

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Saturday, 19 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work on Saturday, with SBSTTA holding a plenary session in the morning to address the draft plan of action 2020-2030 on soil biodiversity. A contact group under the Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (WG2020) met in the afternoon to discuss the GBF's targets on reducing threats to biodiversity. In the evening, a SBSTTA contact group continued discussions on biodiversity and health; and an SBI contact group resumed considerations on the draft gender plan of action.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the SBSTTA plenary and the WG2020 contact group as well as the discussions of the two contact groups that met on Friday, 18 March, during the evening. The remaining two contact groups will be summarized in the Bulletin on Monday, 21 March.

SBSTTA-24 Plenary

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz outlined the agenda items to be addressed and invited co-chairs of the contact groups to report on progress.

Andrew Stott (UK), Co-Chair of the Contact Group on the monitoring framework of the GBF, reported progress on proposed headline indicators of 17 targets, adding that the group will complete its work though two additional sessions in the coming week.

Marina von Weissenberg (Finland), Co-Chair of the Contact Group on biodiversity and health, reported on two meetings of the group, noting progress and a new version of the non-paper that will be considered at a third meeting of the group on Saturday, 19 March.

Adams Toussaint (Saint Lucia), Co-Chair of the Contact Group on biodiversity and agriculture, reported that the group met to review the draft plan of action 2020-2030 on soil biodiversity, which is ready for consideration by the SBSTTA plenary.

Biodiversity and Agriculture: SBSTTA Chair Benítez invited delegates to discuss the draft plan of action 2020-2030 for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity, as included in CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.10.

On the **introductory part** of the document, several parties, including BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, the AFRICAN GROUP, COSTA RICA, and PARAGUAY, requested deletion of nature-based solutions (NbS). The EU and others supported retaining NbS. BOLIVIA cautioned against shifting the burden of the climate crisis to the most vulnerable and suggested adding text to prevent impacts of soil mitigation approaches on IPLCs.

On the **overall objectives** of the draft plan of action, COSTA RICA proposed recognizing IPLCs' role in sustainable agriculture

by adding "artisanal forms of food production." BRAZIL requested supporting soil biodiversity assessments at the national level.

On the specific objective of supporting the role of IPLCs, women, smallholders, and small-scale food producers, several parties, including the EU, UK, BRAZIL, PARAGUAY, ARGENTINA, and the AFRICAN GROUP, preferred the alternative text that includes land and resource rights of IPLCs. The EU, supported by the UK, suggested deletion of "ecological intensification" as an example of sustainable agricultural practices. ARGENTINA, supported by SWITZERLAND, suggested referring to sustainable agricultural practices, since they are supported by IPBES assessments. BOLIVIA proposed maintaining reference to agroecology. BRAZIL, NEW ZEALAND, ZIMBABWE, PARAGUAY, and MALAYSIA suggested not singling out specific agricultural practices. SAUDI ARABIA emphasized that the rights of women and smallholders should be strengthened.

On the section on **scope and principles**, GHANA suggested broadening the scope to include aquaculture.

On a paragraph underscoring the multiple co-benefits derived when linking the plan for action for soil biodiversity with other international agreements and initiatives, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, and BOLIVIA suggested reference to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in addition to the Paris Agreement. BRAZIL and ALGERIA further proposed reference to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

On a paragraph inviting FAO to facilitate implementation of the plan of action, COSTA RICA requested reference to the International Network on Soil Biodiversity and the Global Soil Biodiversity Observatory's work to monitor and forecast the condition of soil biodiversity and soil health.

On the section on **global actions**, regarding an action on strengthening education and capacity building to monitor soil microbiobiodiversity, GUATEMALA proposed that capacity building focus on the use of tools for appropriate monitoring. KENYA and CAMEROON suggested a reference to strengthening research.

BRAZIL, supported by ARGENTINA, JORDAN, and CAMEROON, and opposed by the UK and FRANCE, requested deletion of an action regarding the development or identification, and implementation of feasible indicators of soil biodiversity related to key ecosystem services and under the framework of the One Health approach, noting that research and capacity building should precede the development of indicators. ARGENTINA, with ZIMBABWE, suggested that, if the action is to be retained, the reference to the One Health approach be deleted. CANADA,

supported by FRANCE, proposed that both development and identification of indicators be pursued, rather than one or the other.

