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# COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Item 15 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Eighteenth Regular Session**

**27 September – 1 October 2021**

**REPORT FROM THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

*Documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)*

## **OVERVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS UNDER THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND ITS PROTOCOLS OF RELEVANCE TO THE COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

1. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is providing this brief report for the information of the Eighteenth Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA).
2. The report covers activities since the Seventeenth Regular Session of the CGRFA and focusses on inter-sessional activities relevant to the prioritized themes of the Eighteenth Regular Session of the CGRFA as requested by its Secretariat.
3. The report provides information on activities undertaken further to outcomes from:
  - the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP-14),
  - the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP 9), and
  - the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on ABS (COP-MOP 3).

These meetings were held concurrently in November 2018 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

4. Due to the ongoing global pandemic, the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, the tenth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol and the fourth meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol, originally scheduled to be held in October 2020 in Kunming, China, will now be held in two parts. The first part will be held virtually starting on 11 October 2021.

### **Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and Global Biodiversity Outlook, fifth edition**

5. The fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5), based on the national reports provided by Parties to the Convention and on a range of indicators, research studies and assessments (including the State of the World Reports prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) concluded that at the global level, none of the 20 targets contained in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity had been fully achieved, including targets 6 (sustainable management of aquatic living resources), 7 (sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and forestry) and 13 (safeguarding genetic diversity). However, despite the limited achievement globally, the Outlook also documented important examples of actions in support of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 which have generated successful outcomes. Therefore, the overall picture provided by the Outlook was one of progress, but at levels generally insufficient to achieve the ambitions set out in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020.
6. GBO-5 also provided evidence illustrating, that despite the failure to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, it is not too late to slow, halt and eventually reverse current trends in the decline of biodiversity. Moreover, the actions required to achieve this turnaround (or ‘bending the curve’ of biodiversity decline, as it has been termed), are fully consistent with, and indeed crucial components of, the goals and targets set out under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Realising such a shift will require transitions in a number of key areas, including transformations in the production of goods and services, especially food. This will include adopting agricultural methods that can meet growing global demand while imposing fewer negative impacts on the environment, and reducing the pressure to convert more land to production. Transformations are similarly needed to limit the demand for increased food production by adopting healthier diets and reducing food waste, and also in limiting the consumption of other material goods and services affecting biodiversity, for example in forestry, energy and provision of fresh water. Each of these areas of action relies on very substantial changes and innovations, implemented on a short timescale and involving a wide range of actors at all scales and across all sectors of society.

### **Development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework**

7. In decision 13/34, the COP established an open-ended intersessional working group to support the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. This working group, known as the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (WG2020), has met twice since its inception. The first meeting of WG2020 was held in August 2019 at the Headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi, Kenya, and the second meeting took place in February 2020 at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy. The third meeting of WG2020 was postponed due to the pandemic and is now scheduled to take place virtually from 23 August to 3 September 2021.

8. In addition to the formal meetings of the Working Group, numerous consultation sessions have been held and there have been multiple rounds of submissions, including from the Commission Secretariat and FAO, as well as peer review comments leading to the Zero Draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (published in January 2020) and the Updated Zero Draft (released in August 2020). Additional input was provided during the virtual sessions of the twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-24) and the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-3), held in May-June 2021.

9. The result of this work is the First Draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which was released on 12 July 2021 in all six UN languages (CBD/WG2020/3/3) and will be discussed at the third meeting of the Working Group.

10. The framework is intended to set out an ambitious plan to implement broad-based action to transform society's relationship with biodiversity and ensure that, by 2050, the vision of living in harmony with nature is fulfilled. Many of the goals, milestones and targets set out in the First Draft are related to food and agriculture.

11. All information on the preparations for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework can be found at: <https://www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020>.

### **United Nations Summit on Biodiversity**

12. In decision 14/34, the COP invited the General Assembly of the United Nations to convene a high-level biodiversity summit at the level of Heads of State/Heads of Government in 2020 in order to raise the political visibility of biodiversity and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the development of a robust post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

13. The United Nations Summit on Biodiversity was convened by the President of the General Assembly on 30 September 2020, at the level of Heads of State and Government under the theme of "Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development." The Summit highlighted the crisis facing humanity from the degradation of biodiversity and the urgent need to accelerate action on biodiversity for sustainable development. It provided an opportunity for Heads of State and Government and other leaders to raise ambition for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties. Member States, observer States and the European Union submitted pre-recorded statements of their Head of State / Government, ministers or other head of delegation, which was played in the General Assembly Hall. The recording of the Summit and summary of the meeting can be accessed online on the web portal of the President of the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>1</sup> In preparation for the Summit, the Secretariat co-chaired with UNEP, the inter-agency task force that supported the Office of the President of the General Assembly in preparing the Summit. Through an interagency team including FAO, the Secretariat also contributed to the drafting of the President's report of the Summit. Further information, including links to individual statements, is also provided on the CBD website.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Summit on Biodiversity – Summary, online: <https://www.un.org/pga/75/united-nations-summit-on-biodiversity>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/article/2020-UN-Biodiversity-Summit>

