



Biodiversity COP 16: Important agreements reached towards making peace with nature

The UN biodiversity summit known as COP16 officially opened in Colombia in October 2024, and negotiating countries can agree on a path forward to safeguarding the planet. Considered the world's most important event to conserve biodiversity, the summit is taking place in Cali, the third largest city of the South American nation, and will host some 15,000 attendees, including a dozen heads of State, 103 ministers and over 1,000 international journalists. The summit aimed to promote international cooperation, agree on investments to protect ecosystems and strengthen global environmental policies, COP16 takes as its roadmap the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework (GBF), a landmark plan to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity for 2030, adopted at COP15 in Canada.

Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) since its adoption at COP 15 in 2022. COP 16 acknowledged the progress made in the previous two years and highlighted the need to accelerate action. To date, 119 countries, representing the majority of the 196 Parties to the CBD, submitted national biodiversity targets reflecting alignment with the KMGBF. Additionally, 44 countries submitted National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) - the policy documents that support the implementation of national targets.

THE CALI FUND

Having agreed at COP 15 to establish a multilateral mechanism, including a global fund, to share the benefits from uses of digital sequence information on genetic resources (DSI) more fairly and equitably, delegates at COP 16 advanced its operationalization – a historic decision of global importance. This complex decision addresses how pharmaceutical, biotechnology, animal and plant breeding and other industries benefiting from DSI should share those benefits with developing countries and Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Under the agreed guidelines, large companies and other major entities benefiting commercially from DSI uses should contribute to “the Cali Fund,” based on a percentage of their profits or revenues. The model targets larger companies most reliant

on DSI and exempts academic, public research institutions and other entities using DSI but not directly benefiting. Developing world countries will benefit from a large part of this fund, with allocations to support implementation of the KMGBF, according to the priorities of those governments.

At least half of the funding is expected to support the self-identified needs of indigenous peoples and local communities, including women and youth within those communities, through government or by direct payments through institutions identified by indigenous peoples and local communities. Some funds may support capacity building and technology transfer. Strong monitoring and reporting will ensure industries see the impact of their contributions in a transparent and open way, and regular reviews will build the mechanism's efficiency and efficacy over time. This agreement marks a precedent for benefit-sharing in biodiversity conservation with a fund designed to return some of the proceeds from the use of biodiversity to protect and restore nature where help is needed most.

Strengthen the role of indigenous people and local communities

In a landmark decision at COP 16, Parties adopted a new Programme of Work on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention related to indigenous peoples and local communities. This transformative programme sets out specific tasks to ensure the meaningful contribution of indigenous peoples and local communities towards the three objectives of the Convention (a) the conservation of biological diversity, b) the sustainable use of biological diversity, and c) the fair and equitable sharing of benefits), as well as the implementation of the KMGBF. Through this Programme, rights, contributions and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities are further embedded in the global agenda.

Parties also agreed to establish a new permanent subsidiary body on article 8j and other Provisions, with its *modus operandi* to be developed over the next two years. The new Subsidiary Body is expected to elevate issues related to the implementation of Article 8j and enhance the engagement and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in all convention processes. A further decision was taken to recognize the role of people of African descent, comprising collectives embodying traditional lifestyles, in implementing the Convention and in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

COP 16 adopted a landmark decision on Biodiversity and Climate Change with an important reference to the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus. The text notably calls upon the Presidents of COP 16 of the CBD and COP 29 and COP 30 of the UNFCCC to strengthen multilateral coordination. The



decision also requests the Executive Secretary of the CBD to invite Parties, observers and other stakeholders to submit (by May 2025) their views on options for enhanced policy coherence, including a potential joint work programme of the three Rio conventions, namely CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD. It is well established that biodiversity loss and climate change are correlated and mutually reinforcing. A thriving nature keeps carbon stored where it naturally belongs and not in our planet's atmosphere. Biodiversity enhances adaptation capacity and resilience, including in disaster-risk reduction. Climate change, on the other hand, is one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss.

PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY CONSIDERATION

Synthetic biology was a prominent topic at COP 16, with an eye toward its potential benefits while considering the risks. To address inequity in the participation of developing countries in the synthetic biology field, the decision introduces a new thematic action plan to help address the capacity-building, technology transfer and knowledge-sharing needs of Parties, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. By helping countries assess and apply synthetic biology technologies, COP 16 aims to foster innovation while safeguarding biodiversity. An expert group will guide identification of synthetic biology's potential benefits and review the potential impacts of recent technological developments – a unique opportunity to explore synthetic biology in relation to the CBD's three fundamental objectives and in implementing the KMGBF.

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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CAPACITY-BUILDING, TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

COP 16 adopted decisions to further guide action on capacity building and development, technical and scientific cooperation (TSC), knowledge management (KM) and the clearing-house mechanism (CHM) to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). With respect to capacity building and development, COP 16 invited Parties, indigenous peoples and local communities, and relevant stakeholders to share information about their capacity needs and their ongoing and planned capacity-building and development activities and requested the Secretariat to make this information available through the central portal of the clearing-house mechanism (CHM). The Secretariat was also requested to implement joint capacity-building activities with the Secretariats of the Rio conventions and the biodiversity-related conventions.



COP 16 welcomed the 18 subregional technical and scientific cooperation support centres (TSCCs) that were selected to support Parties to effectively utilize science, technology, and innovation in the implementation of the KMGBF. It also adopted modalities for operationalizing the global coordination entity and mandated the CBD Secretariat to host it. The entity will coordinate and facilitate the work of the TSCCs, including through providing them with access to relevant information, tools, advice, technical support and additional resources for their work and will be accountable to the COP.

