

## From biodiversity targets to conservation commitments

Webinar Report – 27 October 2020

### Summary

This webinar was a facilitated discussion between international biodiversity policy experts and participants. It explored the nexus between the following elements within the scope of commitment making to implement the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):

- Engagement and facilitation of state and non-state actors' commitments and pledges in support of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework;
- Enhancing synergies between state and non-state actors;
- The role of and type of mechanism to coordinate or collect non-state actor commitments;
- Examples of current initiatives and platforms that can contribute to any potential commitment coordination mechanism; and
- The role and needs of non-state actors within the context of commitments, particularly field professionals and indigenous peoples and local communities.

### Context & background

A decade ago the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed to a bold set of targets known as the [Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#). These are to be succeeded by a [new global biodiversity framework](#).

To contribute to the process, the Governments of Egypt and China, in collaboration with the CBD secretariat, launched the Sharm El Sheikh to Kunming [Action Agenda](#) for Nature and People. As of 2020, a new website and communication plan was tailored to inspire, inform, and invite commitments from non-state actors.

This Action Agenda aims to be inclusive with a call for commitments to conserve, sustainably use and ensure access and benefit sharing of biodiversity from sub-national and local authorities, civil society, indigenous peoples and local communities,, academia, youth, the UN system, and the private sector.

The need to broaden conservation commitments was further highlighted at the September 2020 UN Summit on Biodiversity: *"Action on biodiversity for sustainable development is needed by public and private sectors, including from national and sub-national governments, cities, the business and finance world, and civil society."*

Today there is increased momentum with multiple initiatives. For example, the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, co-chaired by Costa Rica and France is promoting *"implementation initiatives to put nature on a path to recovery by 2030."*

This webinar explored how we can engage non-state actor stakeholders and establish an appropriate mechanism or mechanisms to recognise, encourage, track, and support voluntary non-state actor conservation commitments.

## Panel

- Dr Balakrishna Pisupati, Chairperson FLEGDE [Moderator]
- Ms. Catalina Santamaria - Special Advisor to the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Ms. Marina Weissenberg - Senior Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Environment, Finland
- Ms. Rita Zaghoul - Coordinator and Costa Rica's focal point for the High Ambition Coalition for Nature & People, Costa Rica
- Ms. Adele Fardoux - Policy Advisor, International Negotiations, Ministry of Ecological Transition, France
- Dr Ton van der Zon - VCA Auditor, Researcher, Naturalis Biodiversity Centre in Leiden, The Netherlands
- Mr Reynaldo Morales - Dissertator, University of Madison, Wisconsin, USA

## Discussion

*Several Heads of State and Governments have made concrete pledges. These are in addition to those pledges and commitments made by the Parties to CBD earlier. How do you see the pledges and commitments relate to ongoing discussions on finalising the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework? And how do you wish to see countries formalize their commitments? What is the role of other non-stake actor stakeholders and how can the two work together re the post-2020 framework?*

The 150 countries who attended the UNGA Biodiversity Summit did indeed show increased ambition and interest to build an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework, within a whole of government approach. These connect and support the ongoing discussions on the post 2020 framework. Speakers also considered it important to encourage contributions that can unfold from commitments made by non-state actor's in support of the post-2020 framework discussions. This is very important for the implementation of the post-2020 framework. How this will materialise remains to be discussed at forthcoming subsidiary body meetings. For example, [CBD/SBI/3/11](#) describes options for an enhanced review and reporting mechanism.

Some speakers referred to the recent [EU Council conclusions on the EU biodiversity strategy](#). It is a concrete and ambitious plan to stop and reverse biodiversity loss. The scientific sector, NGOs, and youth were and are critical in its creation. Regarding the post-2020 framework, some speakers opined that it could be something like the Paris Agreement with a 1.5 degree-like target for the CBD. As for the non-state Action Agenda space under the UNFCCC, speakers considered that such an approach could benefit the post-2020 process, with outreach engagement, while addressing biodiversity

mainstreaming into productive sectors. The speaker explained that the Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People is a voluntary commitment platform that aims to raise public awareness, building on existing and growing momentum from a broad base of sub and non-state actors, in support of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Discussion then turned around the need and potential for a mechanism or mechanisms that could collect, coordinate, and support voluntary state and non-state commitments contributing towards fulfilment of the post-2020 framework.

