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# **CBDA Webinar-Biodiversity COP 15 in Montreal: Looking and acting beyond what the media told us**

## **Techno-fixes**

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# Introduction

The Kunming-Montreal GBF and related decisions adopted at COP 15 under the CBD comprise a mixed bag of proposed measures to address the biodiversity and converging climate and other crises





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# Technofixes: Synthetic Biology and the CBD and Cartagena Protocol Processes



# Synthetic biology = new dimension in the field of genetic engineering

Synthetic biology - incorporates DNA/RNA synthesis, sequencing, as well as modify living organisms with 'novel' traits for agricultural or ecosystem changes

Synthetic biology developments are increasing at a fast pace today – pose risks and potential adverse impacts on human and animal health, social-cultural and economic and ecological spheres – especially in the context of nature conservation

This warrants the need for these technologies to be anticipated, monitored and assessed





Precautionary principle = undermined with each  
negotiation by industry, big biotech crop countries







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## Outcomes of the COP 15: GBF and COP Decisions





GBF has a strong focus on science, technology and innovation (*see for example Section under considerations for implementation*) but this is without the balance of the precautionary approach, or of horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment



# Target 17 on biotechnology

- Target 17 on biotechnology = fails to contain language on precaution, HSMA and socio-economic considerations = blindfolding the CBD
- “Establish, strengthen capacity for, and implement in all countries in biosafety measures as set out in Article 8(g) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and measures for the handling of biotechnology and distribution of its benefits as set out in Article 19 of the Convention.”





# New and emerging issue?

- Attempts by biotech industry to remove synbio – claims that it doesn't meet the criteria as a 'new and emerging issue'
- Lack of consensus = opposition of a broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment process of the most recent technological developments







# Interconnectedness and linkages of the Targets in the GBF

*T10 - 'Ensure that areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the sustainable use of biodiversity, including through a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification, agroecological and other innovative approaches, contributing to the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services'*





# Interconnectedness and linkages of the Targets in the GBF

- Target 10 on agriculture is related to other targets including; (T7 on reducing pesticides and HH chemicals, T8 on climate, T17 on biotechnology, among others).
- T10 = Agroecology & Sustainable Intensification (SI)
- SI = mono-crop farming, reliance on GMOs, pesticides = undermining of agroecology and agricultural biodiversity



# Limited gains under the Synbio agenda

- Contested as a new and emerging issues, only one cycle for broad HSMA with no guarantee for continuation, socio-economic considerations and environmental risk assessments which were contentious issues deleted
- Provision for multidisciplinary in the AHTEG for HSMA = participatory process = broad range of scientific disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary and intercultural expertise from indigenous peoples, and local communities







Still opportunity to fall back on under the CBD with its principles of precaution and biosafety obligations under (Article 7 on identification and monitoring and Article 14 on impact assessment) that ensure HSMA





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**Other processes related to Synthetic biology and  
Intersessional work**



- ***Risk assessment and risk management decision*** (Parties agreed to develop guidance materials to support risk assessment of LMOs containing engineered gene drives and established an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on RA. This decision also recall importance of precautionary approach)
- ***Detection and Identification decision*** which involve further work on new detection techniques and on the detection and identification of newly developed LMOs
- ***Socio-economic consideration decision*** which involves sharing experiences by Parties on experiences on taking socio-economic considerations in decision making,....





More work to be undertaken at international level = participation in online forums, nomination of experts and these decisions will have implications on national decision making on biosafety regulation and the future of international decision making on new and emerging technologies





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**What next?**



- Adopted GBF was a missed opportunity and a lost chance to take forward the discussions on biosafety in the context of halting and reversing biodiversity loss
- As the push for biotech industry in these international spaces continues to undermine precaution, HSMA and other important aspects such as socio-economic considerations this poses a risk to national decision making and how to deal with new and emerging technologies





- There is still a lot of work to be done both at national and international levels
- As Parties embark on revising their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) in the ensuing years we need to ensure that the principles of precaution are taken into account
- This will be the same for parties to the CPB and any future decisions on genetic engineering through synthetic biology and other emerging technologies







It will be extremely important for civil society and social movements, IPLCs, women, youth particularly in the global South – Africa to campaign for appropriate responses to the multiple challenges facing biodiversity loss which that are democratic/participatory, socially justice, and ecologically sustainable and those that don't rely on technofixes.



# Thanks



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