The Parties also decided that the review of progress in the implementation of the long-term strategic framework for capacity building and development and the technical and scientific cooperation mechanism will be conducted in conjunction with the process for the global review of collective progress in the implementation of the KMGBF. The Parties also adopted a new programme of work for the CHM and a knowledge management strategy to support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

ECOLOGICALLY OR BIOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT MARINE AREAS

COP 16 agreed on a new and evolved process to identify ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs). Under the CBD, work on EBSAs, which identifies the most critical and vulnerable parts of the ocean, began in 2010 and became a central area of onean-related work. Continued development of the programme was stymied for more than 8 years due to legal and political concerns.

COP 16 gave new life to this process, agreeing on new mechanisms to identify new EBSAs and update existing ones, ensuring that the cataloging of information of these areas can support planning and management with the most advanced science and knowledge available. This comes at a time when EBSAs can play an important role for marine biodiversity protection, with major steps being taken to implement the 30x30 protected areas target and to prepare for the future implementation of the new agreement for marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND PLANT CONSERVATION

Among the most crucial areas of discussion was the protection of wild species. A decision on sustainable wildlife management underscores the necessity of monitoring, capacity-building, and the inclusive participation of indigenous peoples, local communities, and women. To this end, the decision calls for the cooperation of international bodies like CITES and FAO to implement. The framework encourages research on how wildlife use, biodiversity loss, and zoonotic diseases are interconnected, a vital area for a world increasingly aware of the public health implications of biodiversity loss.

Additionally, COP 16 saw a commitment to align plant conservation efforts with the KMGBF monitoring framework. This includes updating the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation with specific indicators and a standardized reporting template, ensuring that progress in plant protection is measurable and consistent with global biodiversity targets.

At COP 16, CBD Parties approved a Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health designed to help curb the emergence of zoonotic diseases, prevent non-communicable diseases, and promote sustainable ecosystems. The strategy embraces a holistic “One Health” approach that recognizes the health of ecosystems, animals, and humans as interconnected. Recognizing that biodiversity loss and poor health often share common drivers - such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change - the Plan emphasizes the urgency of tackling these threats to benefit both ecosystems and humans. The strategy underlines the need for education and promoting understanding of the connections between biodiversity and health, and the need to strengthen policies that promote sustainable ecosystems, support traditional medicine, and reduce habitat destruction. Special attention is accorded to vulnerable populations, including Indigenous peoples, who depend on local biodiversity for food, medicine, and cultural identity, as well as youth, seen as vital contributors to conservation and health initiatives.

At the heart of the plan is a collaborative framework that brings together health professionals, conservationists, and policymakers. The COP decision invites nations to designate national focal points for biodiversity and health, and to develop policies reflecting these interconnections, integrating biodiversity-health considerations in policies across the range of sectors from agriculture to urban planning. Parties further called for close cooperation with international organizations, including the World Health Organization, to develop monitoring tools and metrics for assessing the progress of biodiversity-health initiatives.

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PARTICIPATION OF THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION AT COP16

Participating in COP16, the Vietnamese Delegation including representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs... attended high-level meetings with the theme “Peace with Nature”, including Ministerial dialogues with topics on: Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF); Biodiversity Finance; Biodiversity and Climate Change... During the COP16, members of the Delegation actively participated in meetings, commented on developments, and grasped the views of each country and groups of countries, exchanged ideas to contribute to the development of COP16 decisions.

In particular, the Vietnamese Delegation participated in and co-chaired the high-level dialogue event with the theme “Integrating biodiversity within and between sectors to prevent and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030”. At this dialogue, Vietnamese representatives shared



▲ *The Vietnamese Delegation at COP16*

about Vietnam’s experiences in integrating goals and contents of biodiversity protection in the fisheries sector. Many major guidelines and policies issued by the Central, Government, Ministries, and local levels have mentioned and integrated the task of protecting biodiversity into activities of the fisheries sector. Representatives of countries and organizations co-chairing the event also shared their experiences in integrating biodiversity protection goals into other sectors such as agriculture, tourism, forestry, etc. Through this event, Vietnamese representatives informed international friends about Vietnam’s responsibility and efforts in protecting marine biodiversity, protecting aquatic resources, and contributing to creating a “peace with nature” planet.

On the sidelines of the Conference, the Vietnamese Delegation also had bilateral meetings and working sessions with organizations and partners. The Delegation worked with the Asia Regional Coordinator of the Biodiversity Integrated Programs of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to discuss GEF’s orientation for the next cycle; update the financial mobilization situation and calls for proposals of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF); assess Vietnam’s priorities for biodiversity conservation. The Delegation worked with the Secretary of the UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) to discuss the implementation of the MAB Programme in Vietnam; the direction of the UNESCO’s MAB Programme for the assessment of damage after Typhoon Yagi to a number of biosphere reserves; update the plan to organize the Fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in China and approve the MAB Strategy for 2025 - 2035. The Delegation worked and met bilaterally with representatives of the United States WWF to discuss progress in developing the Project Document “Enhancing biodiversity conservation and reducing climate vulnerability in Central Vietnam for sustainable development utilizing a landscape approach”. Through these events, the Vietnamese Delegation informed international friends about Vietnam’s responsibility and efforts in protecting biodiversity, contributing to creating a “peace with nature” planet ■

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