Regarding an action to prevent and address negative impacts of farming practices, such as unsustainable use of fertilizers and pesticides, to soil biodiversity, CANADA suggested the action refer to “unsustainable” farming practices. ARGENTINA, supported by the UK, MALAYSIA, and others, suggested reformulating the action towards positive action to promote good agricultural practices, including integrated pest management, to prevent and address negative impacts of fertilizers and pesticides.

On an action on promoting conservation, restoration, and sustainable use activities and management practices, BOLIVIA suggested strengthening the knowledge systems of IPLCs. KENYA proposed promoting both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation.

On an action to develop protocols and follow harmonized methods to collect and digitize soil biodiversity data, MALAYSIA, opposed by ARGENTINA, suggested “adopting” harmonized methods.

On language encouraging non-state actors to become involved in implementation of the plan of action, SAUDI ARABIA suggesting addressing civil society actors rather than non-state ones.

On the section on **key elements and activities**, which notes that the plan of action comprises four main elements that could be undertaken as appropriate and on a voluntary basis, GHANA, supported by PERU, TOGO, and CÔTE D’IVOIRE, and opposed by BELGIUM, UK, AUSTRALIA, and POLAND, suggested deleting the reference to the voluntary basis of the activities.

On the rationale, PERU requested special emphasis on the role of small producers and women farmers. BOLIVIA suggested reference to smallholders, small-scale food producers, family farmers, and peasants. CAMEROON proposed reference to technology transfer.

Regarding an element on **policy coherence and mainstreaming**, on an activity on promoting policies that protect or increase soil biodiversity, avoiding policy measures that would distort trade; and to eliminate, phase out, or reform incentives harmful to soil biodiversity, PARAGUAY suggested “eliminating or reforming incentives with a view to phasing out.” INDIA, opposed by FRANCE, BELGIUM, and ARGENTINA, requested deleting “eliminating.” FRANCE and SWITZERLAND, opposed by BRAZIL, PERU, and ARGENTINA, proposed deleting the reference to trade distortion. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO suggested referring to policies that “help increase soil productivity.” JAPAN cautioned that adding new elements in the text dilutes its core purpose.

The EU offered compromise language, replacing policy measures that would distort trade with measures that “would not be in harmony with the Convention and other relevant international obligations,” and keeping reference to “eliminate, phase out, or reform” harmful incentives as in Aichi Target 3. BRAZIL and ARGENTINA agreed, adding that such measures should also be consistent with the Convention. PARAGUAY opposed, requesting either keeping the reference to trade distortion or explicitly referring to WTO rules.

On an activity to address linkages between biodiversity and human health, healthy diets, and pollutants exposure, BRAZIL, opposed by BELGIUM, suggested deleting the examples of pollutants which include pesticides, veterinary drugs, and overflow of fertilizers.

On an element on encouraging the use of **sustainable soil management practices**, ARGENTINA, supported by BRAZIL and PARAGUAY, recommended replacing “ecological

intensification” with “sustainable agricultural practices” throughout the section. On science-based risk assessment procedures, ARGENTINA and PARAGUAY requested removing a mention of their use “as appropriate,” with the latter suggesting language on conformity with international risk assessments. ARGENTINA, opposed by PERU, requested the removal of a list of potential assessment subjects. Parties also suggested, among others, facilitating access to “information”; including reference to IPLCs, small-scale food producers, and peasants; and noting a reduction in production and use of synthetic fertilizers.

Regarding an element on **awareness-raising, knowledge, and capacity-building**, SEYCHELLES pressed for language on “modern soilless agriculture.” BELARUS, with SERBIA, and opposed by ARGENTINA and COLOMBIA, requested adding a reference to countries “with economies in transition.” SRI LANKA, opposed by AUSTRALIA, requested a reference to “sharing” traditional knowledge. GHANA pressed for “appreciating” soil-related information. CAMEROON requested a reference to technology transfer to allow access to molecular technology. CÔTE D’IVOIRE stressed “better understanding the causes and consequences of soil biodiversity decline.”

