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Equity and ambition needed in resource mobilization

Lim Li Ching, Third World Network

Agreement on the resources needed for taking action to address the biodiversity crisis is crucial at COP16. With over 400 square brackets to resolve, these discussions will be very contentious, and will quickly become entrenched in the North-South fight over monies owed. When we view it from a global justice lens, we understand that it really is about equity.

Developing countries hold most of the world's biodiversity, so bear the bigger burden to take action. Developed countries bear greater responsibility due to "the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command."

This is the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Article 20 clearly obliges developed countries to provide financial resources to developing countries so that they can effectively implement their commitments. Developed countries have not delivered on their commitments.

Further, developed countries bear overwhelming current and historical responsibility for ecological breakdown. They owe an ecological debt to the rest of the world, which far surpasses the financial resources currently provided by developed to developing countries.

Developed countries' contributions to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) so far is less than \$250m. The KMGBF target for flows from developed to developing countries is at least \$20bn per year by 2025, and at least \$30bn per year by 2030. (Assuming 2023 as the start year, by 2025, the total provision should be at least \$60bn, and at least \$210bn by 2030.)

Developing countries want a dedicated Global Biodiversity Fund established at COP 16, that is under the authority of the COP and responsive to their needs and priorities. Currently the GBFF, under the GEF, has a governance structure that favours developed countries.

This is being strongly resisted by developed countries.

Instead, they have passed on their responsibilities to corporate interests under the guise of "all sources". References to private finance, blended finance and innovative financial schemes, including market-based mechanisms such as biodiversity offsets and credits, are all over the text.

But these are false solutions, and will harm peoples and biodiversity. At the very least, their mention should be coupled with requirements to assess their impacts on biodiversity, gender equality and human rights. Brackets on references to environmental and social safeguards, and a human rights-based approach – principles accepted in the KMGBF – must be lifted.

Instead, collective actions, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, Mother Earth-centric actions and non-market-based approaches, are the best means to protect biodiversity. These approaches are recognised in the text, but there is no agreement on whether support should be scaled up for them.

The scale and justice aspects of the resource mobilization discussion need to vastly increase. This must include the amounts flowing directly to rightsholders – indigenous peoples, local communities, women, youth – who are the best stewards of biodiversity.



How False Finance Destroys Biodiversity

Simone Lovera, Biomass Action Network

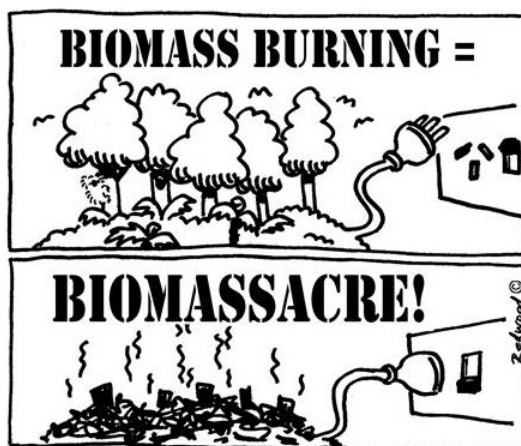
Now it is *Action Time* for biodiversity policy makers, who are coming together at COP 16 for the first time since the adoption of the historic *Global Biodiversity Framework* in 2022, and the big question on the table is: “Do we have the resources we need?” Delivering finance for conservation will be at the heart of North-South negotiations the coming weeks, and the demand of developing countries that developed countries pay the new and additional costs of biodiversity conservation in light of historical injustices is fair and square.

The good news is that there is a lot of money - but much of it is being spent the wrong way: The recently released *Banking on Biodiversity Collapse 2024 report** of the *Forests and Finance Coalition* shows how 77 billion USD was invested in forest risk commodities between January 2023 and June 2024 alone. Even climate finance continues to be spent on policies that destroy biodiversity – despite the essential role healthy ecosystems like forests play in climate mitigation and adaptation.