### **Soil biodiversity**

14. In response to decision 14/30 (paras 23 and 24), the Secretariat prepared a review of the implementation of the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity and an updated draft plan of action (CBD/SBSTTA/24/7), in consultation with the FAO, for consideration by the SBSTTA at its twenty-fourth meeting. This pre-session document was revised (CBD/SBSTTA/24/7/Rev1) to include an updated version of the summary for policymakers, in line with the report on The State of Knowledge of Soil Biodiversity: Status, Challenges and Potentialities, prepared by FAO in collaboration with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils of the Global Soil Partnership, the Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative, the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Due to the changing timeline caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a presentation was prepared for the SBSTTA-24 briefing webinars that were held between January and February 2021. The pre-session document was subsequently discussed during the informal and formal virtual sessions of SBSTTA 24, held in February and May-June respectively, with a view to adopt the 2020–2030 plan of action for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity at COP-15.

15. A draft recommendation on this matter was prepared during the virtual formal session of SBSTTA-24 (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L.7) for formal adoption during a resumed session of SBSTTA-24 to be convened at a later stage.

### **Climate change and biodiversity**

16. In response to decision 14/5, the Secretariat prepared a review of new scientific and technical information on biodiversity and climate change and its implications for the work of the Convention for consideration of the twenty-third meeting of SBSTTA. Based on this review, SBSTTA-23 adopted recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/REC/23/2, which includes a draft decision for consideration by COP-

17. Furthermore, the Secretariat revised, updated, edited and published the report on the voluntary guidelines for the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and supplementary information (available in CBD Technical Series no. 93). These were launched during a special event on the margins of the Bonn Climate Change Conference (SB50) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in collaboration with GIZ in June 2019.

### **Health and biodiversity**

18. In line with decisions XII/21, XIII/6, and 14/4 of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, the Secretariat's programme of work in health and biodiversity aims to catalyse the mainstreaming of biodiversity and health linkages and accelerate efforts towards a biodiversity-inclusive One Health transition. In the light of the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, special virtual sessions of SBSTTA and SBI were convened in December 2020 to further discuss interlinkages between biodiversity and health, One Health, and the response to COVID-19 and pandemics. The Secretariat contributed to leading reference documents further investigating the link between biodiversity and zoonotic diseases, including (i) WHO/CBD Questions and Answers on Biodiversity and Infectious Diseases; (ii) The report of UNEP and the International Livestock Research Institute on Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic Diseases and How to Break the Chain of Transmission; (iii) The Joint Statement of the Collaborative Partnership for Sustainable Wildlife Management on The COVID-19 Challenge: Zoonotic Disease and Wildlife; (iv) The report on the Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics convened by IPBES.

19. During the virtual session of SBSTTA-24, the meeting considered an agenda item on biodiversity and health, including a draft Global Action Plan for Biodiversity and Health which aims to support Parties in implementing a biodiversity-inclusive One Health approach and a sustainable and inclusive recovery from COVID-19, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see document CBD/SBSTTA/24/9). This Global Action Plan for Biodiversity and Health is expected to be endorsed by the CBD Parties at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Deliberations on this matter will continue when SBSTTA-24 resumes at a later date.

### **Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and partnerships**

20. The Executive Secretary submitted a report on cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) at its third meeting.<sup>3</sup> The SBI was also provided for its consideration: a report of activities concerning cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives;<sup>4</sup> a progress report on implementation of actions to enhance synergies among the biodiversity-related conventions at the international level during the period 2017 to 2020;<sup>5</sup> a report on the Collaborative Partnership on Forests Work Plan 2021–2024;<sup>6</sup> and the report of the Second Consultation Workshop of Biodiversity-related Conventions on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (Bern II).<sup>7</sup> A report by FAO providing an update on the work of FAO on mainstreaming and the integration of biodiversity within and across agriculture, forestry and fisheries was presented to SBSTTA-24 and SBI 3.<sup>8</sup> The agenda item will be further discussed at the resumed session of the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation, where it is expected that the Subsidiary Body will prepare a recommendation on cooperation for the consideration of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