On an element on **research, monitoring, and assessment**, NORWAY, supported by FRANCE and opposed by ARGENTINA, suggested retaining a previously deleted paragraph on the development of community-based or otherwise accessible soil biodiversity monitoring methodologies. BRAZIL, supported by ARGENTINA, suggested deleting language on the negative impacts of pesticides on soil organisms. FRANCE requested that the text be bracketed. BRAZIL further suggested adding language on biological pest control and pesticide packaging. ARGENTINA, supported by GHANA, recommended replacing language on “genomic technologies” with “molecular biology techniques.” BOLIVIA, opposed by AUSTRALIA, recommended language on FPIC in the element’s rationale. PARAGUAY requested bracketing of language on “gender-responsive approaches.”

Parties also suggested, *inter alia*, bracketing references to agroecology and to the Nagoya Protocol. Multiple parties requested that new additions be bracketed to provide time for consultation.

SBSTTA Chair Benítez said that an L document will be prepared for further consideration and, noting time limitations, urged delegates to “be more efficient in our deliberations.”

SBSTTA Contact Group on GBF Monitoring

Co-Chair Stott guided the evening discussions on Friday, 18 March. He said two non-papers would be prepared, with one including all the suggestions for new indicators.

Some delegates found indicator 15.0.1 (dependencies and impacts of businesses on biodiversity) relevant, but lacking in clear methodology, while others considered it problematic and asked that it be revised to measure sustainability. Several parties supported having an indicator on the ecological footprint of businesses.

Regarding indicators 16.0.1 (food waste index) and 16.0.2 (material footprint per capita), some parties noted the indicators are relevant, but stressed the need for further elaboration. One party urged measuring implementation of regulatory frameworks to ensure that consumer choices are sustainable, with another adding the need to ensure that the relevant information is available. Some parties urged referencing work by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on circular economy. Regarding the indicator on food waste, one party asked that it refer to all waste, including hazardous waste.

Many delegates welcomed indicator 17.0.1 (on potential adverse impacts of biotechnology on biodiversity taking into account human health), with some suggesting it also focus on regulation of living modified organisms (LMOs) and be disaggregated by sectors. Some parties asked to also measure the positive contribution of biotechnology.

Regarding indicator 18.0.1 (value of subsidies and other incentives harmful to biodiversity, that are redirected, repurposed, or eliminated), many delegates noted its relevance, with some proposing to also add positive incentives to promote biodiversity conservation, pointing to ongoing work of the OECD on both.

Many delegates welcomed indicators 19.0.1 (official development assistance for biodiversity) and 19.0.2 (public and private expenditures on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity), with some noting that more work is required to measure domestic and private expenditure. There was also a suggestion to add an indicator on availability of funding earmarked and available to IPLCs.

Discussions will continue on Monday, 21 March.

WG2020 Contact Group 2

Contact Group 2 resumed discussions on the GBF targets. Co-Lead Teona Karchava (Georgia) reminded delegates of the guiding questions on these targets based on previous discussions on Tuesday, 15 March. Delegates addressed GBF targets 1-3, 7, and 8. They further initiated discussions on Target 4 based on a non-paper developed by the co-leads.

On Target 1 (ensure that all land and sea areas globally are under integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning), parties diverged on whether to refer to “freshwater, marine, and terrestrial ecosystems” or to “land and sea areas.” Some called for including the term “coastal,” saying some countries have no marine ecosystems. Several also highlighted the need to ensure the reference addresses areas within national jurisdiction. Many called for reference to connectivity. One party suggested including reference to primary forests. Some parties said reference to “all” land and sea areas suggests a numerical value of 100% of areas under spatial planning, which is not feasible, and called for reformulation.

On Target 2 (ensure that at least 20% of degraded freshwater, marine, and terrestrial ecosystems are under restoration), some parties supported retaining the numerical value of 20%, saying it is backed by scientific research. Others called for further justification of its source and feasibility. Some preferred an absolute value. One delegate said this target is important for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Many urged fostering IPLCs participation in decision making.

On Target 3 (ensure that at least 30% globally of land areas and of sea areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity, are conserved through protected areas and other effective conservation measures), several parties, particularly members of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, supported 30% of global areas under protected area management by 2030. Some emphasized that the goal should be interpreted as global and thus not be translated to national implementation. One party called for reference to maintaining the integrity of transboundary protected areas. Some parties said this target should include safeguards for the rights of IPLCs and the right to development, which should not affect the rights or abilities for parties to access financial and other resources required for the effective implementation of the whole GBF. Some also called for inclusion of the rights of women and youth.

