ambitious goal of “living in harmony with nature” and should define practical applications to achieve this vision.

The first draft: a solid basis for negotiation, providing valuable input to debates

The first draft of the CBD's Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (hereinafter first draft) updates the original zero draft to take account of the discussions of the scientific and implementation subsidiary bodies (SBSTTA-24 and SBI-3) that took place online in spring 2021. The document is structured in three main parts: (i) four long-term goals to 2050, corresponding to the three CBD objectives¹ and their implementation, (ii) ten milestones to 2030 and (iii) action-oriented targets to 2030.

The new text is much more precise than the previous version: square brackets have been removed and it proposes tangible and quantified actions to reduce pressures on biodiversity, based on the latest science². For example, it contains:

- targets to reduce subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity by US\$ 500 billion per year, and increase financial resources available for biodiversity to at least US\$ 200 billion per year, including an annual increase of US\$ 10 billion for developing countries (Targets 18 and 19);
- the conservation target of 30% of land and sea areas (Target 3);
- the target on pollution reduction, aiming to halve the amount of nutrients lost to the environment, to reduce pesticides by two-thirds and eliminate the discharge of plastic waste by 2030 (Target 7).

The text also places great importance on nature's contributions to people, and also to the inclusion and participation of indigenous peoples and local populations through a new target dedicated to them. Sustainability issues, in the broadest sense of the term, are also given greater prominence: the first draft thus contains a new paragraph on the contribution of the post-2020 framework to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This addition comes at the request of the Africa and the Latin America and the Caribbean groups, which aim to bring sustainable development agendas closer together and to focus on a more integrated approach.

New proposals and sustained strong opposition

OEWG-3, originally scheduled to take place in Cali, Colombia, was held online from August 23 to September 3. Discussions were based on the first draft and, despite the restrictive online format, allowed delegations and observers to make new proposals.

The first draft, generally considered as a step towards the adoption of a post-2020 framework in Kunming, was first subject to general comments: the delegations wanted the text, goals and targets to be simple and understandable by stakeholders, to guarantee the implementation of the framework and its appropriation by all. The structure of the text (goals-milestones-targets) also received comments: some delegations highlighted the need to move towards more “aspirational” goals and targets that are as action-oriented as possible, while others insisted on the need for a better overall structuring of the framework.

In terms of content, the key issues discussed included:

- The **30% conservation target for land and sea areas**, where antagonism between supporters³ and detractors is growing, while a number of civil society organizations are calling for the protection of half the planet;
- The **inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities** through a specific target or repeated mentions, which is a prerequisite for the implementation of a framework that is fair and respects their “free, prior and informed consent”, reinforced by the mobilization around this issue at the IUCN Congress⁴ and the adoption of a motion supporting their role in nature conservation;
- **resource mobilization**, including financial, technical and human resources, a key factor in the framework’s implementation. Discussions focused on a 2050 goal and specific milestones, as well as on targets for subsidies and resources. The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on increased resource needs were highlighted by Southern countries; some Parties called for the creation of a dedicated fund while others stressed the importance of financial resources from the private sector;
- The debate on the integration (or not) of **Digital Sequence Information (DSI) of genetic resources** within the framework, with the organization of a “contact group” on this subject. The resolution of this discussion item will be needed to avoid obstructing the negotiations – opposition remains between Parties that wish to avoid hindering research and innovation and those who provide these resources and who denounce the non-respect of access and benefit sharing (ABS) principles since the digital dematerialization of these resources;
- The **request from certain Parties for the better balancing of targets between the three CBD objectives⁵** to better reflect ABS issues: a legitimate principled position within the Convention’s political framework, but one that risks being used strategically to divert attention from the main causes⁶ of biodiversity loss and the proposed solutions, notably conservation, sustainable use, including beyond protected areas, and the restoration of degraded ecosystems;
- Finally, and more generally, several delegations emphasized the **need for simple targets**, to encourage ownership by all, but that are also **quantifiable and divisible at the national level** for better monitoring, while others argued for the removal of **certain numerical aspects**. For example, the pollution reduction target, which is necessary for the transformation of agricultural systems, has seen the disappearance of any mention of percentage reductions in most textual proposals, even though some Parties have suggested integrating other types of pollution, such as noise and light.

Colombia launched a “PreCOP” on August 30. Speakers discussed the fundamental issues of production and consumption patterns, green recovery, resource mobilization and the role of non-state actors. A session on coalitions was also organized and three major coalitions (Leaders’ Pledge for Nature, High Ambition Coalition and Global Ocean Coalition) called on States to relaunch the dynamics of biodiversity commitments. Another major mobilization moment was the IUCN World Conservation Congress, which concluded with a [Manifesto](#) calling for a transformative, effective and ambitious post-2020 framework.

Maintaining and encouraging dialogue this autumn

There have been many technical discussions in recent months and it is now important to activate high-level political ownership, moving beyond great declarations of principle. It is becoming essential to identify levers for increasing practical commitments to preserve the momentum built up this autumn. From October onwards, China will play a crucial role in ensuring the leadership of the negotiations and the emergence of a consensus that raises ambition while ensuring robust mechanisms and means of implementation. Even though the opening of COP15 and its high-level segments can and must serve as a springboard, at the same time it is also crucial to address the needs for clarification and discussions between negotiators prior to the physical meetings in January and spring. It will therefore be necessary to respond to the questions and proposals raised by delegations at OEWG-3.

Lastly, major efforts are still required regarding the modalities and means of implementing the future framework, particularly on the issues of transparency and biodiversity mainstreaming, both in the framework itself and in the accompanying COP decision. Formal and informal discussions cannot, therefore, be put on hold until January and must continue to bring about a common understanding of these crucial issues for the framework's implementation, as well as a "planetary alignment" regarding ambition. This last quarter of 2021 should allow all actors, both state and non-state, to mobilize on a technical and political level, to reach the home straight on the best possible footing.

¹ Cf. Art. 1 of the CBD: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf>

² Scientific studies were indeed cited by the "one-pagers" prepared by the CBD's co-chairs and secretariat prior to the meeting, to reinforce the understanding of the first draft (CBD/WG2020/3/INF/3).

³ The High-Ambition Coalition for Nature & People, which advocates the 30% target, now includes 66 countries

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/08/marseille-summit-indigenous-people-best-keepers-of-their-lands-aoe>

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/biological-diversity-day/convention>

⁶ According to the IPBES Global Assessment, the five major causes of biodiversity loss are: changes in land and sea use, exploitation or overexploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution and the invasion of alien species

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