



TOWARDS POST-2020 EXPERTISE ON #19

BUILDING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DELIVERING GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY GOALS

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Discussions on accountability for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under SBI and OEWG provide an opportunity for better understanding and convergence of Parties' expectations, strengthening the monitoring, reporting, and review of their commitments and actions under the CBD in the longer term.

The last few years have witnessed an increase in the number and depth of deliberations on transparency and accountability for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Covering a range of dimensions, e.g., monitoring of progress and national reporting, they strengthen globally adopted goals and targets. Accountability places a sense of individual and collective responsibility on Parties, both to deliver on their commitments and report on progress during implementation in a transparent way. Identifying where capacity, resources, or other support are needed is essential in this process. Accountability and transparency have yet to be discussed in detail in intergovernmental negotiations. Preliminary exchanges at a workshop hosted by the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union ¹, as well as the first two meetings of the open-ended working group (OEWG) on the post-2020 framework and a thematic consultation on transparent implementation, monitoring, reporting and review, provided an overview of mechanisms ². Deliberations under the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) and subsequent negotiations will define the way forward.

ACCOUNTABILITY

**"WE NEED TO HEIGHTEN
OUR SENSE OF
RESPONSIBILITY AND
STRENGTHEN THE POWER
OF ACTION TO TACKLE
CHALLENGES TO THE
ENVIRONMENT."**

H.E. Xi Jinping, President of
the People's Republic of China,
at the UN Summit on Biodiversity



Aerial landscape of fields in Germany

1. WHY ARE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IMPORTANT?

Concerns about shortcomings in implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets led to calls for enhanced planning, reporting and review under the CBD. These aim for greater transparency on progress made, and increased accountability. It encourages collective responsibility among actors to make and deliver on their biodiversity-related commitments. This will be essential for implementing the post-2020 framework, and setting us on a path to achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity of “living in harmony with Nature”. Accountability and transparency are two sides of the same coin. Communicating the planned and implemented national efforts more widely and effectively facilitates the understanding of contributions to global progress. It also increases recognition of the breadth of actions happening on the ground, and where further support is needed.

new or strengthened commitments. The latter could be incorporated and communicated in different ways, such as annexes to existing NBSAPs, updating their content in response to the new framework.

The importance of NBSAPs goes beyond the instrument itself and the CBD. Their development and implementation are part of a social process that can facilitate or hinder the integration of biodiversity across sectoral policies. NBSAPs can be seen as a critical mechanism towards mainstreaming and a step to address both parts of Article 6⁴ of the CBD. NBSAPs development and review present exceptional opportunities for different government agencies and other stakeholders to engage and feel ownership of the process and outputs. This is a fundamental pre-requisite for accountability, shifting towards a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

One of NBSAPs' key strengths is also a challenge: full flexibility in format and content, including the timeframes for which they are set out.

While this helps to ensure national ownership, it generates complexity in understanding how national commitments collectively contribute to the level of ambition required to achieve global targets.

2. WHAT MECHANISMS ARE IN PLACE?

Accountability and transparency are not new concepts, and the Convention already employs a multidimensional review approach which contains some notable elements to build on.

RECOGNISING THE ROLE OF NBSAPs

Expectations are that NBSAPs (National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans) will remain the main instrument for national biodiversity planning³.

NBSAPs express national commitments as contributions towards global goals and targets, with at least three essential purposes:

- + Creating a roadmap for implementation of the CBD, as well as the other biodiversity-related conventions (MEAs), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its sustainable development goals (SDGs);
- + Communicating strategies and plans to all stakeholders;
- + Identifying opportunities to integrate biodiversity in other planning processes (mainstreaming).

NBSAPs cover different time periods and some will remain valid for several years. However, Parties will likely adjust or supplement their strategies and targets because of the adoption of the new framework. When revising NBSAPs in light of new frameworks, experience gained over the last ten years shows it is crucial to maintain momentum with existing plans, while responding to emerging challenges through

“WE WANT GLOBAL RULES THAT ARE CLEAR, MEASURABLE, THAT ALLOW US TO HOLD EACH OTHER TO ACCOUNT. AND ABOVE ALL, RULES THAT WILL PROTECT SPECIES AND STRENGTHEN OUR RESILIENCE AND OUR WELL-BEING.” H.E. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Retaining a level of flexibility throughout NBSAPs remains important. So, how can Parties find the right balance to enable aggregation and comparability of information, while ensuring NBSAPs remain instruments that respond to national circumstances?

Key elements to consider include:

- + Capturing new goals and targets, so that they reflect the scope and ambition of the post-2020 framework;
- + Ensuring adequate participation across government and engagement of other stakeholders to strengthen ownership, ambition and implementation across sectors responsible for delivering on commitments;
- + Using NBSAPs as mechanisms to support the delivery of biodiversity-relevant aspects of other intergovernmental conventions and processes;
- + Communicating the commitments that governments are making as a basis to understand how the vision, goals and targets may be met;
- + Avoiding lengthy revision processes that might delay implementation;
- + Considering capacity development and financial resource needs for implementation;
- + Monitoring and reporting on progress towards target achievement, including by using a set of indicators consistently over time.

