

## Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Wednesday, 16 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference got into high gear on a dense negotiating day with five contact groups meeting during the day and into the night. In the morning a contact group under the Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (WG2020) addressed targets related to meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing. In the afternoon and evening, two SBSTTA contact groups focused on biodiversity and agriculture, and biodiversity and health. Furthermore, two SBI contact groups addressed capacity building and development in the afternoon, and reporting, assessment, and review of implementation during the evening.

This daily bulletin includes the deliberations of the four contact group meetings in the morning and afternoon as well as the discussions of the two contact groups that met on Tuesday, 15 March during the night. The remaining two contact groups will be summarized in the bulletin on Thursday, 17 March.

### WG2020 Contact Group 3

This contact group, co-led by Gabriele Obermayr (Austria) and Gillian Guthrie (Jamaica), focused on GBF targets 9-13, on meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing.

WG2020 Co-Chairs van Havre and Ogwal introduced the targets, outlining outstanding issues. Drawing attention to the Co-Chairs' reflection paper (CBD/WG2020/3/6), they focused on linkages between the targets, alternative formulations, and whether to include numerical values in all targets.

**Target 9:** Co-Lead Obermayr presented the target, which focuses on ensuring the sustainable use of species and providing benefits to people, especially the most vulnerable. She summarized work in the contact group during the first part of WG2020-3 and asked delegates to respond to three questions, namely whether: this target should be merged with Target 5 (harvesting, trade, and use of wild species); a list of benefits, including nutrition, food security, medicines, and livelihoods should be included; and any elements are missing from the target.

Almost all parties suggested keeping Targets 5 and 9 separate, with a couple of delegations preferring merging them. Opinions differed on whether a list of benefits should be included, with many parties suggesting maintaining such a list to raise the target's ambition, and others preferring keeping the target general.

Regarding missing elements, delegates suggested including references to: bioeconomy; water security; safeguarding and respecting sustainable customary use and management by IPLCs; sustainable long-term benefits; strengthening the harmonic

and complementary relationship between people and nature; maintaining and enhancing nature's benefits to people; effectively managing human-wildlife interactions to avoid or reduce human-wildlife conflict; small-scale use and non-industrial activities; and other economic opportunities.

Delegates further discussed whether to explicitly refer to the sustainable use of fisheries, and whether the target's focus should be on benefits or on ensuring sustainable use. Some delegations suggested referring to sustainable use of biodiversity rather than of wild terrestrial, freshwater, and marine species. Reformulating the target was also proposed to highlight the fact that the sharing of benefits and sustainable use is a major driver of conservation. A party suggested maintaining or increasing nature's contributions (NCP) to people, including ecosystem services.

Observers proposed references to: the implementation of the global Plan of Action on customary sustainable use; women as recipients of benefits among the most vulnerable; pollination in the list of benefits; and human rights law, principles, and standards.

**Target 10:** Co-Lead Obermayr introduced the target, which addresses the sustainable management of agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry. On the question of whether the scope of productive sectors should be expanded, parties broadly agreed increasing the scope to include fisheries, though several argued that the scope should remain as is.

Parties were divided regarding whether all areas should be sustainably managed, or a percentage of areas. Some supported maintaining a high level of ambition by covering all areas; others argued that sustainable management of all areas would be unrealistic, suggesting a "progressive" approach of "continuously increasing" sustainable management. Other proposals included language on agroecology and equitable governance.

On the discussion around "increasing productivity" of production systems, a number of parties rejected the Co-Chairs' proposal to include language on "ecological intensification," suggesting that the term is not yet well-defined. Others supported the reference. Several parties suggested qualifying intensification with language on "sustainable intensification." Others suggested language on soil biodiversity. Some parties proposed adding livestock farming and fisheries as production systems. Parties also called for language to ensure that increased productivity avoids and reduces adverse impacts on biodiversity and wild species. There was also support for agroecology, strengthening gender equity, Indigenous systems, and integrated farming systems, which protect below and above ground biomass.

**Target 11:** Co-Lead Guthrie introduced the target, which focuses on nature's contributions to regulation of air quality, quality and quantity of water, and protection from hazards and extreme events for all people. She called on parties to deliberate

on the choice of NCP or ecosystem services; and drew attention to the Co-Chair's alternative text, which applies the latter.

