Strengthening global biodiversity governance post-2020: lessons from the climate regime?

Summary

- Globally, the diversity of life on earth is declining due to human activities despite increasing efforts to address it. Global biodiversity loss has severe impacts on human well-being.
- There is an urgent need to transform the Convention on Biological Diversity, the principal global governance framework on this issue, to better respond to this challenge.
- National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) need to be significantly strengthened as concrete mechanisms for implementation of biodiversity commitments at the national level.
- There are elements from recent experiences of developing/negotiating the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change that may offer useful lessons for the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.
- For instance, stronger biodiversity conservation outcomes could potentially be achieved by:
  - establishing concrete bottom-up pledges;
  - explicitly linking national targets to global goals;
  - conducting periodic global stocktakes to assess progress;
  - designing a ratchet-up mechanism for increasing ambition over time; and
  - more systematically involving non-State actors and stakeholders in taking ambitious action, which could also help in developing synergies between the CBD and UNFCCC

1992-2020: From objectives to targets

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 simultaneously with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The CBD was designed around three objectives: “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources”.

In 2010, the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011-2020 in Nagoya, introducing for the first time concrete topic specific biodiversity targets - known as the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets. This Plan provides an overarching framework on biodiversity for the international community, including the entire United Nations system and all other stakeholders and partners engaged in biodiversity management, conservation and policy development.

In 2010, Parties also agreed to translate this overarching international framework into revised and updated national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) and to adopt them as policy instruments by 2015.

Biodiversity is still declining

The observed lack of progress in advancing the implementation of the Aichi Targets is extremely worrying: biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming pace in spite of increasing efforts to address it.
The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species documents this continuing decline. The trend towards greater extinction risk for several groups of species has not decelerated since 2010 despite individual success stories. Natural ecosystems around the world also continue to be degraded reducing ecosystem services that benefit people, societies and economies. Current financing efforts fall short of what is needed to halt the loss of biodiversity, let alone restore it back to an unthreatened level.

- The Red List estimates that 1/4 of species assessed are threatened by extinction, and that the threats are generally getting worse.
- In 2005, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment found that more than 60% of ecosystem services were degraded or used unsustainably. For example, between 2010 and 2015 natural forest area decreased by a net 6.5 million ha per year (FAO 2016).
- The annual global funding gap for biodiversity is estimated to be USD 300-400 billion. This financing gap is about 20-30 times greater than current investable cash flows from conservation projects (Huwyler et al. 2014).

Aggregated trends across all biodiversity indicators: (a) pressures (in red) are increasing, (b) state of biodiversity (in orange), is deteriorating or at best stable, (c) benefits (in blue) are deteriorating or at best stable and (d) responses (in green) are increasing.

An assessment undertaken in the fourth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-4) in 2014\(^1\) shows that 19 of the 20 Aichi targets will not be achieved in 2020: 26 of the 46 assessed indicators showing negative trends for biodiversity are related to the status of biodiversity, the pressures on it, and the benefits that it provides. This assessment concludes that, with the exception of Target 16 (on the Nagoya Protocol), no target is on track to be completely met.

Recent scientific literature assessed by the CBD secretariat, post 2014,\(^2\) also confirms GBO-4’s assessment: progress at the current pace is not sufficient to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020. Additional action is required to keep the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 on track. There is now a clear and urgent need to deeply transform the CBD to adequately respond to the magnitude of the challenge faced.

---

\(^1\) Global Biodiversity Outlook 4
\(^2\) CBD/SBI/22/Add.2 (2018)
NBSAPs need strengthening

National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) are the principal instruments for implementing the CBD at the national level. The process of development of NBSAPs is a complex and multi-faceted task which must involve many sectors of government and society at large, and ideally also the private sector. In fact, it can be argued that the process NBSAP development is as important as their implementation, given that the success of the latter could depend to a significant extent on the former.

Since 1993, 190 Parties (97%) have developed and submitted at least one NBSAP. However, more than 80% of national targets and commitments contained in the NBSAPs are lower than what was agreed to globally in the Aichi Targets or do not address all of the elements of the Aichi Targets (CBD 2018).

Several analyses have suggested the following weaknesses in the current system:

- The lack of alignment between national-level targets and global targets (Birdlife International, Conservation International, The RSPB, The Nature Conservancy and WWF 2016)
- Current global biodiversity targets do not deliver what is required to prevent ongoing biodiversity decline and NBSAPs have been inefficient in their allocation of resources to achieve these targets (Di Marco et al. 2016).
- Complexity, ambiguity in definition and quantification, and redundancy of the current targets, make it difficult to stimulate and quantify progress (Butchart et al. 2016).
- Implementation of targets focusing on equity, rights, or policy reform suffer from a lack of effective target design, and lack of fit within existing institutional commitments (Hagerman & Pelai 2016).
- The set of indicators used for target monitoring is sometimes inadequate, hindering the ability to accurately monitor some of the targets; also different indicators, at times, lead to contrasting assessments (Shepherd et al. 2016).
- Global progress toward Aichi targets that require collaboration between conflicting stakeholders has been particularly slow, or moving in the wrong direction (Maxwell et al. 2015). This is because of a lack of systematic engagement of all relevant sectors of government, non-State actors and stakeholders in designing ambitious objectives (Maxwell et al. 2015).
- The collective nature of current global targets which individual actors do not feel obliged to deliver, the lack of concrete bottom-up pledges, and the absence of an effective monitoring and compliance mechanism to take stock of the collective impact of individual commitments, and enhance ambition for implementing the Convention’s objectives and targets (Laurans et al. 2018).