21. In line with the request of the Conference of the Parties in paragraph 24 of decision 14/30, the Secretariat continued to work with FAO to promote mainstreaming biodiversity in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors. The Secretariat collaborated with FAO in relation to fisheries and aquaculture (including under the CBD Sustainable Ocean Initiative), ecosystem restoration, forest (including with the FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment team<sup>9</sup>), soil biodiversity (as reported above) and biodiversity mainstreaming, including in the context of the Revised 2021–2023 Action Plan for the Implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors. As members of the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions,<sup>10</sup> the Secretariats of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and CBD collaborated on issues of common interest and in support of the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.<sup>11</sup> IPPC and ITPGRFA Party representatives and Secretariats participated in the Bern workshops among biodiversity-related conventions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework held in June 2019 and January 2021. In line with the mandated relationship between ITPGRFA and CBD, the Secretariats continued to cooperate closely to support Contracting Parties in implementing the International Treaty and the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol in a harmonious and mutually supportive manner, including through capacity building. The report submitted by the CBD Secretariat to the eighth session of the Governing Body of ITPGRFA is available among the documents of that meeting.<sup>12</sup>

### **Digital sequence information on genetic resources**

22. COP-14 and Nagoya Protocol COP-MOP 3 adopted, respectively, decisions 14/20 and NP-3/12 on digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources. In paragraph 6 of decision 14/20, the Conference of the Parties noted that, as there is a divergence of views among Parties regarding benefit-sharing from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources, Parties commit to

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<sup>3</sup> CBD/SBI/3/10.

<sup>4</sup> CBD/SBI/3/INF/31.

<sup>5</sup> CBD/SBI/3/INF/32.

<sup>6</sup> CBD/SBI/3/INF/35.

<sup>7</sup> CBD/SBI/3/INF/29.

<sup>8</sup> CBD/SBSTTA/24/INF/14 and CBD/SBI/3/INF/6; a presentation was also prepared for the SBSTTA-24 briefing webinars.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, consult CBD/SBI/3/10 and CBD/SBI/3/INF/36.

<sup>10</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) and International Whaling Commission (IWC).

<sup>11</sup> Detailed information on collaborative activities are provided in CBD/SBI/3/10 and CBD/SBI/3/INF/31.

<sup>12</sup> The report of the CBD Secretariat on cooperation with ITPGRFA under document IT/GB-8/19/15.3/Inf.1, is available online at: <http://www.fao.org/3/na908en/na908en.pdf>

work towards resolving this divergence through the process established in the decision, with the aim of strengthening the fulfilment of the third objective of the Convention and Article 15, paragraph 7, without prejudice to the circumstances to which this article applies.

23. To this end, the decision established a science and policy-based process including the submission of views and information, the commissioning of a number of studies and the establishment of an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG). The AHTEG was to submit its outcomes for consideration by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. WG2020 is, in turn, to make recommendations to the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties on how to address digital sequence information on genetic resources in the context of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Furthermore, in decision NP-3/12, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol requested WG2020 to submit the outcome of its deliberations for consideration by COP-MOP 4.

24. The submission of views and information and the commissioning of the studies was undertaken in May to December 2019 and the outcomes were made available as documents for the AHTEG which met in March 2020. An expert from the Secretariat of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture participated in the meeting of the AHTEG. The AHTEG considered the submissions and the studies and developed options for operational terms, including consideration of their potential implications; and identified key areas for capacity-building.<sup>13</sup>

25. With the postponement of the third meeting of WG2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and at the request of the Co-Chairs of the Working Group, the Secretariat organized a series of webinars on DSI as well as an online discussion forum to facilitate informal information exchange and to maintain momentum on the issue. These informal activities were held between December 2020 and April 2021 and addressed the following topics:

- a) Webinar 1: Understanding DSI: a technical overview of its production, distribution and use (December 2020);
- b) Webinar 2: An overview of the process and recent outcomes related to digital sequence information on genetic resources under the Convention on Biological Diversity, with a focus on the outcomes of the AHTEG (December 2020);
- c) Webinar 3: Policy options for access and benefit-sharing, and digital sequence information on genetic resources (February 2021);
- d) Webinar 4: Criteria to consider policy options on digital sequence information on genetic resources (April 2021);
- e) Informal online discussion forum to exchange information and views on DSI policy options and criteria (April-May 2021).

26. As outlined above, the third meeting of WG2020 is now scheduled for 23 August to 3 September 2021 and an item on digital sequence information on genetic resources has been included on the agenda for the meeting. Document CBD/WG2020/3/4, including the outcomes of the AHTEG, has been prepared to assist the Working Group in its deliberations on this matter.

27. In addition, an information document containing an update and summary of activities on digital sequence information in other relevant international processes will be made available for the third meeting of the Working Group (CBD/WG2020/3/INF/1). This is further to the request in decision 14/20 for the Executive Secretary to cooperate with other intergovernmental organizations to inform them of the process and to take into account the work, approaches and outcomes that these organizations generate in this area.

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<sup>13</sup> The documents for the meeting of the AHTEG, including its report, are available at: <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/DSI-AHTEG-2020-01>

### **Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization**

28. The Nagoya Protocol has received 131 ratifications as of 27 July 2021. Parties continue to publish information in the Access and Benefit-Sharing Clearing-House (<http://absch.cbd.int>), including more than 2,500 access permits or their equivalent constituting internationally recognized certificates of compliance.