Parties supporting ecosystem services noted that it is an internationally agreed concept, with some referring to it as a cross-cutting pillar for the implementation of the GBF. Those that supported NCP said the concept is broader and includes ecosystem services, taking into account both scientific and other worldviews of services from nature, including those of Indigenous Peoples. Some also drew attention to the fact that the NCP concept developed at the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is a basis of the global biodiversity assessment, which is a core scientific basis of the GBF. Some parties compromised to mentioning "NCP, including ecosystem services."

One party suggested numerical values, proposing, "actively enhancing and strengthening critical services by at least 20%," saying that it has been used in other targets, is based on scientific research, and its achievement is feasible.

Some parties advocated inclusion of ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions (NbS), saying the latter should follow the definition from the recently concluded resumed Fifth Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2).

One party suggested deletion of the target, arguing that the issues have been covered elsewhere, and another suggested a new target to address instruments that foster payments for ecosystem services. A party also called for deleting "all people," saying regulatory services are for all species, not just humans.

**Target 12:** Co-Lead Guthrie introduced the target, which focuses on increasing the area of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces in urban areas. She invited parties to express their opinions on whether discussion on the One Health approach can be put aside given it is under discussion in Contact Group 1, as well as whether there are missing elements in the target. Most delegates agreed that the One Health approach can be set aside pending parallel discussions. A party proposed maintaining reference to One Health in the target. Another party suggested referring to the "integrity of Mother Earth" rather than the One Health approach.

Parties further suggested references to: urban planning; contributions to local biodiversity; the quality and benefits of ecological/functional connectivity; quality of green and blue areas; infrastructure; ecosystem services; ensuring access to high quality green and blue spaces; drivers of genetic outbreaks and land use changes; a quantitative element on measuring progress; urban and peri-urban forests; and biodiversity safeguards.

Two parties suggested replacing green and blue areas with ecological infrastructure. A party opposed to the use of NbS, opting for "Mother Earth-centered actions."

**Target 13:** Co-Lead Guthrie introduced the target, noting it focuses on measures at the global level to facilitate access to genetic resources, and to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, including through mutually agreed terms (MAT), and prior and informed consent (PIC). She invited comments on whether an additional target on access and benefit-sharing (ABS) is needed, and, if so, what it should address, given that the discussion on digital sequence information (DSI) is taking place in parallel under a different contact group.

Delegates held divergent positions on the need for an additional target on ABS. Some parties stressed that ABS is wider in scope than the CBD and the Nagoya Protocol. Others underscored the need to streamline the GBF, requesting a single target on ABS.

One party proposed an additional target on ABS including a specific global, multilateral mechanism to implement DSI.

Another party requested reformulating the target, emphasizing that, as currently drafted, it implies that all requests for access to genetic resources should be granted. Various parties made textual suggestions, including: reference to other international ABS instruments; language on equitably sharing monetary and non-monetary benefits; and separate targets on the use of genetic resources, the use of traditional knowledge, and a mechanism for ABS arising from DSI.

Many delegates requested including reference to DSI, with some noting that including a solution on sharing the benefits from DSI in the GBF constitutes a red line in negotiations, and warning that failing to address the issue paves the way for nullifying the third objective of the Convention. They requested reference to DSI in the target saying DSI and ABS cannot be separated. Others opposed, noting divergent positions and interpretations of DSI that will need to be resolved prior to addressing it in the GBF. Some recommended postponing decisions until the resolution of discussions in the DSI contact group. A party noted that the DSI discussion needs to be based on best available science and evidence.

The Co-Leads will prepare a non-paper for discussion in the next session of the contact group on Monday, 21 March.

### ***SBSTTA-24 Contact Groups***

**Biodiversity and Health:** This contact group, co-chaired by Helena Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) and Marina von Weissenberg (Finland), met in the evening of Tuesday, 15 March and was tasked with reviewing the non-paper issued after the first reading during the first part of SBSTTA-24.

Noting broad initial support, Co-Chair Brown opened text-based negotiations on the annexed global draft action plan for biodiversity and health. Delegates first discussed the sections on: overview; background; introduction; strategic objectives and rationale; principles; and key elements of the action plan.

