

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Tuesday, 15 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its deliberations on Tuesday with four contact groups meeting during the day and into the evening. Two contact groups on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) addressed structural questions and the first eight targets of the GBF. SBSTTA and SBI continued their work in contact groups addressing biodiversity and health, and the review mechanism respectively. This daily bulletin includes the discussions on the two contact groups on the GBF. Deliberations on the subsidiary bodies' contact groups will be included in tomorrow's bulletin.

WG2020 Contact Group I

The contact group, co-led by Vinod Mathur (India) and Norbert Baerlocher (Switzerland), focused on structural questions such as the relationship between the framework's goals, milestones, and targets. It further addressed a section on guidance for the framework's implementation and GBF's Goal A (enhancing the connectivity and integrity of ecosystems).

WG2020 Co-Chairs Basile van Havre (Canada) and Francis Ogwal (Uganda) provided introductory remarks. They emphasized the need to: discuss the value of explicitly including milestones in the document; analyze whether numerical values should be included in the goals; decide on the implementation timeframe; address the theory of change; discuss cross-cutting issues; and deliberate on the guiding principles for implementation.

Co-Leads Mathur and Baerlocher noted that progress is critical, as the outcomes of the contact group's deliberations will inform and may have implications on discussions in other contact groups.

Milestones: Some delegates suggested eliminating the milestones and incorporating important elements under goals, targets, or indicators. They argued that milestones add an unnecessary level of complexity and generate duplication. Some added that it will be challenging to translate milestones at the national level.

Others expressed satisfaction with the draft GBF's current structure, stressing that milestones are important pieces to assess progress towards the targets by 2030.

Co-Lead Baerlocher proposed an informal group to discuss the diverse views and ways to tackle milestones in the GBF. Some delegates expressed concern regarding smaller delegations' inability to participate in parallel discussions.

Guidance for implementation of the framework: Parties discussed a proposed section regarding guidance for the implementation of the framework.

Parties broadly welcomed the proposed section. Several parties argued that, while they welcome references to such topics as IPLCs, human rights, and the role of youth in the guidance, they

should not replace explicit references to these under the specific and appropriate targets in the GBF. One developing country party suggested that the section lacked clarity and was repetitive, and called for harmonizing the text.

One party expressed his "deep dismay" with how the process had emerged, arguing that considering "non-discussed text" was a "strategy to avoid negotiating" crucial elements. Some observers cautioned that including the relevant guidance for implementation in the GBF may weaken important targets that require operable language.

Co-Lead Baerlocher suggested, and delegates agreed, inviting those interested in adding elements to the guidance for implementation to provide their suggestions in writing to the Secretariat.

Glossary: Regarding the glossary, one delegate suggested noting that it is not a negotiated document and that different ideas regarding used terms persist between parties. Another delegation expressed concerns over the suggestion, highlighting the need to establish a link between the GBF and the glossary.

Goal A: Delegates addressed Goal A of the GBF, including references to: increasing of at least 15% in the area, connectivity, and integrity of natural ecosystems; decreasing the rate of extinctions by at least tenfold; halving the risk of species extinctions; and safeguarding the genetic diversity of wild and domesticated species by maintaining at least 90% of genetic diversity within all species.

Co-Lead Mathur called on delegates to deliberate on whether numerical values should be included or whether the goal should be reformulated as an aspirational goal.

Many delegates agreed that the goal should focus on ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity. They supported inclusion of elements such as connectivity, integrity, population abundance, and resilience.

Some delegates favored removal of numerical values, saying all goals should be aspirational and may be supported by numerical targets. Some noted that quantitative elements may be challenging due to absence of appropriate baselines at the national level.

Proponents for numerical goals said including such values will support ambition and offer an opportunity to measure progress. Some noted the need for consistency, underscoring that either all goals should have numerical values or none.

Some suggested reference to "all species" rather than explicitly referring to wild and domesticated species. Increasing integrity of semi-natural ecosystems was also suggested. Many supported "halting human-induced extinction of known species by 2050," saying reduction of extinctions by at least tenfold in the current version is unclear and that a baseline is not captured.

Co-Lead Mathur said that a non-paper will be prepared to guide further negotiations on Friday, 18 March.

WG2020 Contact Group II

This contact group, co-led by Teona Karchava (Georgia) and Rosemary Paterson (New Zealand), has the mandate to consider the first eight targets of the draft GBF. WG2020 Co-Chairs van Havre and Ogwal introduced their reflections on these targets, pointing to discussions during the first part of WG2020-3.

Target 4: Co-Lead Karchava began the discussion on Target 4 (active management actions for conservation, genetic diversity, and human-wildlife conflict). Parties broadly supported the target, but diverged on certain elements.

Parties discussed, among other issues:

- *in situ* versus *ex situ* conservation, with some supporting explicit references to *in situ* conservation and others suggesting removing references to *ex situ* conservation;
- reference to “human-wildlife conflict,” which some delegates suggested removing, with others preferring “human-wildlife interaction,” and yet others proposing that the subject should be considered under other targets;
- the inclusion of domestic as well as wild species; and
- increasing the urgency, scope, and capacity for implementation of the target.