Additionally, opportunities exist to more systematically enhance and record the contributions of on-State actors and also to reduce the heterogeneity and non-comparability of the different NBSAPs.
What can be learned from the recent UNFCCC and Paris Agreement process?

In developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, there may be useful lessons to draw from the recent UNFCCC process that led to the successful adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015.

While it is too soon to assess the overall performance of the Agreement, some of its distinctive features, which may be useful for consideration by the CBD process for the post-2020 period, are noted below.

Some distinctive features of the Paris Agreement

a) A clear globally agreed long-term goal, informed by science, i.e. to hold the rise in the global average temperature to ‘well below 2°C’ above pre-industrial levels, and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C – and to reach ‘net zero’ emissions in the second half of the century in order to achieve this goal;

b) A requirement for all Parties to submit ‘nationally determined contributions’ (NDCs) in support of this agreement at 5-yearly intervals;

c) A clear expectation that successive NDCs submitted by each Party will be a progression over previous ones and reflect their highest possible ambition, and be informed by the outcomes of the global stocktake i.e. a ratchet-up mechanism to increase ambition over time; and

d) An agreement that a global stocktake would be undertaken every 5 years to assess the collective progress towards achieving the goals of this Agreement.

Enhanced non-state action

The formal negotiations in the UNFCCC leading up to the Paris Agreement were also supported by the emergence of a wide-range of concrete climate change initiatives and actions across key thematic areas led by coalitions of various non-Party stakeholders. These were given high-level political prominence, including through (1) the 2014 Climate Summit convened by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and (2) the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) convened jointly by the Peruvian and French Presidencies of UNFCCC COP20 and COP21, the Executive Office of the UN Secretary General and the UNFCCC secretariat, which generated positive momentum up to Paris.

The important role of non-Party stakeholders in helping to scale up climate action was also formally acknowledged at COP21, with Parties encouraged to work closely with them to catalyse efforts to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action. Two high-level Climate Champions were also appointed by the Parties to act on behalf of the COP President in facilitating the successful execution of existing efforts and the scaling-up and introduction of new or strengthened voluntary efforts, initiatives and coalitions in the 2016-2020 period, including through the organisation of high-level events at each COP.

The registration of climate actions undertaken by non-Party stakeholders in the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) platform of the UNFCCC was also encouraged. The process of systematically engaging with non-Party stakeholders was subsequently formalised through the setting up of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (MPGCA) at UNFCCC COP22.

Ideas for the post-2020 biodiversity framework

Drawing on the experience of the climate process, the following may be consider for the post-2020 biodiversity framework:

1. The post-2020 Mission (“Apex target”) should constitute an overall science-based target for biodiversity that can be quantified and tracked through implementation. For instance, an appropriate equivalent of the 2°C/1.5°C temperature rise cap agreed under the Paris Climate Change Agreement could be explored;

2. Inviting (Intended) ‘Biodiversity’ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) from Parties. If
appropriate, the necessary decisions could be taken at CBD COP14 in November 2018 calling for the development of ‘Biodiversity INDCs’ to be submitted by CBD COP15, setting up a process analogous to that which was adopted in the lead up to UNFCCC COP21.

3. Putting in place a rules-based process for conducting ‘global stocktakes’ to monitor progress on implementation against agreed global biodiversity targets at period intervals, and establishing a formal ‘ratchet mechanism’ requiring countries to periodically enhance their ambitions and actions on biodiversity conservation over time, in support of the globally agreed goals/ ‘Apex target’.

4. Improving the current format of NBSAPs and National Reports to encourage more specific and quantified national targets and planned actions, and more specific reporting of progress.

5. More systematically engage, and take into account the efforts of, non-state actors/non-Party stakeholders in contributing to greater biodiversity conservation action on the ground, drawing from the process undertaken in the lead up to and following UNFCCC COP21. These could include, for example:
   a. Convening of a high-level summit on biodiversity by the UN Secretary General
   b. Starting a process to promote more ambitious biodiversity action on the ground, led by the Egyptian and Chinese Presidencies, the CBD Secretariat and the UNSG’s office
   c. Appointing high-level champions for biodiversity action
   d. Setting up a platform to register Non-State Action on Biodiversity Action (NABKA)

If designed carefully, these could potentially help to transform the landscape of the CBD in a more positive direction by promoting concrete country-led action and collaboration, and provide a more productive template for international cooperation on biodiversity conservation in the post-2020 period. Such an approach would also have the benefit of helping to harmonise the Rio Conventions and create opportunities for developing common reporting frameworks that could maximise synergies and minimise national reporting burdens.