¹ The workshop “Post-2020 global biodiversity framework: commitment, implementation and accountability” was organised as part of the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. See document: CBD (2019), Report of a Workshop on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: commitment, implementation and accountability. <https://cutt.ly/hhU7vr2>

² See document CBD/POST2020/WS/2020/1/3, Report on the thematic consultation on transparent implementation, monitoring, reporting, and review for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. <https://cutt.ly/bjd9r1B>

³ Article 6 of the Convention of Biological Diversity calls for Parties to develop NBSAPs, which are the main instrument for implementing the Convention.

⁴ Article 6 of the Convention calls for Parties to: (a) Develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity or adapt existing strategies, plans or programmes; and (b) Integrate, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies.



UN Secretary-General António Guterres opening speech at the UN Biodiversity Summit, September 2020, IISD, <https://cutt.ly/UjkhXvZ>

UNDERSTANDING PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIONS TAKEN

CBD objectives can only be achieved with sufficient ambition and effective implementation, supported by access to the right information at the right time which aids identification of gaps and shortcomings where increased effort is needed. This process is formalised by developing robust mechanisms to monitor, report on and review progress in implementation at national and global levels.

Monitoring. Monitoring global progress builds on and, often, depends on national monitoring systems, necessitating consistency in tracking and reporting by Parties. This can be aided by the selection of a subset of internationally agreed “headline indicators” aggregated from national to global levels to:

- + Help prioritise national efforts and support from international organisations to further develop national indicators and associated monitoring systems;
- + Facilitate the identification of priority capacity and resource needs for enhanced implementation ⁵.

Reporting. Parties have shown diverse views on reporting and its frequency. The following issues have been raised:

- + Changes in the format of CBD national reports (NRs) ⁶ over-reporting cycles has complicated the tracking of implementation over time;
- + The need for stronger alignment between NBSAPs and NRs so that the latter more clearly relate to Party commitments;
- + The importance of receiving feedback on NRs, and transparency in the use of reported information.

The development of the post-2020 framework presents an opportunity to tackle some of these issues and address the form, content and frequency of reports over the next ten years, including:

- + The purpose of reporting;
- + Mechanisms to deliver meaningful reports and to ensure that the information is used to inform future decisions;
- + Ensuring reporting processes involve all relevant actors from across government, as well as contributions by other, non-governmental actors, including the private sector.

There is a need to identify mechanisms that facilitate the use of the reported information to inform decision-making at both national and global levels. Ways could be found to ensure that the information in NRs is used more effectively by the CBD Secretariat and governing/subsidiary bodies. This might include exploring ways to increase alignment in reporting to different conventions and processes ⁷.

Review. Under the CBD, this refers to the review of: National planning (NBSAPs) and implementation actions (NRs); Progress at the global level (against goals, targets, and implementation of the CBD); Approaches to both dimensions would benefit from renewed impetus and strengthened mechanisms. *Review of progress at the global level* builds in part on

the information provided by Parties through NBSAPs and NRs, brought together and/or supplemented by various global processes (e.g., Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, IPBES assessment reports, or Global Biodiversity Outlook). There are several challenges in using this information to assess both planned measures and progress in implementing them (e.g., relating to the completeness of data and its comparability).

“AS MUCH AS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC UNDOUBTEDLY REPRESENTS NEW CHALLENGES AND FORCES RESTRICTIONS ON SUCCESSFUL MULTILATERAL ACTION, ON THE OTHER HAND IT STRENGTHENED THE RECOGNITION OF OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF THIS PLANET AND THE FATE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.” H.E. Abdel Fattah

Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Another aspect concerns the *process and content* of national instruments developed due to the Convention's provisions (NBSAPs and NRs derived from Articles 6 and 26 respectively). At the Parties' request, the CBD Secretariat developed a methodology for a voluntary peer review (VPR) of NBSAP revision and implementation. It was initially tested in two countries (Ethiopia and India) in 2015 and 2016, before being piloted more widely from November 2017.

To date, three countries (Montenegro, Sri Lanka and Uganda) have been reviewed under the pilot phase. The VPR methodology was recognised as part of the multidimensional review approach under the Convention at COP14 ⁸. A test of a Party-led review process took place online in September 2020 ⁹. The outcomes of this exercise, albeit fairly limited in size, will provide important insights for enhanced monitoring, reporting and review when discussed at SBI. Lessons can be learnt from other intergovernmental processes, although it remains important to adapt them to the scope and mechanisms under the CBD. Some essential features include ¹⁰:

- + Review of NRs by independent experts, followed by a facilitated sharing of views/dialogue among Parties and key stakeholders;
- + Identification of resource gaps and/or capacity development needs as part of the review process, and support with their follow-up to help strengthen implementation;
- + Submission of supplemental information from additional sources, in particular other intergovernmental processes.

Strengthening review under the CBD provides an opportunity to develop facilitative mechanisms promoting mutual learning and a more systematic exchange of experiences. This may create co-benefits beyond the content of the specific documents under review.