A new report by a group of Asian NGOs* including several *Biomass Action Network* members on the devastating impact of subsidized industrial bioenergy production demonstrates how misguided incentives destroy precious ecosystems in the name of climate action. In 2023 alone, wood pellet demand in Asia surged by no less than 20%, with South Korea and Japan being the lead importers. This demand is driven by lush subsidy schemes and other incentives like the Japanese Feed-in-Tariff system, despite growing scientific evidence that bioenergy is not only a disaster

for biodiversity but also triggers more greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuels, per unit of energy. The Korean government supported biomass burning with more than 33 million USD per year between 2015 and 2022. Meanwhile, Indonesia’s own climate strategies, which include an aggressive co-firing scheme that is seen as a survival strategy for the coal industry itself, will trigger an additional demand of more than 8 million tonnes of biomass.* This is threatening at least 10 million hectares of undisturbed forests, and includes massive expansion of monoculture tree plantations which already comprise 1.2 million hectares only a few years into this plan - which will replace forests and other ecosystems.

That is why today’s **International Day of Action on Big Biomass** will focus on the devastating impacts of industrial bioenergy production on biodiversity - and the false finance that supports this industry, including harmful subsidies.



It is clear that we do not simply need to “mobilize” resources, in large part we need to redirect funding to ensure it contributes to conservation instead of destruction. Another new report by the Forest and Finance Coalition “*Regulating Finance for Biodiversity*”⁴, shows exactly how this

could be done. It is high time, developed countries put their money where their mouth is, reform subsidies, and regulate the financial sector to ensure public and private investments contribute to biodiversity conservation, instead of destruction.

* See the online version for links to the reports.



The CBD's Role in Securing Multilateral Regulation for Biodiversity: doing better than past Mainstreaming Processes

Helena Paul, Econexus

The planet is losing biodiversity at alarming rates. Planetary boundaries are breached, with serious negative implications for future generations of human beings and all living organisms and ecosystems. The main driving forces for this ongoing disaster are corporations operating in sectors such as food and agriculture, forestry, mining, energy, infrastructure, and finance, which are wreaking havoc around the planet.

Many countries—particularly those most impacted by biodiversity loss in the Global South—are unable to enforce stringent environmental regulations due to economic dependencies, including debt-related pressures. Such situations can lead to a race to the bottom in environmental regulation, which will further destroy biodiversity and have severe social impacts everywhere.

Previous efforts to address this issue were organised in the “Mainstreaming biodiversity in all sectors” negotiations. This led to documents, such as the Long-Term Strategic Approach to Mainstreaming (LTAM) and its Action Plan (AP), which contained many proposals which further undermined the environment and people’s rights, and allowed corporations to continue unchecked growth and environmental degradation. These included false solutions such as Nature-based Solutions, Nature Positive, Biodiversity Offsetting, TNFD, Voluntary Certification, No Net Loss and Net Gain, multi-stakeholder platforms, and others.

In all of this process, the phrase ‘Biodiversity mainstreaming’ seems to have lost the link with what it should actually mean: making biodiversity and its protection central to the policy-making of all governments.

This happened as the result of an unbalanced and un-transparent process, which allowed for the input of

corporate actors, without Parties ever discussing the content of the resulting papers in plenary, and with little involvement from rightsholders or civil society in the whole process. The aim of the CBD as an institution is to ensure multilateral coordination towards strong environmental regulation. The CBD should set up a new process at COP 16, with the meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, other rightsholders and civil society, to develop global policies that ensure all countries apply robust regulations to prevent further biodiversity destruction in a multilaterally coordinated way. The objective and suggested name of this process would be “ensuring coherent multilateral regulation to protect biodiversity”.

Stating that the Global Biodiversity Framework already addresses mainstreaming does not take into account that the GBF itself has gaps, weaknesses and internal contradictions. Therefore, it does not fully reflect what the protection of biodiversity as a major priority should actually entail.

True biodiversity protection is an urgent priority that should be fully discussed and developed in plenary with Parties and Observers, in a new process that learns from the procedural and content shortcomings of the mainstreaming process.