Regarding human-wildlife conflict, a delegate suggested that communities affected by such conflicts should be compensated. Some delegates suggested reference to “sustainable management.”

Observers suggested the need to: implement intensive species-specific recovery actions; prioritize community-based customary use, and actions and processes developed by IPLCs; and amend the language to be more result-oriented.

Target 5: Co-Lead Paterson introduced Target 5 (elimination of unsustainable, illegal, and unsafe harvesting, trade, and use of wild species). She drew delegates’ attention to the Co-Chairs’ alternative text on the target, changing the focus from ensuring sustainable, legal, and safe harvesting to eliminating unsustainable, unsafe, and illegal harvesting.

Some delegates supported the Co-Chairs’ suggestion, noting that it addresses overexploitation. Many supported the One Health approach as a means to broaden the target to include risks to ecosystems and species.

Some cautioned that “eliminating” is impossible to achieve, suggesting “reducing.” Several called for respect to customary law, and customary sustainable use and trade of wild species by IPLCs.

Debates on whether to address issues of sustainable use in this target took place, and some proposed strengthening language on regulation and management of harvest and trade.

Some delegates called for inclusion of text on biopiracy, highlighting benefit sharing. Others suggested tackling illegal trade through traceability and addressing markets for illegally traded wildlife.

Target 6: Co-Lead Paterson introduced Target 6, which focuses on the identification and management of pathways of the introduction of invasive alien species (IAS), reducing their rate of introduction and establishment by at least 50%, and controlling or eradicating IAS, focusing on priority species and priority sites. Discussions focused on the appropriateness of pathways’ identification and whether a numerical value should be retained or replaced by “significantly decrease.”

Many parties supported identification of pathways. One party suggested legislating and implementing measures to strengthen control of IAS.

Opinions diverged on the inclusion of a numerical value. Some delegates suggested removing it, noting the challenges associated with measuring the rate of introduction and relevant baselines. Others preferred retaining it, stressing that it raises ambition.

A regional group noted that the rate of introduction and establishment are two different metrics, also suggesting addressing species that could be seen as “potentially” invasive. Another

suggested focusing on the rate of establishment, noting challenges related to measuring rates of introduction. Some suggested scaling up relevant knowledge on the rate of IAS introduction and establishment, including relevant capacity building.

One delegate suggested broadening the numerical target to also include IAS control in at least 50% of priority sites. A party suggested referring to priority areas rather than sites, while another suggested also referring to priority pathways. A delegate suggested a reference to species with high invasive potential. Some delegates opined that priority sites and species concerned should be identified at the national level and be subject to local conditions. Others said that language on priority species should explicitly refer to IAS.

One party stressed that the target would benefit from a comprehensive solution in the GBF for access to and sharing benefits arising from the use of digital sequence information (DSI).

Targets 1-3: Parties simultaneously considered the first three targets of the draft framework. Two parties suggested that the first three targets be replaced by an “apex target” on sustainable use. Some parties argued that targets should recognize different national realities and circumstances.

Regarding Target 1, on integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning addressing land- and sea-use change, some parties argued that a target covering 100% of land and sea is unrealistic. Some delegates stressed challenges for developing countries, urging assurance of financial support, capacity building, and technology transfer. One party suggested a new target to support mapping, monitoring, and assessment of ecosystem services on a regular basis.

Regarding Target 2, on restoration of degraded ecosystems, parties were divided on the target of 20% of areas under restoration. Some suggested that a percentage was better than an absolute figure, while others recommended a measurable numerical target.

On Target 3, on ensuring conservation of at least 30% of land and sea areas, several parties recommended a reference to full partnership with IPLCs in the text. Several also recommended distinguishing marine and land areas, and linking the target to marine protected areas (MPAs). One party opposed the proposed language of “ecosystem services,” suggesting “nature’s gifts to humanity.” Several parties supported retaining reference to freshwater ecosystems.

Observers stressed that areas conserved by IPLCs are distinct from protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and that full partnership with IPLCs must include areas conserved by them.

Co-Lead Karchava noted that a non-paper for targets 4, 5, and 6 will be produced. Discussion on the other targets will continue in the contact group’s next session on Saturday, 19 March.

In the Corridors

Maybe it was jet lag; maybe it was the haze that delegates woke up to in Geneva, the clouds turned yellow by sand blown over from the Sahara. Whatever the reason, the excitement that bubbled up on Monday had fizzled for some by Tuesday. Discreet conversations with delegates revealed a worry that, already, discussions were getting lost in the details. “I’m exhausted, and it’s only day two—I can’t imagine how it will feel at the end of the meeting,” one languished. For many, “hopeful” isn’t yet the appropriate word.

But two weeks is a long time—to be lost, or to find new energy. Out in the hallways, delegates smiled as they spoke of the children for whom they wish to preserve and build a better world. Others shared stories of birdwatching habits in their time at home, agreeing that the chance to get back to nature was worth any excuse. If that spirit pierces through the clouds, there may be solid results yet for the Geneva Biodiversity Conference.