

# International politics on biodiversity conservation

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*Source: Adams, S., 2022.*

Since 1970, global wildlife populations have declined by two thirds. Of the eight million plant and animal species present on Earth, one million are threatened with going extinct within the coming decades. This loss constitutes a huge threat to human civilisation. In this editorial we will explore the importance of conserving biodiversity for human civilisation, and the current state of international politics on biodiversity conservation.

What explains the huge unprecedented loss in biological diversity over the last few decades are a number of human activities: mainly overconsumption, conversion of natural habitats to human-dominated ecosystems, intensive agriculture, the introduction of invasive species, the overexploitation of valuable species, and climate change. These activities themselves are at the core of the current system of functioning of human economies and societies. This shows the complexity of globally implementing pathways to resolve the ecological crisis.

In December 2022, world leaders gathered in Montreal to discuss international progress made on biodiversity conservation, at the COP15 UN Biodiversity Conference. International meetings on biodiversity are held yearly since the signing of the Convention on Biological

Diversity (CBD) in 1992, but the 2022 negotiation was a key meeting for the discussion of the progress on the 2010-2020 biodiversity-focused Aichi goals. The CBD is composed of 196 member states, which includes all UN member states apart from the US. Nevertheless, a special biodiversity envoy was sent to represent the US in Montreal in 2022, a positive expression of the US's commitment to nature. The Aichi targets' year of achievement was 2020 but the meeting was postponed to 2022 due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Similarly to the Sustainable Development Goals - or the SDGs, as they are more commonly referred to -, the Aichi Targets are broad and target different areas that have a significant effect on biodiversity. These areas are for example consumption and production, and pollution. Alarmingly, the progress made on the 20 Aichi targets by 2020 was minimal, with the world failing to meet each one of the targets by 2020. This means that we are internationally failing to protect biological diversity, and therefore also failing to secure a liveable future for future human generations.

Biodiversity is at the core of the wellbeing of human societies. Biodiversity is essential for food security. This is firstly because biodiversity is inextricably linked to our ability to produce and grow food. Moreover, biodiversity is closely linked to our access to clean water. One key factor explaining this is microbes' filtering out microscopic particles from the water and making it safe for humans to drink. Biodiversity also provides us with clean air, due to trees and other vegetations' absorption of pollutants through their leaves and needles. All in all, the potential loss of one million species within the next couple of decades indicates that the liveability of the planet for human societies is under threat. Apart from biodiversity's instrumental use for humans' ability to survive on the planet, biodiversity deserves respect and protection due to its intrinsic value and due to animal and plant species' inherent right to continue to exist as species. This is important to mention as value systems within current human societies partly explain the current crisis we are in. Our destruction of biodiversity is tightly linked to our culture's lack of belief in both the instrumental and intrinsic value of biodiversity.

Having shown why preserving biodiversity is key to human societies' survival, we can now look more specifically at the causes for the world's lack of progress on the Aichi targets during the last decade. There are two main reasons for the targets' failure to lead to sufficient global action for biodiversity. Firstly, there was a lack of monitoring and reporting of the Aichi targets. National policies and legislations were not well aligned with global commitments, for instance with national actions not addressing all elements of the individual Aichi targets. This is linked to an absence of tools to measure the effectiveness of strategies and policy instruments toward biodiversity goals. That future targets be measurable and quantifiable is essential to their successful achievement.

Secondly, financial resources deployed toward biodiversity action were found to be insufficient at all levels of governmental activities among members of the CBD. This highlights a

lack of political will and ambition, with actions thereby showing insufficient national commitment to achieving the Aichi targets. Insufficient action means an insufficient prioritisation of biodiversity within governmental spendings. Given the non-binding character of the Aichi targets, actions taken at national levels depend on the willingness of states to act. Research has found states' insufficient willingness to act to be linked to their lack of understanding of the role of biodiversity in global issues and of its close link with global warming.

At the COP15 Biodiversity Conference, world leaders also negotiated toward a new set of goals to be achieved by 2030. These are referred to as the post-2020 Biodiversity framework. One positive aspect about the negotiations on future goals, was that, as opposed to previous international meetings, there were discussions of methods of implementation of targets alongside the usual discussions of ambitions and goals. Another victory was the inclusion of Indigenous peoples as part of strategies to protect biodiversity. Indigenous peoples are widely recognised by scientists as the best stewards of nature, and thereby as key to conservation efforts. In the final post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, there were 18 mentions of Indigenous peoples to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. Another positive result of negotiations was the agreement to conserve 30% of the Earth's land for nature, by 2030, whilst respecting indigenous and traditional territories.



