



TOWARDS POST-2020 DIALOGUE WITH #25

A RESPONSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY MECHANISM FOR BIODIVERSITY: ASSESSING OPERATIONAL OPTIONS

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The responsibility and transparency mechanism of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) will be a crucial feature for implementing decisions taken at COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Several aspects of the mechanism still need to be clarified on the road to Kunming.



“TO PUT THE WORLD ON THE RIGHT TRACK TOWARDS THIS LONG-TERM GOAL WILL REQUIRE STRONG POLITICAL WILL COMBINED WITH REAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE APPROPRIATE LEGAL, ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL TOOLS AND INCENTIVES.”

Leaders' Pledge for Nature

The establishment and implementation of a coherent responsibility and transparency mechanism strengthen collective accountability and cooperation¹ on the implementation of global biodiversity goals and targets, tracking progress and (re)assessing individual and collective ambitions in reaching global goals. The COVID-19 crisis hit precisely as CBD discussions were unfolding on this topic, explaining why so much work is still needed despite it being a major stake of COP15.

The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) and the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework - EU support project organised an online dialogue between CBD negotiators and experts on 17-18 December 2020.

The discussions that took place addressed operational options for this mechanism and showed that the international community is ready to delve deeper into the rationale, modalities and potential results of an efficient transparency and responsibility mechanism as a critical step in developing a truly transformative post-2020 GBF.

1. COMMITTING AND PLANNING: STEPS TO ALIGN NATIONAL ACTION, THE POST-2020 GBF AND IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

In early December 2020, the Secretariat of the CBD released a background document (SBI/3/11) for discussion at SBI-3 on item 9 – mechanisms for reporting, assessment and review. Discussions are ongoing, and further developments are awaited at SBI-3 as well as during OEWG-3 on the road to COP15. The workshop was one of the first moments of collective discussion of this document and served as a warm-up for upcoming discussions. The SBI/3/11 document considers several options and instruments for an enhanced planning, reporting and review mechanism to strengthen the implementation of the post-2020 GBF and suggests four main elements for enhanced transparency and responsibility:

- + National commitments and commitments from non-state actors (NSA), indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and stakeholders (as contributions to achieving the post-2020 goals and targets);
- + National reporting;
- + A country-by-country review process; and
- + A global analytical review.

The SBI/3/11 document proposes to distinguishing the function of national planning and the function of committing to global goals, adding that in the context of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) could focus on national planning and processes. In contrast, national commitments would represent a contribution to global goals and targets. On this basis, the webinar discussion centred on the dual role of national planning and contribution to global goals and targets, and the need to clarify which vehicle or vehicles could best fulfil these two functions. Some participants suggested that if national commitments were presented in a shorter and standardized format, they would be easier to review, compare, and aggregate in the perspective of a gap analysis and a global stocktake. They could also offer a certain flexibility, especially for parties that do not have the capacities to update or revise their NBSAPs swiftly after COP15, to reflect the post-2020 global goals and targets. However, concerns were raised that such national commitments would represent an all-new instrument bringing additional complexity and potentially weakening NBSAPs, which remain the only legally binding measure in the Convention (art.6)

when it comes to reflecting the CBD at the national policy level. Participants noted that NBSAPs remain the primary vehicle for planning and implementing the Convention as well as an existing instrument already being developed and operated by parties and other stakeholders involved in their elaboration and implementation. On the road to COP15, a solution will have to be found that enables (i) well-designed contributions to goals and targets submitted in a timely manner after COP15 in order for international obligations to be translated at the national level; and (ii) making the best use of existing tools and national processes, while preventing excessive additional burden on all parties. The solution could be found by focusing on functions rather than the vehicle. Discussions usefully distinguished between the functions of “committing” and “planning”. Thus the question will be whether it seems best to adapt NBSAPs to better reflect these two functions, or whether it is necessary to imagine distinct vehicles for each function (e.g., national commitments and NBSAPs). An intermediary option, where national commitments could be considered as “pre-updated NBSAPs” was also mentioned during the workshop. These would be submitted quickly after COP15 to leave more time for countries to update their actual NBSAPs.

