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Strengthening Action for Change: Synergistic Solutions to the Climate Crisis, Nature Loss, Desertification, and Pollution
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Cali, Colombia

Introduction

Two years ago, the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 15) adopted an ambitious set of targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The GBF recognizes the need to address the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, also known as the triple planetary crisis. The GBF emphasizes the need for synergies across all multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and includes provisions for aligning actions with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

COP 16 provided the first significant opportunity for Parties to take stock of the GBF. A [High-Level Roundtable](#) of heads and senior officials of UN agencies and secretariats came together to explore opportunities and pathways for strengthening the collective response to the triple planetary crisis. Additional context for this Roundtable included:

- the [UN Common Approach to Biodiversity](#)—a strategic framework, and the first of its kind, designed to integrate, build on, and connect biodiversity considerations across the policies, programmes, and operations of UN entities at the global, regional, and national levels;
- the [UN Environment Management Group](#) (EMG)—a coordination mechanism that focuses on harmonizing efforts across the UN system to address global environmental challenges; and
- the [Rio Trio](#) initiative—a partnership that aims to catalyze urgent and coordinated action by aligning the work of the Presidencies of the three Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD), all of which have their COPs meeting in 2024.

The Roundtable included representatives from 20 different agencies or organizations. Natasha Walker, independent consultant, moderated the Roundtable, which was loosely structured in two panels. Participants were asked to respond to several broad questions related to enhancing cooperation and



Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director

synergies that contribute to the COP 16 theme of making “Peace with Nature,” as well as questions specific to their agency’s mandate and how to move forward on key priorities.

Keynote Remarks

Inger Andersen, UN Under-Secretary-General, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and EMG Chair, provided opening remarks. She said that for EMG members, there is always a concern that “we slice and dice” the environmental agenda. She noted the directive from UN Secretary-General António Guterres to “go beyond the papers we deliver,” and said a focus on the country level is required to deliver an integrated package of environmental solutions. She also referenced the 2020 decision by the EMG to adopt the UN Common Approach to Biodiversity. She called for better coordination, saying we are asking governments to take an all-of-government, all-of-society approach and “if we can’t do it, then maybe we have no right to ask.”

Astrid Schomaker, CBD Executive Secretary, shared her perspective during a break between the two interactive panel discussions. She said the GBF, along with the CBD’s monitoring and reporting system, is providing a much stronger basis for shared efforts to move the agenda forward. She noted the mobilization of unprecedented amounts of people, business, finance, and media in support of biodiversity and sustainable development, and emphasized the need for “all to see the crisis and push forward together.” While she mentioned encouraging stories of Parties making remarkable efforts, and much discussion



of synergies, she also acknowledged the constraints that all the Conventions experience. She identified a need to change approaches in how the UN agencies support implementation, calling it a “a true reform agenda for the UN and for the countries.” In closing, she emphasized the value of the EMG and coming together to share perspectives on so many different levels.

Panel Discussions

A lightning-round of questions began each panel discussion, where participants were asked to share how their agencies were contributing to the COP 16 theme of “Peace with Nature.” Following those responses, each panelist was asked more agency-specific questions. The responses to the initial questions are compiled here for cohesion.

Responses from the first panel included: supporting the right to a healthy environment; supporting implementation of global environmental agreements; driving the connection between climate, nature, and the SDGs; making clear that reducing disaster risk helps protect nature, and that protecting nature helps reduce disaster risk; helping countries incorporate sustainable use of biodiversity and agriculture into their plans; providing new guidance for Parties, including sustainability assessments and legal assistance on illegal wildlife trade; and promoting restoration as a key issue related to desertification.

Responses from the second panel included: synergies are completely normal—most of the youth work on more than biodiversity and work on linkages as well; scaling up efforts to address illegal and unsustainable taking of migratory species and lifting up the Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity (GPEC); putting wetlands at the center of our lifelines; working to unlock private sector finance; accelerating efforts to protect human and environmental defenders; engaging with women, including through women-led leadership on National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs); a climate action plan to

guide communities, governments, and global leaders to prioritize children’s needs; addressing crimes against the environment; focusing on the research nexus and building capacities and knowledge sharing platforms; and working on peace, food systems, and social protection.

Panel One

On an agency-specific question related to the context of the Rio Trio and synergies between the Conventions, Muralee Thummarukudy, Director of the G20 Global Land Restoration Initiative, UNCCD, emphasized taking advantage of the digital transformation and addressing the asynchronous planning cycles.

Regarding collaboration with other MEAs to ensure synergies, Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, highlighted sharing the responsibility of and accepting the credit for undertaking collaborative projects vs. thinking only about our own mandates.



Muralee Thummarukudy, UNCCD



Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

On cooperation with the CBD, Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, emphasized recognizing how illegal drug trade affects finances, and addressing silos at the national levels.

Kaveh Zahedi, Director, Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, said that to better integrate biodiversity action across agrifood systems, mutually-reinforcing agendas must be taken forward in a synchronized way, for example through updated NBSAPs.

On how a focus on prevention is helping with NBSAP implementation and disaster risk reduction (DRR), Saskia Carusi, Deputy Chief, Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, said a comprehensive risk management approach requires an integrated approach to planning for DRR, climate, and biodiversity, including the use of nature-based solutions.

Marcos Neto, UN Assistant Secretary-General, and Director of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UN Development Programme, spoke about the need for countries to access financial and capacity support. He emphasized synchronizing requests for information between Nationally Determined Contributions and NBSAPs.

