

SBSTTA 26 Highlights: Monday, 13 May 2024

The 26th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 26) opened on Monday, in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates addressed organizational matters, before initiating discussions on: the monitoring framework for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF); scientific and technical needs towards GBF implementation; and synthetic biology.

Opening

SBSTTA Chair Senka Barudanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) opened the meeting, encouraging delegates to translate the ambitious goals and targets of the GBF into action by building on available knowledge and experiences.

UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Inger Andersen highlighted as opportunities for SBSTTA 26: increasing accountability and transparency; advancing the global action plan on biodiversity and health; and multilateral and institutional collaboration, including on biodiversity within and beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

Acknowledging ongoing environmental catastrophes, including the recent flooding in the host country, Kenya, David Cooper, Acting Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), emphasized the role of the GBF in halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

Organization Matters

Adoption of agenda and organization of work: Delegates adopted the provisional agenda and organization of work ([CBD/SBSTTA/26/1](#) and [Add.1](#)). BRAZIL expressed concern about the multiplication of intersessional activities, noting the disproportionate burden on developing countries.

Election of officers: Grenada, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), nominated Paulina Stowhas Salinas (Chile), and Ana Laura Mello (Uruguay) as an alternate, for matters relating to CBD Protocols. Senegal, for the AFRICAN GROUP, nominated Mostafa Madbouhi (Morocco), with further nominations pending. Jean Bruno Mikissa (Gabon) was elected as rapporteur.

Monitoring Framework for the GBF

The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents ([CBD/SBSTTA/26/2](#) and [Add.1](#)).

Many delegates welcomed the work of the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on indicators and supported updating the monitoring framework with a view to adopting it at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16).

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, requested: reflecting the study on access and benefit-sharing (ABS) indicators, including a new benefit-sharing indicator and considerations on digital sequence information (DSI), and developing new indicators on, among others: technology transfer; species requiring support; plastic pollution; and a traditional knowledge headline indicator related to land tenure.

SUDAN requested guidance and support for developing national indicators and pointed to gaps in the monitoring framework. EGYPT welcomed the information workshop on indicators. ZIMBABWE suggested fine-tuning complementary and headline indicators.

KENYA said that recent flooding-related catastrophes highlight the importance of addressing the issues before SBSTTA.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC) raised concerns regarding outstanding gaps in indicators and data availability. UGANDA urged addressing gaps following the AHTEG's work. MOROCCO requested coherence in methodologies and indicator use. CÔTE D'IVOIRE noted that several indicators are "excessively technical," emphasizing differences in parties' capacities. TANZANIA stressed the need to make the monitoring framework user-friendly. MALAWI and SYRIA supported a gender plan of action indicator.

The EUROPEAN UNION (EU) supported a robust monitoring framework, to be reviewed alongside the GBF through the respective processes, focusing on gaps. SWEDEN emphasized the relevance of several complementary indicators for multiple GBF goals and targets. FINLAND highlighted indicator 1.1 (spatial planning) as a priority and encouraged the use of indicators developed under the chemicals framework.

The NETHERLANDS, GERMANY, HUNGARY, FRANCE, and SWITZERLAND underscored that it is crucial to adopt a list of binary indicators at COP 16, prioritizing its finalization before parties begin work on national reports. AUSTRALIA suggested not discussing each binary indicator in detail, also noting that further methodological work is needed.

BELGIUM urged the Secretariat to prepare a non-paper on binary indicators as the basis for contact group discussions and, with SWITZERLAND, suggested strengthening links with work by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

CANADA, supported by the UK, COLOMBIA, and others, urged against reopening discussion on AHTEG-reviewed indicators at this meeting, and recommended focusing on reporting on headline indicators as well as on finalizing technical details. NEW ZEALAND underlined finalizing headline indicator disaggregation as a priority and adopting a streamlined process to address remaining brackets under binary indicators. TÜRKIYE noted that some indicators are insufficiently comprehensive and impractical at the national level, calling for inclusive and accurate indicators.

BRAZIL expressed concerns that many of the AHTEG's conclusions are inconsistent with language agreed at COP 15. He emphasized, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and INDIA, that national information and monitoring systems should be primary sources of information. He pointed to several indicators requiring further discussion and urged against introducing trade-distorting policies or aggravating existing global asymmetries.

ARGENTINA pointed to finalizing the monitoring framework as part of the main package for COP 16, alongside DSI and resource mobilization, since the latter is required to implement the monitoring framework. MEXICO indicated readiness to take note of the annexes to the status of the headline indicators (annex II) and the gap analysis (annex III).

COLOMBIA, URUGUAY, CUBA, INDIA, and others highlighted diverging national circumstances and capacities regarding indicators, stressing that commitments to the monitoring framework's implementation must be accompanied by commitments on resource mobilization and strengthened technical, technological, and scientific cooperation.

COSTA RICA pointed to four targets without headline indicators and suggested the use of indicators developed for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CUBA stressed that several headline indicators are complex and urged concrete and result-oriented questions regarding binary indicators.

CHINA, JAPAN, OMAN, and others, suggested focusing on the draft recommendation and applying the monitoring framework based on national circumstances and capacities. MALAYSIA called for further work on resource mobilization. JAPAN stressed that identifying gaps and assessing effectiveness can be helpful for future updates. INDONESIA pointed to differences in capacity and urged using the World Trade Organization (WTO) definition of harmful subsidies.

INDIA stressed the importance of suggesting headline indicators for targets lacking them, calling for balanced implementation according to national circumstances. NEPAL highlighted the significance of mountainous ecosystems.