“IT IS HARD TO ASSOCIATE PLEDGED NATIONAL COMMITMENTS WITH ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION WITHOUT TRANSPARENT AND RIGOROUS REVIEW SYSTEMS. (...) RECOMMENDATION. A COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM IS CREATED TO REVIEW SPECIFIC PARTIES’ IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POST-2020 GBF BASED ON MONITORING INDICATORS AND SYSTEMS.” Haigen Xu et al. (2021),

2. IMPROVING COMPARABILITY AND AGGREGATION: A KEY FEATURE FOR TRANSPARENCY

So far, the difficulty in comparing and aggregate national efforts to implement global biodiversity goals has hampered the collective capacity to regularly take stock of and monitor action for biodiversity, both on its successes and limitations. Besides this technical dimension, such incapacity also prevents the regular creation and maintaining of political momentum and impetus.

For the post-2020 GBF, it will thus be important to more easily compare and aggregate the information submitted by parties. Participants in the workshop identified a set of priorities to achieve comparability and aggregation.



Commiphora,
Berenty, Madagascar.
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¹ Read [Expertise on Accountability \(#19\)](#)



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STANDARDISATION – SIMPLIFICATION – INDICATORS – TEMPLATES, INCLUDING:

- + Guidance on standard information that should be included in NBSAPs (for instance, suggestions on how to organise NBSAPs around key sections and what they could ideally contain).
- + Agreement on headline indicators for standard reporting while allowing for the use of other indicators fitting varying national contexts.
- + Reliance on already existing and adopted indicators that can be used for joint reporting with other MEAs and SDGs ².
- + A precise and operational monitoring framework supporting the work of the parties.

PERIODICITY & SYNCHRONISATION, A CORE ELEMENT FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE TRANSPARENCY MECHANISM:

- + Reporting should happen more often than currently, but without creating an excessive burden.
- + Timing intervals should be clear, and a precise calendar should be developed for the coming decade.
- + Further elaboration is needed on how to best synchronise with the reporting to other MEAs.

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CAPACITIES ON TRANSPARENCY:

- + The transparency mechanism would require dedicated additional resources and capacity building for all parties to fully contribute to its different elements.

These points concern several items that will be discussed during SBSTTA-24, SBI-3, and OEWG-3. This is not surprising, given that the transparency mechanism is a cross-cutting issue throughout the post-2020 GBF. Parties and observers, in the next steps leading to COP15, should bear these interconnections in mind.

3. WHAT FORMAT(S) FOR THE REVIEW?

Once the information is provided, how to organise its review is a crucial question to address for a transparency mechanism ³. The review can comprise several components and serve different purposes, and it is up for the next phase of discussions to better identify the direction that will be taken for the post-GBF. One possible component could be a review phase where country cases would be individualised and discussions held in a spirit of policy learning and accountability to peers. Another would be a review at the collective level, geared towards understanding the pathway on which aggregated efforts are putting us. Different options were discussed during the workshop, mostly focusing on these two types of review processes.

- + **THE INDIVIDUAL REVIEW** refers to different possible formats where individual country cases are discussed as to identify and share lessons learnt, successes, challenges, and opportunities. Individual

needs in terms of capacity-building and cooperation can also be identified. Two formats were mentioned during the discussions that are already experimented at the CBD, and that could serve as a basis for further elaboration: the voluntary peer-review ⁴ and the open-ended forum on implementation ⁵.

On these, workshop participants noted that:

- + The different purposes, merits and limitations of the two options should be clearly identified and analysed to assess their contributions to fulfilling the objectives of the post-2020 transparency mechanism.
- + How to include civil society and independent experts should be further discussed.
- + To be useful in monitoring global implementation, the post-2020 transparency mechanism should involve all parties. clarifying what is mandatory or voluntary in the review options will be essential.

THE COLLECTIVE REVIEW refers to a format used to assess collective progress towards post-2020 goals and targets, and workshop participants raised several points and questions:

- + What could be the role of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO) in such a review? Does it need to evolve to better fit the needs of the post-2020 transparency mechanism?
- + Such a gap analysis should also address aspects relating to capacity building and resource mobilisation.
- + The importance of global stocktake as a Party-led process based on national reports, and with other inputs – including from IPBES – to measure and exchange on actual collective progress towards goals and targets.