Source: *The Nature Conservancy, n.a..*

One step that will facilitate achieving the biodiversity goals for 2030 is governments making connections between all the targets, and between actions within different areas. The CBD has advised that each area within the Aichi targets can only be tackled effectively by simultaneously taking action in other areas. For example, restoration efforts can be successful only if coupled with strategies to transform the global food system that is currently driving forest loss. When there is a satisfactory understanding of the value of biodiversity and of the connectivity between solutions, CBD members can hope to succeed in meeting global targets. This will depend on a more robust integration of different knowledges within future policies.

Another important step for achieving the post-2020 Biodiversity goals is the improvement of data about our planet. This will create satisfactory monitoring of for instance deforestation or nature-based solutions. The absence of tools to evaluate the effectiveness of measures and policies was a core reason for the failure to meet all Aichi Targets. Finally, both political ambition and financial resources for biodiversity at all levels are essential. Connected to this is the need to replace subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity with subsidies that have a positive impact on biodiversity. Positively, governments came to an agreement at COP15 to reform environmental subsidies for nature.

Biodiversity needs to be prioritised at an equal level with climate change. Though international governmental action on climate change has been very insufficient, biodiversity has been viewed as a lower priority, for instance illustrated by the lack of awareness of international biodiversity goals and negotiations within civil society. But both our climate and biodiversity depend on each other.

All of these strategies require involvement and motivation at all levels of society: NGOs, businesses, civil society, government. Action across all sectors and levels of society and policy coherence through connectivity between targets and individual policies will create transformative change. Transformative change across economic, social and political factors was described by the IPBES - the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - as the necessary step to halt biodiversity loss.

To conclude, the coming decade is key. International politics on biodiversity have been failing for two decades to engage governments to take the necessary actions to protect biodiversity. It is critical to the liveability of our planet that the coming decade be shaped by a range of significant actions taken for biodiversity. A cultural shift in values can have a hugely positive impact: the recognition of the value of biodiversity by businesses, civil society, and governments would catalyse change. The Aichi Target 1, on awareness of the essential role of biodiversity, was a target that saw a good amount of progress. This is a sign for hope. As civil society, we can take part in initiatives which protect biodiversity and which put pressure on businesses and governments to act accordingly with the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework.

<b>Target 1</b>	Ensure that all areas are under participatory, integrated and biodiversity inclusive spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land- and sea-use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity, close to zero by 2030, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.
<b>Target 2</b>	Ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.
<b>Target 3</b>	Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.
<b>Target 4</b>	Ensure urgent management actions to halt human induced extinction of known threatened species and for the recovery and conservation of species, in particular threatened species, to significantly reduce extinction risk, as well as to maintain and restore the genetic diversity within and between populations of native, wild and domesticated species to maintain their adaptive potential, including through in situ and ex situ conservation and sustainable management practices, and effectively manage human-wildlife interactions to minimize human-wildlife conflict for coexistence.
<b>Target 5</b>	Ensure that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe and legal, preventing overexploitation, minimizing impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and reducing the risk of pathogen spillover, applying the ecosystem approach, while respecting and protecting customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.
<b>Target 6</b>	Eliminate, minimize, reduce and or mitigate the impacts of invasive alien species on biodiversity and ecosystem services by identifying and managing pathways of the introduction of alien species, preventing the introduction and establishment of priority invasive alien species, reducing the rates of introduction and establishment of other known or potential invasive alien species by at least 50 per cent by 2030, and eradicating or controlling invasive alien species, especially in priority sites, such as islands.
<b>Target 7</b>	Reduce pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, considering cumulative effects, including: (a) by reducing excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, including through more efficient nutrient cycling and use; (b) by reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half, including through integrated pest management, based on science, taking into account food security and livelihoods; and (c) by preventing, reducing, and working towards eliminating plastic pollution.
<b>Target 8</b>	Minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and increase its resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction actions, including through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches, while minimizing negative and fostering positive impacts of climate action on biodiversity.
<b>Target 9</b>	Ensure that the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products and services that enhance biodiversity, and protecting and encouraging customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.
<b>Target 10</b>	Ensure that areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the sustainable use of biodiversity, including through a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification, agroecological and other innovative approaches, contributing to the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems, and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services.
<b>Target 11</b>	Restore, maintain and enhance nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, such as the regulation of air, water and climate, soil health, pollination and reduction of disease risk, as well as protection from natural hazards and disasters, through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches for the benefit of all people and nature.
<b>Target 12</b>	Significantly increase the area and quality, and connectivity of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas sustainably, by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, enhancing native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity, and improving human health and well-being and connection to nature, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable urbanization and to the provision of ecosystem functions and services.
<b>Target 13</b>	Take effective legal, policy, administrative and capacity-building measures at all levels, as appropriate, to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources and from digital sequence information on genetic resources, as well as traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources, and facilitating appropriate access to genetic resources, and by 2030, facilitating a significant increase of the benefits shared, in accordance with applicable international access and benefit-sharing instruments.
<b>Target 14</b>	Ensure the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning and development processes, poverty eradication strategies, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and, as appropriate, national accounting, within and across all levels of government and across all sectors, in particular those with significant impacts on biodiversity, progressively aligning all relevant public and private activities, and fiscal and financial flows with the goals and targets of this framework.
<b>Target 15</b>	Take legal, administrative or policy measures to encourage and enable business, and in particular to ensure that large and transnational companies and financial institutions: (a) Regularly monitor, assess, and transparently disclose their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity, including with requirements for all large as well as transnational companies and financial institutions along their operations, supply and value chains, and portfolios; (b) Provide information needed to consumers to promote sustainable consumption patterns; (c) Report on compliance with access and benefit-sharing regulations and measures, as applicable; in order to progressively reduce negative impacts on biodiversity, increase positive impacts, reduce biodiversity-related risks to business and financial institutions, and promote actions to ensure sustainable patterns of production.
<b>Target 16</b>	Ensure that people are encouraged and enabled to make sustainable consumption choices, including by establishing supportive policy, legislative or regulatory frameworks, improving education and access to relevant and accurate information and alternatives, and by 2030, reduce the global footprint of consumption in an equitable manner, including through halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and substantially reducing waste generation, in order for all people to live well in harmony with Mother Earth.