More than one speaker mentioned that a coordination mechanism would be essential to structure the follow-up of previous and new commitments such as the recent leaders' pledges made at the UN Biodiversity Summit in September 2020. One of these speakers brought up the need for translating current commitments into the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) alongside a ratcheting instrument to strengthen these commitments. A speaker noted that this does not only apply to state actors, but to non-state actors as well. This mechanism could be managed by an independent entity like IUCN, UNEP, WCMC, or Earthmind, but remains to be discussed by the Parties to the Convention. This is especially the case with regards to how state and non-state actor commitments are managed in the context of the formal and informal CBD framework processes.

In either case, another point that came up was the need for accountability, otherwise we risk loss of impact and effectiveness. It was also noted that marine biodiversity still needs more attention from all coalitions and the CBD post-2020 discussions.

*What are the salient features/ambitions of the High Ambition Coalition (HAC) to support the outcomes of the UN Summit on Biodiversity into actions on the ground?*

HAC is working on meeting its objectives via two tracks to bring a 30by30 goal (30% conserved by 2030) to the attention of high-level decision makers. These are a political track and a technical track. The political track aims to bring area-based conservation to the highest level of policy making to the framework discussions and elsewhere. The technical track aims to coordinate between countries' experts to establish the right language and narrative on the 30% target in the negotiations.

*What, are the roles of state and non-state actors in working together to implement the global biodiversity goals?*

Speakers noted that state and non-state actors have different roles to play in realising biodiversity goals. For instance, states have responsibilities to make sure goals are fit for purpose, while non-state actors have the power to influence the process on the ground. Synergies between the two, however, will be instrumental to realise the post-2020 framework since non-state actors manage many areas beyond those legally protected and are already in the field. One key to success will be speed of implementation of one or more commitment mechanism and designing these to catalyse coalitions and coordination between state and non-state actors.

Coalitions such as the HAC are seen by France as highly important to achieve specific targets, but, in general, it will be important to think strategically on any mechanism that will reflect non-state actor contributions to the post-2020 framework. It could be that for the framework, the Action Agenda is the only voluntary initiative needed to engage the wide range of non-state actors, and thus could also do with further strengthening towards the mainstreaming of biodiversity into all sectors.

*There are examples of potential platforms to contribute to a commitment mechanism and the role of private sector is also significant. What are the key lessons learnt through such voluntary platforms and actions to realising the biodiversity targets - current and future?*

There is an important discrepancy to note regarding the language barriers of professional jargon between local level conservation actors and the CBD and other technical international bodies. This means that engaging area-based managers in the CBD framework or any related formal or informal coordinating mechanism will meet communication limits and complications. This is of great importance since in some areas, the non-state sectors have significant impact, e.g. in the marine realm where one cannot avoid working with companies and communities who manage the majority of the areas. Thus, language needs to be adopted so that non-state actors can be engaged directly starting with voluntary commitment-making rather than a rules-based and targeted system.

A formal or informal mechanism collecting and coordinating CBD commitments needs to be transparent, measurable, accountable, and with a form of independent verification. One existing instrument that does this already is the [Voluntary Conservation Area \(VCA\) Platform](#) where individuals, communities and companies can register their conservation efforts along the lines mentioned above.

Following on from previous speakers, it was added that an overall coordinating mechanism may be needed to which existing platforms like the VCA Platform can contribute. A main take away would be to take examples from the ground to add into design considerations of a coordinating CBD-linked mechanism where non-state actors are concerned. However, measurement of such commitments and their results are still an issue to address.

*What are the key challenges we should consider for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) to realise the pledges and commitments and measure these as well?*

It has been internationally recognised that IPLCs have a critical role to play in biodiversity conservation, and also in the success of the most recent biodiversity commitments coming from the UN Biodiversity Summit. It was also recently reported in [Global Biodiversity Outlook 5](#) that too often IPLCs have been marginalised, and that this has been a direct contribution to the failure of some Aichi Targets being met. It is very important to engage IPLCs more in global conservation processes as major stakeholders,

apart from the CBD which does recognise them as strategic partners already. Major decisions could be based more on both science and traditional knowledge rather than just science for a higher success rate.