On how the private sector is supporting inclusive and rights-based approaches to protected areas, Lin Li, Senior Director of Global Policy and Advocacy, WWF International, offered, as an example, the Heritage Columbia project, which has attracted USD 245 million in public and private funds to protect 32 million hectares of land.

Speaking on the mainstreaming of human rights into the “heart of implementation,” Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said participation in decision making is central. She noted the broad range of human rights affected by biodiversity loss, especially defenders of the environment and Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

Regarding actions related to biodiversity finance, the private sector, and mobilizing funding to support NBSAP implementation, Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General, UN Trade and Development, noted that many people

live in countries that spend more on debt service than on health or education, and stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to debt relief, including meaningful debt restructuring.

Walker then invited panelists to provide insights on how collaborating with each other can help generate more funds or deliver funding where it needs to go. Key points included: deploying guarantees and changing the way credit rating risk is calculated to attract more investment; addressing pollution issues while also addressing climate issues; increased leveraging of partner agency portfolios; repurposing existing investments; and creating partnerships and consortia among diverse partners.

Panel Two

The second panel also responded to agency-specific questions from the facilitator.

On promoting a strong monitoring framework for the GBF and cooperation, Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), highlighted GPEC for leveraging actions and resources. She noted a knowledge gap on critical habitat for breeding and feeding areas, saying the gap affects not only work by CMS, but also investment banks and infrastructure development that require the necessary information to make informed decisions.

Regarding developing and implementing NBSAPs and National Wetland Policies in a consistent and mutually-supporting way, Musonda Mumba, Secretary-General, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, noted that 56 countries have mentioned wetlands in their NBSAPs, and that the Ramsar Convention is working with countries on wetland inventories to support their inclusion in NBSAPs. She also noted Costa Rica’s National Blue Carbon Strategy that integrates different UN frameworks, including on climate, biodiversity, and wetlands.

Speaking about scaling up investment, Pradeep Kurukulasuriya, Executive Secretary, UN Capital Development Fund, said many countries are still being left out of the capital market. He highlighted the need to use guarantees in order to de-risk capital and encourage regulated financial institutions to connect with Indigenous Peoples and communities.

On providing direct access to financial resources for women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, Catarina



Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, Convention on Migratory Species



Sonja Hahn-Tomer, UNU FLORES

Carvalho, Chief of Intergovernmental Support, UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), noted that UN Secretary-General António Guterres said we need to put women and girls at the center, and announced a forthcoming related paper on synergies between the three Rio Conventions.

In the context of the climate crisis as a child rights crisis, Tanya Chapuisat, Representative of UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Colombia, said one in every four child deaths is an environmental-related death. She noted work on innovative, gendered, age-responsive financial tools for child health and wellbeing in environmental policy, investment, and interventions.

Speaking about collaboration between law enforcement and crime prevention, and environmental actors on the ground, Hanny Cueva-Beteta, Head, Global Programme on Crimes that Affect the Environment, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), highlighted an integrative approach, including connecting with Indigenous and local communities—the actors who know what is happening on the ground.

Sonja Hahn-Tomer, Executive and Liaison Officer, Office of the Director, UN University Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU FLORES), spoke about collaborative research and education related to the technical/scientific solutions required to implement the GBF. She mentioned the integrative Resource Nexus approach, sustainable financing, and collaborative partnerships, including one on revitalization of a post-coal mining area.

On how the youth movement is promoting the incorporation of a whole-of-society approach in the CBD process, David Schwarzer, Founder, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, described the International Youth Summit on Biodiversity that took place in Yokohama, Japan, in August that involved the CBD, the local government, and Japan's Ministry of Environment, saying it was a "healing" experience. Regarding "the one best way" for UN entities to better support and amplify youth voices, he said young people are being "criminally underfunded" compared to resources for other sectors, cited shortfalls in support for attending COP 16, and called for real, genuine, and equal partnerships.

With respect to efforts to implement the GBF and what is needed from the UN system, Mireia Villar Forner, UN Resident Coordinator in Colombia, said "It's not a silo problem, it's an

incentive problem," and we need to "think downward," to help get the resources and knowledge to the communities.

Walker invited participants to reflect on what more can be done to provide support at the local level and what top three things should be taken forward to the High-level Ministerial meetings. Recommendations on support at the local level included: using public money to capitalize on funding from the private sector, and promoting financial de-risking; addressing access to water and nutrition; and connecting with local authorities, and those who are most affected, namely local communities, women and girls, and children and youth.

Key messages to forward to the ministerial meetings included: spending more time interacting; focusing on reducing carbon emissions; demonstrating true political will; including the voices of young people; anchoring environmental action in human rights; using a common country analysis; being honest about the challenges of mobilization; transforming the energy, finance, and food systems; thinking outside the box; using data and evidence in a coherent way; committing to reach out to each other; and considering monitoring whether the EMG is really having an impact.

In a closing round of comments, participants described what they would do if they could spend a year working somewhere else. Responses included: UNODC to tackle crimes and drugs, which are causing biodiversity loss; in the agriculture sector on a farm; and chairing discussions to ensure we all come together.

Conclusion

Repeated themes that emerged from the Roundtable included the need for: enhanced cross-agency collaboration; sectoral integration and policy coherence; support for inclusive participation, particularly involving women, youth, and Indigenous communities; integrating human rights and equitable access to resources; and mobilizing and structuring financial resources to address biodiversity needs, with calls for private sector engagement, de-risking investment, and restructuring debt.

Many participants shared their appreciation for the opportunity to gather and share perspectives about ways to enhance collaboration and synergies, and expressed a desire for similar opportunities in the future.



Hanny Cueva-Beteta, UNODC