A developing country regional group expressed concerns about the quality of the draft action plan, noting that several sections go against the spirit and letter of the Nagoya Protocol. Others expressed similar concerns, with one party warning that the plan does not have broad support and lacks depth, asking to instead refer to "draft options for mainstreaming biodiversity and health linkages." One party opposed the change, noting that the draft global action plan has been improved through a robust peer review process and should be adopted at COP-15 as mandated by COP-14. Other delegates supported retaining references to the Nagoya Protocol and ABS instruments, but opposed additional references to benefit-sharing. In response, some parties pointed out that benefit-sharing is one of the three objectives of the CBD and clearly falls within its mandate, whereas other issues contemplated in the draft plan are not.

Pointing out that it is often subnational governments that deal with health issues, a party asked to include reference to them throughout the document. One delegation urged that language regarding civil society include persons living with disabilities, pointing out that some have designated long COVID-19 a new disability.

Delegates also asked to include references to: benefit-sharing; genetic sequence data; capacity-building; technology transfer; funding; monitoring; containing risk of pathogen transfer; zoonotic diseases; equitable access to medical care; and the right to a safe, clean, and healthy environment. The Co-Chairs collected proposed additions and confirmed they would share a non-paper in advance of the next session of the contact group for negotiation.

Delegates further initiated discussion on key strategic elements responding to the operations and supporting objectives, and corresponding action areas and activities of the proposed action plan. They focused on cross-sectoral mainstreaming of biodiversity and health linkages in biodiversity, health, and environment-related policies; and on sector-specific mainstreaming of biodiversity and health linkages. Delegates requested adding numerous references, including to sustainable consumption and healthy diets; NbS, with some opposing such a reference; sustainable use; ABS-compliant medicines; wild species instead of wildlife; loss and fragmentation of ecosystems; and reducing the risk of infectious disease overspill from wildlife to humans and domestic livestock.

Discussions continued on Wednesday, 16 March in the evening.

**Biodiversity and Agriculture:** This contact group was co-chaired by Norbert Baerlocher (Switzerland) and Adams Toussaint (Saint Lucia).

Co-Chair Toussaint introduced the relevant document on the review of the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity and its updated plan of action (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.7). As the draft recommendation to SBSTTA had already been considered in the first part of SBSTTA-24, discussions focused on its annex (the Draft Plan of Action 2020-2030 for the Initiative).

Parties made a number of textual suggestions on the introductory section. One party, opposed by others, suggested adding language on NbS.

On the section on purpose and objectives, and regarding developing voluntary standard protocols to assess the status and trends of soil biodiversity, one delegation requested clarifying whether this action will take place at the national, regional, or international level. Co-Chair Baerlocher noted that the actions are for members to the Initiative.

Delegates debated language recognizing and supporting the role and rights of Indigenous Peoples, smallholders, and small-scale food producers in maintaining biodiversity through agroecological approaches. Some requested deleting reference to agroecological approaches, while others suggested adding “and other sustainable approaches,” and yet others adding reference to sustainable intensification. A party requested separating role and rights of IPLCs, and another including reference to family farmers. One delegate urged addressing actions for aligning the agro-industry with sustainable practices.

A regional group suggested adding aquatic to terrestrial ecosystems regarding encouraging conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil biodiversity. One delegate recommended adding references to IPLCs, women, and youth to the specific objectives.

Regarding language promoting monitoring and assessment at the global level, a party suggested doing so “at all levels.” Another noted that monitoring and assessment is a national responsibility of parties, suggesting instead “at the corresponding level.”

One delegate suggested acknowledging that environmental, cultural, and social factors are critical for the environmental management of soils.

Regarding the scope and principles, parties made a number of suggestions, including references to: productive landscapes other than agricultural ones; local governance within the Plan’s cross-cutting nature; and the UN Decade of Family Farming.

On global actions, on a paragraph related to indicators of soil biodiversity, one party recommended deletion, stating that a knowledge gap would prevent certain parties from developing indicators. Another cautioned against using “ecosystem services,”

preferring NCPs. One party suggested an additional paragraph on preventing negative impacts of farming practices, and associated impacts on soil biodiversity. Other suggestions concerned references to micro-biodiversity, water security, and disaster risk reduction.