SYRIA pointed to a lack of resources being provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), urging, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, ensuring adequate access to funding “for all countries.” JORDAN urged sufficient funding for implementing the monitoring framework. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION underscored that work on indicators and accountability should be party-driven and suggested prioritizing monitoring at the national level.

The Seychelles, for the HIGH AMBITION COALITION FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE, urged efficient and swift adoption of indicators, and focused on the implementation of the GBF’s 30-by-30 Target, alongside gaps associated with plastic pollution and invasive alien species.

Major stakeholder groups noted, among other things: the importance of strengthened partnerships between parties and key stakeholder groups such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), women, and youth for successful GBF implementation; the need for effective data-sharing agreements; outstanding gaps and concerns regarding indicators; and the need for further disaggregation by gender.

Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations expressed their readiness to support parties, including on ecosystem classifications and tools and online repositories for monitoring progress. They also pointed to missing indicators and encouraged elevating the indicator on land-use change and land tenure in IPLC traditional territories to headline-level.

Chair Barudanović suggested, and delegates agreed, to establish a contact group, co-chaired by Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico) and Anne Teller (EU), to continue discussions.

Scientific and Technical Needs to Support the

Implementation of the GBF

The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents ([CBD/SBSTTA/26/3](#) and [Add.1](#)), addressing matters related to the IPBES work programme and new suggested areas of work for the CBD.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, lamented the limited tools and guidance used to inform the analysis and requested adding sustainable wildlife management under the topics identified for further work.

MOROCCO welcomed addressing gaps, biodiversity and pollution, and equity. NEW ZEALAND and MALAWI highlighted biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning. CÔTE D’IVOIRE urged synergies between platforms to address capability issues. SOMALIA noted challenges in assessing biodiversity resources arising from knowledge and data gaps.

MEXICO supported new work areas identified in the draft recommendation. COLOMBIA recommended a special approach to capacity building for Indigenous Peoples and other major groups. BRAZIL welcomed work on bioeconomy and other new areas, stipulating that overlap is avoided, and suggested a fast-track IPBES assessment on biodiversity and poverty. ARGENTINA cautioned against overloading the agenda, suggesting work on sustainable activities, products, and services based on bioeconomy, and avoiding overlaps with other intergovernmental fora. GUATEMALA suggested explicitly mentioning free, prior, and informed consent, and Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

The EU emphasized interlinkages with discussions under the monitoring framework and supported an IPBES fast-track

assessment on biodiversity and climate change. GERMANY, the NETHERLANDS, and others requested clarifications on the concept of bioeconomy, noting it is not included in the GBF targets. AUSTRIA stressed that further discussions are needed on new areas of work and, with BELGIUM, HUNGARY, and others, highlighted the establishment of regional and subregional centers for technical and scientific cooperation.

The NETHERLANDS and ARGENTINA underscored that proposals for IPBES fast-track assessments should account for ongoing processes. BELGIUM highlighted the need for biodiversity mainstreaming across other conventions.

SWEDEN queried prioritization between current and new work programmes. SPAIN supported strengthening cooperation with IPBES, highlighting cities and biodiversity. The UK cautioned that available tools and guidance are not always accessible and suggested assessments on biodiversity and pollution, and biodiversity and poverty. SWITZERLAND recommended focusing on biodiversity and pollution, followed by climate change.

JAPAN, AUSTRIA, POLAND, ARGENTINA, EGYPT, and others highlighted existing tools and guidance. JAPAN suggested limiting new work areas to those necessary for GBF implementation. CANADA called on SBSTTA to clearly identify scientific and technical needs and gaps, noting that some of the intersectional work identified in the draft recommendation may be unnecessary.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the CBD should not address human rights issues. MALAYSIA stressed, with UGANDA and others, the need for financial resources, capacity building, and technology transfer. INDONESIA urged against adding new issues, since indicators are missing for current ones. INDIA lamented occasional lack of data and disparities in disseminating and applying findings. JORDAN urged focus on financing.

Major stakeholder groups noted the need to, among others: further integrate intersectionality into biodiversity policy and action; and clearly define “bioeconomy,” with some cautioning its use in greenwashing activities. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations supported, among others: an IPBES fast-track assessment and new areas of work on rights-based approaches; and increased focus on existing platforms for scaled-up action for GBF implementation. Delegates also heard an update on relevant IPBES work.

Chair Barudanović said a conference room paper (CRP) will be prepared.

Synthetic Biology

Jan Plesnik (Czechia) chaired the discussions on synthetic biology. The Secretariat introduced document [CBD/SBSTTA/26/4](#).

Many delegates welcomed the work of the multidisciplinary AHTEG (mAHTEG). Egypt, for the AFRICAN GROUP, urged regular horizon scanning and, with BELGIUM, extending the mAHTEG’s mandate. AUSTRALIA and COLOMBIA acknowledged the need to examine eventual contributions of synthetic biology to CBD objectives.

MEXICO stressed special consideration of traditional knowledge and the importance of precautionary and human-rights based approaches. COLOMBIA urged considering risk assessment and monitoring elements. ARGENTINA questioned how horizon scanning contributes to CBD objectives. JAPAN noted the lack of an agreed definition for synthetic biology. Discussions will continue on Tuesday.

In the Breezeways

Arriving in Kenya shortly after the past month’s devastating floods, many delegations expressed their solidarity with, and support for, the host country, and their gratitude for the meeting going ahead despite the ongoing national disaster. In turn, Kenya pointed out that such catastrophes demonstrate the importance of addressing the issues on the SBSTTA agenda.

The gravity of the situation was not lost on delegates, who appeared ready to tackle core issues such as implementing the GBF, including through a strong monitoring framework, with the somber reminder that it is often the most vulnerable people who pay the price of inaction, including with their lives.