Besides these points, several cross-cutting questions were raised during discussions:

- + What material is being reviewed at each step of the review process?
- + What would be the overall reviewing cycle? (e.g., 5 years? 10 years?)
- + If a “ratcheting mechanism” is put in place, where should ambition be raised in priority, on action targets or on means of implementation? Or both? How could this be clarified?
- + The principle of progression is currently not included in the SBI/3/11 document: should it be included in the discussions?
- + At what point(s) should independent experts be involved?
- + Is it possible to include the commitments of non-State actors in the picture?

It will be crucial, starting at SBI-3 discussions, to more precisely identify the preferred options for each type of review process and how they could be combined in the post-2020 transparency mechanism, and to answer some of the pertaining questions and points listed above. Agreeing on a coherent narrative of how the post-2020 transparency mechanism is supposed to support implementation, and then better identifying the concrete operational features that should be included in its design, would be an important step to then select and develop the most appropriate options that could best fulfil these expectations.

² Read [Expertise on DaRT \(#21\) and Nature Ecology & Evolution](#)

³ Read [Expertise on Accountability \(#19\)](#)

⁴ <https://cbd.int/nbsap/vpr>

⁵ <https://cut.ly/ZJopcQ9>

4. THE TRANSPARENCY MECHANISM AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE COLLABORATION TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

The transparency mechanism is meant, fundamentally, to enhance collaboration between parties and with NSAs, towards achieving the post-2020 goals and targets. The workshop identified several ways in which the transparency mechanism could support these efforts. Firstly, the transparency mechanism should be approached as a learning process for parties, including through cyclical, systematized and institutionalised discussions on implementation. This has proved insufficient under the CBD so far, and needs strengthening in the next phase of its history.

Participants also noted that the transparency mechanism might represent a means to create more momentum around implementation, which can resonate across parties but also conventions and stakeholder groups, to foster higher levels of engagement participation and ensure stronger cooperation between and across sectors.

The transparency mechanism could also help in adapting resource mobilization (e.g., identifying the most urgent needs during review discussions) to better target additional resources and capacity building, especially for developing and least developed countries. Transparency would here be key to identify specific needs and challenges encountered by parties⁶. The idea of an “NBSAP partnership” (akin to the NDC Partnership under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC) was mentioned as an example that could serve parties to support each other while revising or updating their national strategies. As under the Paris Agreement or CBD’s Protocols, the constitution of a Compliance Committee was also brought up, as a representative body of experts that could support the parties wherever implementation challenges are encountered. On the road to COP15, it will be important to solidify this positive narrative on the transparency mechanism. This could help to better identify what is expected of it in terms

of function and what it should help achieve in the coming decade(s).

5. LOOKING FORWARD: PRIORITY QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS UNTIL COP15

As a summary of the workshop, we propose three main groups of questions that may need to be addressed as the post-2020 process moves forward:

OVERALL NARRATIVE AND COHERENCE:

How can we think and present the various elements together into a coherent mechanism highlighting its benefits to the work of the parties and collective progress on implementing the post-2020 GBF?

OPERATIONAL FEATURES:

- + What are the respective vehicles for planning and committing to the post-2020 global goals and targets?
- + What would be the modalities for national reporting that fit the needs of the transparency mechanism (format, frequency, ...)?
- + What could be the concrete modalities for both individual and collective review?

EXPECTED FUNCTIONS AND OUTCOMES:

- + Should the ratcheting mechanism concern ambition and/or implementation?
- + How could the transparency mechanism help better identify the needs on means of implementation and to address them better?
- + How can the efforts and contributions of NSA be connected and assessed in the transparency mechanism?

As mentioned previously, the transparency mechanism is a cross-cutting aspect of the post-2020 GBF discussions. On the road to COP15, it will be important to bear this in mind while discussing other important topics (goals and targets, the indicators, the means of implementation, etc.), as they will all have consequences and at least partly condition how the mechanism can be designed and operated in practice in the coming decade.



Tighrope walker, Forêt du Lizeray, Ile-de-Ré, France © Marcel Jouve

⁶ Read [Expertise on Accountability \(#19\)](#)

Cover photo
Bindweed plant, *Convolvulus arvensis*, Alpin Garden, Var, France © Marcel Jouve

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