⁵ See document CBD/SBSTTA/24/INF/16, Indicators for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, prepared by UNEP-WCMC in collaboration with the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. <https://cutt.ly/3jd9uEb>

⁶ Article 26 of the Convention, states: “Each Contracting Party shall, at intervals to be determined by the Conference of the Parties, present to the Conference of the Parties, reports on measures which it has taken for the implementation of the provisions of this Convention and their effectiveness in meeting the objectives of this Convention”.

⁷ This might include the use of tools like the MEAs Data and Reporting Tool (DaRT) to facilitate reporting at the national level. Read Expertise on DART (#20, soon available).

⁸ CBD (2019), Voluntary Peer Review (VPR) of NBSAP Revision and Implementation <https://cutt.ly/OhU6vHW> and Voluntary peer review of NBSAP revision and implementation. <https://cutt.ly/XhU6QzW>

⁹ CBD (2020), Trial Phase of an Open-Ended Forum on Review of Implementation held on 16 and 17 September 2020 online <https://cutt.ly/OhU6IEw>



Woman scientist environmentalist taking sample of water.

3. HOW TO ENHANCE IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY?

Considering how biodiversity commitments are made: Parties have not yet discussed in detail the notion of biodiversity commitments as adopted at COP14¹¹, but preliminary ideas have been shared. Some consider that national commitments are the measures and actions already defined in the NBSAPs, finding no need for additional instruments. Others suggest that a new mechanism which complements NBSAPs, but encourages a timelier revision of the level of ambition would be beneficial to the Convention's implementation. Whichever approach is agreed, there is a clear need to respond quickly to the adoption of the post-2020 framework and identify necessary actions at the national level.

Further enhancing national commitments beyond those inspired by the CBD: The notion of biodiversity commitments can be used as an opportunity to better acknowledge biodiversity-related measures beyond the NBSAPs, thus advancing on a range of multilateral agreements and instruments. Aligning the NBSAPs with the new framework would provide an opportunity to strengthen biodiversity as a vehicle for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, intergovernmental processes relating to climate change or land degradation, and other instruments. Likewise, the integration of other biodiversity-related commitments into NBSAPs would help acknowledge the efforts made under other processes, thereby contributing more effectively to achieving multiple global goals. Effective use of existing institutional mechanisms can help further prioritise and integrate consideration of biodiversity in decision-making across governments.

Upscaling the VPR to cover all Parties: To achieve this, Parties would agree on the modalities, frequency and scope of review, and the possibility to cover both NBSAPs and NRs. There are various associated co-benefits, particularly: peer-to-peer learning and the domestic process of preparing for and engaging in the review, which help raise awareness on the work of the CBD. Such a review would be a facilitative mechanism. Depending on the modalities applicable

to the peer review, other potential benefits and factors include identifying resource requirements and capacity gaps that might be limiting progress, enabling reprioritisation of efforts for enhanced implementation.

A global stocktake of progress: Monitoring global progress would benefit from a more systematic and thorough periodic analysis. A global stocktake would provide an overview of all national measures planned and implemented, enabling to assess the extent to which efforts add up to the global ambition required to achieve goals and targets. By increasing global transparency and accountability, the stocktake could become a key instrument for the COP to review progress and encourage greater ambition from Parties. It would require consistent approaches towards reporting on commitments (made through NBSAPs and other processes) and implementation. Much could be achieved by adapting existing tools, such as national reports, supplemented by concise, frequent reporting on thematic issues, and inputs from other mechanisms such as IPBES.

Acknowledging the role of all actors in society: Transparency goes beyond commitments made by national governments, and could consider those by subnational and local governments¹², non-governmental actors (e.g., private sector¹³, youth¹⁴, women and indigenous peoples and local communities), as well as other intergovernmental processes and MEAs. Visibility in reporting and a review mechanism that involves stakeholders from outside of government would increase awareness and ownership among those actors. The Action Agenda for Nature and People¹⁵ is a tool to build on.

WHAT PATH TO KUNMING AND BEYOND?

Accountability and transparency are fundamental to the Convention's implementation, but remain evolving concepts under consideration within the CBD. Discussions at upcoming meetings of subsidiary bodies, and negotiations on the post-2020 framework provide an opportunity for more in-depth understanding and convergence of Parties' expectations towards COP15, with the potential to strengthen monitoring, reporting and review under the CBD in the longer term. Each of the options presented here could enhance the CBD's implementation, and each has resource implications and operational requirements. If the goals and targets of the post-2020 framework are to be met, identifying and dedicating resources to strengthening accountability and transparency for implementation will be essential.

¹⁰ UNEP-WCMC (2019), Review and accountability mechanisms of selected international agreements to inform the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework <https://cutt.ly/2hxejMP>

¹¹ CBD (2018), COP Decision 14/34. <https://cutt.ly/UhxeTWA>

¹² Read Expertise on Edinburgh process. (#18) <https://cutt.ly/Hjkhaob>

¹³ Read Expertise on Business. (#15) <https://cutt.ly/Rjkhd3h>

¹⁴ Read Expertise on Biodiversity and economic growth. (#12) <https://cutt.ly/ojkhs2>

¹⁵ <https://cutt.ly/AhlqlQQ>

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