Outcomes of the CBD SBSTTA24 and SBI3 virtual meetings

A crisis of climate change and nature loss

We are at a crossroads of an interconnected, double crisis of climate change and nature loss. The recent joint IPBES-IPCC report is clear: Biodiversity loss and climate change are both driven by human economic activities and mutually reinforce each other. Neither will be successfully resolved unless both are tackled together. The most vulnerable and marginalised people and communities suffer most from this crisis and from the absence of urgent action.

The Leaders Pledge for Nature, the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, the recent G7 Climate and Energy Ministers’ communique and the G7 leaders’ Nature Compact provide the high level direction that is needed by committing to reverse biodiversity loss and be nature positive by 2030. We urgently need to translate these commitments into concrete actions and specific agreements. Currently, countries are collectively failing to do so, thereby putting nature, climate and people at risk, and increasing the chances of future zoonotic pandemics. For example, with huge investments in fossil fuels, the economic recovery packages not only are an important missed opportunity but are bringing us to a point of no return, according to António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations.

The outcomes of CBD SBSTTA24 and SBI3

The virtual CBD SBSTTA-24 and SBI-3 meetings, which recently concluded, saw little progress towards agreement on actions needed to address the urgent challenge of biodiversity loss. Although some progress was made on clarifying positions and issues, parties continue to express divergent views and very different levels of ambition on key issues such as addressing the footprint of our production and consumption, including the transformation of food systems and productive sectors, a comprehensive and ambitious resource mobilisation agenda, a transparent implementation and accountability mechanism, and the integration of a rights based approach in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. As a result, the overall level of ambition continues to be too low and does not reflect the high level commitments expressed by heads of state and government in the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature and the G7 Nature Compact.

The process urgently needs to move beyond the current zero-sum game discussions and procedural distractions and focus on the critical issues that need to be addressed, including the mission, goals, targets, headline indicators, implementation mechanism and means of implementation. These elements need to be dealt with as a comprehensive package. Leadership is required to facilitate negotiations towards an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that will be fit for addressing the current biodiversity loss crisis and its key drivers.

Real negotiations are seriously hampered by the virtual setting

Conducting SBSTTA/SBI virtually was a practical solution showing a collective willingness to respond to travel constraints due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also an experiment for future low-carbon
negotiations. However, while learning together, the virtual setting of the CBD meetings became an important reason for the absence of real advancements and much needed convergence on complex issues, notwithstanding the great efforts of many Parties. Problems of connectivity, frequent work in unfavourable time zones and the absence of ‘corridors’ that provide opportunities for informal exchanges, all put considerable strain on the negotiators and observers.

Some have pointed out that these challenges reinforced existing inequalities between parties to engage in the negotiations and to do so in an informed manner.

We also note that the virtual setting is a particular disadvantage for observers: sessions frequently run out of time and observer interventions were sometimes the first to be sacrificed.

The road ahead

The global pandemic crisis has significantly changed the scope and timeline of how best to organise a comprehensive and participatory process for the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. A negotiator “Called on all countries to do our part to reach better consensus because it is urgent to take action …. Nature is asking us”.

The time and opportunities for negotiations ahead of COP15 is extremely limited. We need the collective courage of parties and all stakeholders to be creative, innovative and bold to find opportunities and pathways that can ensure an inclusive and collectively-owned process to agree on an ambitious and transformative post-2020 global biodiversity framework as soon as possible for the benefit of nature, climate and people. This would require:

- The urgent design of a credible timeline and clearly laid out concrete steps from now to COP15 that will use virtual meetings as well as other modalities to strengthen parties convergence,
- A date and modality for COP15 that will allow for a physical meeting of Parties and observers to agree on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework,
- Ensuring that the process is inclusive and transparent, that all parties can participate on equal footing and observers, notably IPLC and other right holders, can have their voices heard.

The acceleration of vaccination coverage worldwide will be key to enabling in-person negotiations as soon as possible. G7 leaders last week already committed to 1 billion vaccine doses donations for developing countries and the poorest. All CBD parties need to work together to ensure safe and timely physical negotiations to urgently tackle intertwined nature, climate and health challenges.

For more information
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