Regarding key elements and activities, one party, opposed by many, suggested deleting a reference to eliminating harmful incentives that contribute to soil biodiversity loss; several pointed out that eliminating harmful subsidies is already contained in the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Another, supported by some, recommended language on avoiding “trade-distortive policy measures.” Delegates disagreed on whether the section’s rationale should refer to “forestry” or “sustainable forest management.” There was also disagreement as to whether to retain references to agroecology.

Regarding a section on encouraging the use of sustainable soil management practices, parties suggested references to, *inter alia*: ecosystems with high contribution to climate change adaptation; ecosystems rather than landscapes; optimizing and minimizing use of agricultural chemicals “in accordance to the corresponding science-based risk assessment”; reduction of bushfires; soil biodiversity, its functions, and its contribution to ecosystem services; and blue carbon ecosystems, including mangroves and seagrasses.

Regarding research, monitoring, and assessment, a party, opposed by many, suggested deleting a paragraph encouraging the development of benefit-sharing mechanisms related to soil organisms. Others suggested that such mechanisms should not only be encouraged, but also strengthened. A delegate proposed promoting the development of commercial applications of products based on the sustainable use of soil biodiversity in order to directly or indirectly improve human health. A party requested including reference to subnational governments, in addition to national ones, throughout the document. A party suggested deleting a paragraph encouraging the development of community-based monitoring and information systems or simplified assessment methodologies for measuring soil biodiversity. A delegate proposed promoting the implementation, and further research and analysis of integrated pest management practices as a tool for protecting functions and services provided by soil biodiversity. Observers suggested references to: ecosystems and cultural landscapes; community-based monitoring; co-creation of knowledge; and promotion of agroecological and other biodiversity-friendly management practices.

On a section supporting voluntary guidance, tools, and initiatives relating to the conservation and sustainable use of soil biodiversity, a regional group suggested ensuring benefit-sharing, stressing that components of soil biodiversity attract the interest of bioprospectors.

The Co-Chairs will prepare an updated version of the CRP to be negotiated in a future session, either in the contact group or in SBSTTA plenary, following relevant consultations with the SBSTTA Chair and Bureau.

### **SBI-3 Contact Groups**

#### **Reporting, Assessment, and Review of Implementation:**

This contact group, co-chaired by Andrew Stott (UK) and Gillian Guthrie (Jamaica), met on Tuesday, 15 March, and focused on mechanisms for reporting, assessment, and review of implementation (CBD/SBI/3/CRP.5).

Co-Chair Stott explained the *modus operandi* of the contact group and provided an overview of the work done during the first



part of SBI-3, both in plenary and in the contact group, as well as intersessionally.

He explained that four annexes are referenced in the document: Annex A (CBD/SBI/3/11/Add.4) contains the draft guidance for updating or revising national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) in the light of the GBF; Annex B (CBD/SBI/3/11/Add.6) includes commitments from actors other than national governments in the context of an enhanced planning, monitoring, review, and reporting mechanism; Annex C (CBD/SBI/3/11/Add.1/Amend.1) addresses national reporting; and Annex D (CBD/SBI/3/11/Add.5) describes the *modus operandi* of the open-ended forum of the SBI for country-by-country review of implementation. Co-Chair Stott said that the contact group deliberations will only address Annex C in addition to the CRP.

Delegates then discussed the paragraphs in the draft recommendation relating to indicators in national reporting, national planning, and global assessments.

On a paragraph noting that headline indicators will be used in global assessments to monitor progress towards the GBF goals and targets, one party proposed to specify that this relates to headline indicators reported by parties in their national reports. Some suggested that this process be progressively developed by parties, taking into account the provisions and means of implementation for strengthening the knowledge management capabilities of national information systems. Others opposed progressively developing the process, calling for a decision at COP-15. Yet others pointed out that some of the indicators are only applicable at the global level. A few delegates urged focusing on global assessments with stocktaking or reviews discussed as alternative terms. Some asked to refer to the SDG Global Indicator Framework as complementary, which others opposed as redundant. The paragraph remains bracketed.