Parties continued to differ on whether to refer to provision of ecosystem services or to NCPs. Both terms received support, with those for NCPs justifying it as a broader concept that also includes ecosystem services. Those supporting ecosystem services claimed that it is more widely accepted and used for monitoring biodiversity at all levels. Others claimed NCPs remain ambiguous.

Observers presented statements suggesting, among others: that Target 3 requires strong, measurable safeguards for the rights of IPLCs, including FPIC; and that the conservation goal should be more ambitious, to the tune of 50% conservation by 2030.

On Target 7 (reducing pollution from all sources, including by reducing nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, and pesticides by at least two thirds and eliminating the discharge of plastic waste), parties were divided on whether the reference to “pesticides” should remain or be changed to “harmful chemicals.” Parties suggested a number of compromises, including: “hazardous pesticides”; clarifying major categories of “harmful chemicals”; “highly hazardous pesticides”; “chemical pesticides”; and “pesticides and other harmful chemicals.” Some stressed that nutrient loss, pesticides, and plastics are highlighted in the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5).

Parties were similarly divided in the support of numerical targets for nutrient loss and pesticides, with some arguing that pesticide “use” is an insufficient metric, as it may open the door to using more potent pesticides in smaller quantities. A delegate suggested referring to reducing harmful effects rather than inputs. A party noted that the existing regulatory framework on pesticides is ignored, pointing to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions. A party noted that the definition of pesticides in the glossary does not reflect the relevant definition the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management. A delegate stressed that only harmful pesticides should be addressed, excluding organic ones. A party called for more quantitative assessments on the pollutants by type, assessing their degree of impact on biodiversity.

Some parties suggested explicitly referencing other sources of pollution, including municipal and industrial pollution, and noise and light pollution.

Some parties urged focusing the target on negative effects of pollution on biodiversity. Others called for a science-based approach building on standards, guidelines, or recommendations developed by relevant international organizations.

Groups and parties suggested a number of alternate targets. One suggested replacing the target with an overarching target on reducing pollution, and minimizing harmful impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Another proposed text on considering cumulative and interactive effects of pollution. A delegate requested reference to recycling and circular economy strategies. One party, supported by many, suggested aligning the text with a recent resolution adopted by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) on “eliminating plastic pollution,” with a delegate stressing the need to address the full life cycle of plastics.

On Target 8 (minimizing the impact of climate change on biodiversity), parties held divergent opinions on whether the target should refer to NbS or ecosystem-based approaches. A few parties suggested using both terms. Many underscored the UNEA resolution on NbS, including the relevant definition. There was broad support to include a reference to “resilience,” with one party opposing such language.

There was disagreement about the presence of a numerical element, with those against arguing that the target of contributing at least 10Gt CO₂ to mitigation efforts through ecosystem-based

approaches has no scientific basis. A party noted that such a target is not feasible. Some suggested that the target focus on actions to mitigate climate change impacts on biodiversity. One group recommended including the impact of ocean acidification, and strengthening ecosystem resilience and contributing to climate mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction. A delegate suggested focusing on developing a synergistic approach between climate change and biodiversity rather than on emissions.

One party argued that the target should also aim to respect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), including through ecosystem-based, community-based, and non-market-based approaches. Another argued for a specific focus on high-carbon ecosystems. A third said that the target's focus should be on biodiversity and on ensuring net gains on biodiversity while promoting action on climate change.

Some parties noted that the target should focus on effects of climate change as a driver of biodiversity loss rather than biodiversity as a tool to mitigate climate change. One party cautioned against focusing on mitigation. One party suggested enhancing the resilience of biodiversity and ecosystems to climate change through ecosystem approaches and other adaptation measures that include disaster risk reduction, and promote the development of biotechnologies to strengthen adaptive capacity to climate change and nature-related hazards.

On target 4 (actions to enable recovery and conservation of threatened species and genetic diversity), delegates expressed divergent preferences on whether to refer to ensuring “active management action” or “active sustainable management actions.” Those advocating for deleting “sustainable” said it detracts from the purpose of the target, which should focus on species.