29. Access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing is currently reflected in Goal C and Target 13 of the First Draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The 2050 Goal and 2030 Target are not limited to the Nagoya Protocol and are expected to guide the implementation of ABS mechanisms in a coherent way. It is expected that existing information from implementation of the Nagoya Protocol as well as other sources, such as the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture will contribute to measuring progress towards the goal and target.

30. As requested, the Executive Secretary had shared decision NP-3/14 on specialized international ABS instruments in the context of Article 4, paragraph 4, of the Nagoya Protocol with the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture as part of the CBD's report to the Seventeenth Regular Session of the Commission. Further to this decision, the Executive Secretary invited the submission of views and information and synthesized the submissions received as well as information from developments in relevant international forums and made it available for consideration by SBI-3 (CBD/SBI/3/14). A draft recommendation on this matter was prepared during the virtual formal session of SBI-3 for formal adoption during a resumed session of the meeting to be convened at a later stage.

31. In decision NP-3/5, the COP-MOP decided to evaluate the strategic framework for capacity-building and development to support the effective implementation of the Nagoya Protocol, which had been adopted at COP-MOP 1.<sup>14</sup> The evaluation was undertaken and the outcomes submitted to SBI-3 (CBD/SBI/3/16). Key findings of the evaluation included that significant progress has been made in the implementation of the Protocol and this progress is intrinsically linked to capacity-building and development efforts. The evaluation also identified a number of priority areas for continued support, emerging needs and preferred capacity-building approaches and made a number of key recommendations. The evaluation was considered during the virtual formal session of SBI-3 and a draft recommendation was prepared (CBD/SBI/3/CRP.6) which will be taken up when the meeting reconvenes at a later date.

### **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and Nagoya – Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress**

32. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is an international treaty governing the movements of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology from one country to another. The Cartagena Protocol was adopted on 29 January 2000 as a supplementary agreement to the Convention on Biological Diversity and entered into force on 11 September 2003. The Cartagena Protocol has 173 Parties as of 27 July 2021.

33. In 2010, the Nagoya – Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted providing international rules and procedures in the field of liability and redress relating to living modified organisms. The Supplementary Protocol entered into force on 5 March 2018 and has 49 Parties as of 27 July 2021.

34. At COP-MOP 9, the Parties decided to develop a specific post-2020 implementation plan for the Cartagena Protocol as well as a capacity-building action plan. The draft plans were developed through an extensive consultative process carried over the course of 2019 and 2020 and the outcomes were submitted to SBI-3 for its consideration (CBD/SBI/3/18). A draft recommendation on this matter was prepared during the virtual formal session of SBI-3 (CBD/SBI/3/CRP.14) and will be considered when the meeting reconvenes at a later date.

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<sup>14</sup> See decision NP-1/8, annex I.

35. In addition, COP-MOP 9 stressed the importance of including biosafety in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Accordingly, a biosafety target (target 17) has been included in the First Draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

36. In decision CP-9/13 on risk assessment and risk management of living modified organisms, the COP-MOP decided to consider at its tenth meeting whether additional guidance materials on risk assessment are needed for living modified organisms containing engineered gene drives and living modified fish. To inform this consideration, the COP-MOP set out a process including the commissioning of studies, the submission of information, discussions in an online forum and a meeting of an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group. The outcomes of this process were submitted to SBSTTA-24 (CBD/SBSTTA/24/5) which is to make a recommendation on whether additional guidance materials are needed. A draft recommendation on this matter was prepared during the virtual formal session of SBSTTA-24 (CBD/SBSTTA/24/L6) and will be considered when the meeting reconvenes at a later date. As it currently stands, the draft recommendation does not foresee the development of additional voluntary guidance materials on risk assessment of living modified fish at this time but it does foresee the development of additional voluntary guidance materials on risk assessment of living modified organisms containing engineered gene drives.

37. In decision CP-9/14, the COP-MOP took note of the “Guidance on the Assessment of Socio-Economic Considerations in the Context of Article 26 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety”.<sup>15</sup> The decision also invited the submission of preliminary experiences using the voluntary Guidance as well as examples of methodologies and applications of socio-economic considerations in light of the elements of the voluntary Guidance. These submissions were discussed in an online forum and the outcomes reviewed by an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group to determine for which stage in the assessment process, as outlined in the voluntary Guidance, the information submitted might be relevant. Among other things, during the meeting of the AHTEG, some experts noted the linkages between socio-economic considerations under Article 26 of the Protocol and related work on socio-economic considerations under the auspices of FAO. The report of the AHTEG will be considered by COP-MOP 10.

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<sup>15</sup> As contained in CBD/CP/MOP/9/10, annex.