Regarding encouraging parties to use headline indicators in NBSAPs and other national planning processes, delegates discussed two alternative formulations, with the longer one including references to national priorities. A regional group opposed the shorter version, stressing that additional issues need to be addressed. Co-Chair Stott indicated that both versions will be taken forward.

Regarding the provision on headline indicators being used by all parties in their national reports, delegates discussed which operational word to use: “should,” “will,” or “shall.” A group of developed countries proposed a number of specifications. A number of developing countries insisted on flexibility and introduced relevant wording, and one delegate proposed a compromise to keep strong opening language that all parties shall use the headline indicators and to delete the specifications.

Delegates decided to delete a paragraph referring to component and complimentary indicators.

Regarding the submission of the seventh national reports, Co-Chair Stott asked delegates to focus on indicators as issues regarding timing will be discussed later. Delegates agreed to delete a reference to using in the national reports the agreed set of headline indicators set out in GBF monitoring framework.

Co-Chair Stott encouraged interested parties to hold informal discussions and develop revised compromise proposals. The group resumed its deliberations on Wednesday, 16 March in the evening.

**Capacity-building and Cooperation:** This contact group met under the guidance of Co-Chair Haïke Jan Haanstra (the Netherlands) to consider the draft recommendation on capacity-building and development, technical and scientific cooperation, and technology transfer (CBD/SBI/3/CRP.13).

The group began deliberations on Section B (technical and scientific cooperation) and considered Co-Chair Haanstra’s proposal to merge existing preambular paragraphs into a single one that addresses capacities of parties to implement the GBF, and implementation in accordance with national priorities and capacities. Several delegates agreed.

On a paragraph on proposals to review and renew technical and scientific cooperation programmes presented in Annex III (proposals for an inclusive process to review and renew technical and scientific programmes), delegates said review should be a priority and that a decision on renewal of these programmes can be made by SBI-4. Some delegates noted that there would not be adequate time for a peer-review of the report by parties, seeking deletion. Others objected, saying peer-review is important and can be carried out by stakeholders and interested parties.

On an Annex III proposal on the review of the technical and scientific programmes, parties debated on the role of the Secretariat over the team of experts. Parties preferred that the Secretariat support the experts rather than provide overview, oversight, or guidance. Delegates also agreed to shorten the title of the annex to “process to review and renew technical and scientific programmes.”

On a paragraph on identification and communication of biodiversity-related technical and scientific needs, Co-Chair Haanstra suggested, and delegates agreed, to remove mention of the matchmaking platform of the clearing-house mechanism, since it does not yet exist. Parties agreed to refer instead to the central portal of the clearing-house mechanism.

Co-Chair Haanstra proposed a friends of the Co-Chair informal group to discuss the options of institutional mechanisms, and modalities to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation, to meet on Thursday, 17 March. The options to be discussed are: a global technical and scientific cooperation support center; regional and/or sub-regional technical and scientific cooperation support centers; and initiatives and programmes implemented or coordinated by the Secretariat.

On establishment of incubator programmes and accelerator mechanisms for appropriate biodiversity-related technologies and innovations, delegates debated whether to refer to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC); prior and informed consent; or approval and involvement of IPLCs. Following a debate, one party drew attention to CBD Article 18, which mentions all options, suggesting the text can include them all.

Discussions will continue on Friday, 18 March.

### *In the Corridors*

Fungi, those undersung heroes of the natural world, often form kilometres of complex tendrils in soil before fruiting into mushrooms. Similarly, the mood among some delegates on Wednesday seemed downright mycelial: “we’re going so deep into the weeds,” one said after the morning, “that it’s hard to keep track of what the bigger picture is.” They might have been inspired by the work in plenary, which just barely managed to finish considering its targets after diving deep into minute textual changes.

Some much-needed encouragement came in the afternoon, when one contact group not only completed its work, but did so with an hour to spare. One commentator was insistent: “We have to keep working at that kind of clip, because this is the small stuff. Otherwise, how will we make progress when things get intense in a few days’ time?” The good that may mushroom from present discussion will likely depend on delegates’ capacity to know when to let go—and when, like fungi, to dig in.