Some called for strengthening the impact of actions by replacing “actions to enable recovery” with “actions to achieve recovery.” Parties suggested that the target should address all species and not just threatened species, and proposed referring to conservation of species, including threatened species.

SBI Contact Group on capacity building and development

Co-Chair Laura Camila Bermudez (Colombia) guided the discussions, which took place on Friday, 18 March. She updated participants on proceedings and introduced a non-paper based on previous discussion.

On the document's preambular paragraphs, parties suggested alternate text, including: recognizing the “challenges in national capacities faced by developing country parties in the introduction of the GBF”; highlighting the need to enhance cooperation; and recognizing small island countries and countries with economies in transition. A delegate, supported by many, suggested an alternate paragraph recognizing that parties may not yet have necessary capacities to fully implement the GBF, and highlighting the need to enhance cooperation to solve these capacity gaps.

After a lengthy debate on whether to delete a preambular paragraph on the UN Summit on Biodiversity, with some stressing the importance of this high-level meeting and the discussions on capacity building, delegates decided to retain it, and include a reference to its summary. Regarding a paragraph welcoming partnerships, delegates agreed to keep the scope general, adding support for capacity building, and technical and scientific cooperation; and deleting reference to specific examples.

Delegates debated a preambular paragraph, proposed by the Co-Chairs, acknowledging the importance of increasing the provision and mobilization of resources from all sources for

effective GBF implementation. Specific references to developing countries and the monitoring framework remain in brackets.

On the first operative part on capacity building and development, regarding a paragraph on the long-term strategic framework on capacity building, a regional group asked to support priorities determined by parties in their NBSAPs, with some expressing concerns about delays to updates of NBSAPs. Delegates agreed to refer “in particular” to those priorities covered in NBSAPs. Delegates determined to keep the operative words for this and other provisions in brackets as long as respective annexes and documents remain under development and negotiation.

On the second operative part on technical and scientific cooperation, a Friends of the Chair informal group reported back on its deliberations, recommending to fast track the review process of technical and scientific cooperation programmes before COP-15 and to make the report available there. Delegates agreed to a new operative paragraph requesting that the Executive Secretary commission the review during the intersessional period.

Delegates spent the remaining time considering alternative paragraphs as fall-back options, in case the review process cannot be completed by COP-15. Some delegates expressed concerns selecting an alternative mechanism when it might not be needed, while others pointed out that a transition period might be necessary. Others asked to bracket the alternative provisions since it is unclear whether they would be needed at COP-15. Following a number of revisions to a second alternative paragraph, delegates agreed to maintain both provisions as alternatives.

Co-Chair Haanstra said that this meeting concluded the contact group negotiations. One delegation expressed disappointment that while some parties keep calling for a high level of ambition, the same is not displayed in terms of provision of means of implementation. He warned that this can affect parties' willingness to adopt an ambitious GBF.

In the Corridors

Some wines don't get better as they age. Four years of consultations and a week of the Geneva Biodiversity Conference finally brought a sliver of true negotiations on Saturday, on GBF targets. But considering that the SBSTTA plenary barely got through one of four preliminary documents, observers could be forgiven for wondering: what, if anything, have the past six days accomplished other than hours of statements and little negotiation?

There are those who remind delegates of the immense work done so far, and urge them not to waste it. But others could barely contain their frustration: “Six days just to hear the same statements we've been repeating since 2019,” quipped an anonymous participant. “The more we change things, the more we are reverting to the original.” “Everyone knows we're nowhere, and everyone knows we haven't even touched the complicated stuff,” said one resigned delegate. “Next week is everything we've been putting off—DSI, means of implementation, targets on resource mobilization.” Delegates are under serious pressure to deliver a framework draft for the COP, if only because “no one can afford another working group meeting—literally, for some.”

It will all come down to the last week, and the last plenaries, then. If parties are waiting until their back is to the wall before making tough concessions, one weathered insider warned, it will be a long final night. And every roadblock here lengthens the path to success in Kunming. No-one can predict the outcome, yet everyone knows we must change our *modus operandi* in the weeks ahead. One thing for sure is that everyone deserves a good break away from it all and to pause and exhale all the suppressed emotions. For when comes Monday, one said, we shall press fast forward after the pause.