<b>Target 17</b>	Establish, strengthen capacity for, and implement in all countries, biosafety measures as set out in Article 8(g) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and measures for the handling of biotechnology and distribution of its benefits as set out in Article 19 of the Convention.
<b>Target 18</b>	Identify by 2025, and eliminate, phase out or reform incentives, including subsidies, harmful for biodiversity, in a proportionate, just, fair, effective and equitable way, while substantially and progressively reducing them by at least \$500 billion per year by 2030, starting with the most harmful incentives, and scale up positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
<b>Target 19</b>	Substantially and progressively increase the level of financial resources from all sources, in an effective, timely and easily accessible manner, including domestic, international, public and private resources, in accordance with Article 20 of the Convention, to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, mobilizing at least \$200 billion per year by 2030, including by: (a) Increasing total biodiversity related international financial resources from developed countries, including official development assistance, and from countries that voluntarily assume obligations of developed country Parties, to developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and small island developing States, as well as countries with economies in transition, to at least \$20 billion per year by 2025, and to at least \$30 billion per year by 2030; (b) Significantly increasing domestic resource mobilization, facilitated by the preparation and implementation of national biodiversity finance plans or similar instruments according to national needs, priorities and circumstances; (c) Leveraging private finance, promoting blended finance, implementing strategies for raising new and additional resources, and encouraging the private sector to invest in biodiversity, including through impact funds and other instruments; (d) Stimulating innovative schemes such as payment for ecosystem services, green bonds, biodiversity offsets and credits, and benefit-sharing mechanisms, with environmental and social safeguards; (e) Optimizing co-benefits and synergies of finance targeting the biodiversity and climate crises; (f) Enhancing the role of collective actions, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, Mother Earth centric actions <sup>[1]</sup> and non-market-based approaches including community based natural resource management and civil society cooperation and solidarity aimed at the conservation of biodiversity; (g) Enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of resource provision and use.
<b>Target 20</b>	Strengthen capacity-building and development, access to and transfer of technology, and promote development of and access to innovation and technical and scientific cooperation, including through South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation, to meet the needs for effective implementation, particularly in developing countries, fostering joint technology development and joint scientific research programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and strengthening scientific research and monitoring capacities, commensurate with the ambition of the goals and targets of the Framework.
<b>Target 21</b>	Ensure that the best available data, information and knowledge are accessible to decision makers, practitioners and the public to guide effective and equitable governance, integrated and participatory management of biodiversity, and to strengthen communication, awareness-raising, education, monitoring, research and knowledge management and, also in this context, traditional knowledge, innovations, practices and technologies of indigenous peoples and local communities should only be accessed with their free, prior and informed consent, <sup>[2]</sup> in accordance with national legislation.
<b>Target 22</b>	Ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge, as well as by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities and ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders.
<b>Target 23</b>	Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the Framework through a gender-responsive approach, where all women and girls have equal opportunity and capacity to contribute to the three objectives of the Convention, including by recognizing their equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-making related to biodiversity.

*The 23 Biodiversity targets for 2030, from the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework. Source: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022.*

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