A last main challenge to the new post-2020 framework is linked to the role of IPLCs as the historical managers of most of Earth's biodiversity. There is their traditional self-governing system to consider and the application of FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) so that they are functionally equal partners in decision making.

*What kind of coordination mechanism can be used to allow all stakeholders to work that can be measurable, delivered and effective. This mechanism should also be a transparent and accountable. Given the current landscape what can we put in place to bring these together?*

The CBD Secretariat has examined initiatives that were used in the Lima-Paris Action Agenda, leading up to the Paris Agreement. It has also examined various action agenda platforms for non-state actors to profile voluntary commitments.

It was noted that many non-state actors have been announcing commitments in support of the post-2020 framework. One example is the [Voices for Nature](#) at the recent UN Biodiversity Summit. Such biodiversity-focused announcements, provide an opportunity for the CBD Action Agenda to connect and profile the growing sub and non-state actors' commitments, maintaining the momentum to COP15, as Parties negotiate the goals and targets for the new framework to be adopted in 2021.

The Action Agenda web platform is currently connecting with other platforms to enhance operability. For instance, the CBD secretariat is working with UN partners, like UNEP-WCMC on a prototype for voluntary area-based commitments. It is also working with broader stakeholder groups. For the next phase of its work, CBD Secretariat welcomes feedback on the platform and plans to explore connections with other existing and relevant platforms. Discussions with the VCA platform will be explored. The scope of work and interconnections to monitoring, reviewing, and reporting under the CBD will be discussed at an upcoming subsidiary meeting to assess opportunities and inform Parties on options in support of the implementation of the post-2020 framework.

Some speakers opined that an informal mechanism with transparency and auditing abilities could be housed outside the CBD to avoid any risk of green washing. Youth, biodiversity-related agreements, IPLCs, gender groups, and so on will have a role to play here. Considering the wide range of stakeholders, an external body might fit the needs for linkages better. Additionally, it will be essential to align this effort with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as, in general, they are garnering greater attention both from governments at a higher level and from non-state actors, notably the private sector.

The HAC will continue to work through current and new task forces to improve inclusivity so that they can bring in a wider range of perspectives e.g. from IPLCs, to improve efficiency. An informal, voluntary, non-binding global registry will remain an important consideration for this mechanism and the VCA which is already active in the field could contribute. It will continue to be important to find a common language between technical CBD discussions and those in the field.

Regarding IPLCs, a speaker noted some next steps to engage IPLCs more fully as important stakeholders towards meeting biodiversity goals as a) educating stakeholders on the legal history of IPLCs and state responsibility regarding this history; b) promoting constitutional reforms so that IPLC are 'peoples' with a legal pre-colonisation history; and c) transforming research protocols for engagement with IPLCs, e.g. to include more FPIC mechanisms.

### **Questions to consider from the discussion**

*1. Since there is a lot happening at state and non-state level actions and impacts, how do we coordinate the two and communicate between them and so we do not lose out on the non-state actors' contributions?*

*2. How do we bring together a formal and/or informal mechanism with impact measurement in place etc. to be discussed by CBD bodies – SBSTTA and the COP?*

*3. How can we ensure transparency and accountability of actions of non-state actors. What sort of informal mechanism can take these into account that can still be measurable?*

*4. The VCA Platform and the Action Agenda prototype are examples of mechanisms, but how to we bring such mechanisms together?*

*Thank you all very much for a most stimulating discussion!*

**Registered participants**

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24	Lennart Kümper-Schlake,	Scientific Officer of Bundesamt für Naturschutz, Bonn, Germany
25	Li Gu	CBD, China

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31	Marcel Kok	PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, The Netherlands
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50	Ramesh Pratap Singh Singh	
51	Randy Houlahan	Secretariat CBD
52	Raphaelle Flint	Voluntary Conservation Areas platform manager, Earthmind
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