Biodiversity Offsets and Credits

A Mirage Destined to Undermine Earth's Future

Nele Mariën, Friends of the Earth International

In a world where economic growth is sacred for most decision-makers, and where profit-making is the mandate corporate CEOs have, biodiversity is constantly under threat. Significant parts of the economy rely upon the continued possibility to implement “development projects” in areas with valuable ecosystems.

Yet, at the same time, the global recognition of the biodiversity crisis is strong, and for most actors, it is clear that “something” needs to be done. Enter biodiversity offsets and credits, presented under a variety of names and concepts that would make anyone confused, and make a global overview impossible.

The idea behind biodiversity offsets is that it is ok to destroy a natural area, as long as this impact can be compensated elsewhere with a similar amount of nature. However, in practice, these “similar” ecosystems are rarely replicated successfully, even as many are destroyed under the false promise of compensation. Biodiversity credits are often used as tools for greenwashing, but more commonly for offsetting. Both biodiversity offsetting and crediting fundamentally conflict with the integrity of ecosystems, resulting in the loss of key habitats, degradation of ecosystem services, soil erosion, disruption of water cycles, and the spread of invasive species.

Over the past period, carbon markets have displayed a huge amount of serious problems regarding environmental integrity, with multiple scandals being revealed. Such problems are bound to be repeated by biodiversity markets. In fact, the inconsistency becomes even more pronounced, as measuring biodiversity is even more challenging - if not outright im-

possible - than measuring carbon.

Biodiversity Offsets were included in the GBF as a source of finance. Yet, financial flows from biodiversity crediting are very insecure and unpredictable. Furthermore, this type of finance inevitably is linked to the destruction of biodiversity and can, therefore, not be called a contribution to biodiversity. Nevertheless, biodiversity offsetting and crediting markets are under constant development, a lot of it without public scrutiny.

Biodiversity offsetting and crediting justify the encroachment by corporations and conservation NGOs into the rich historical biodiversity in Indigenous Peoples’ territories by transforming biodiversity into exchangeable units. It further impacts gender equality and human rights by opening the floodgates for forced evictions, arbitrary detentions, land grabbing, various forms of gender-based violence, food insecurity, destruction of livelihoods and traditional practices.

279 Civil society Organisations and Academics have signed a statement which warns about the dangers of biodiversity offsetting and crediting for our common future. Find the statement and other relevant information on <https://www.biodmarketwatch.info> *

A recent report “The Biodiversity Market Mirage” by 6 civil society organisations elaborates on all of the aspects laid out in this article: <https://www.foei.org/publication/biodiversity-offsetting-crediting-report> *

* See the online version for links



Biodiversity Offsets and Credits: examining risks and challenges

Side event by TWN | GYBN | FOE | GFC

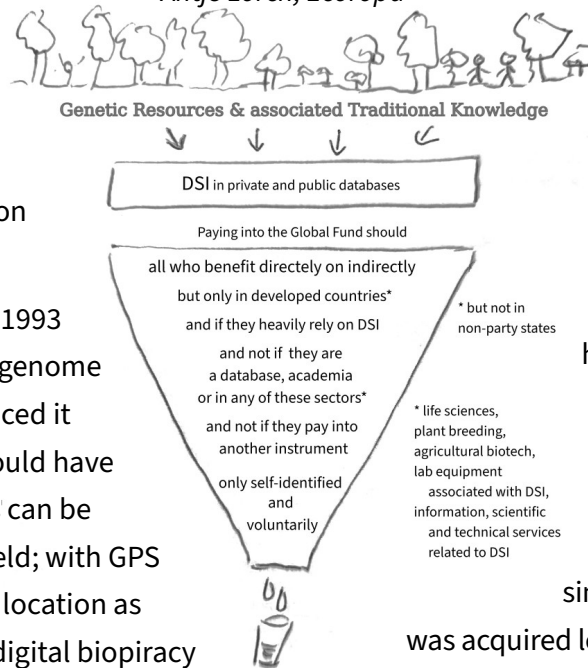
Today, Monday, 21 October, 18:00, Malpelo - Contact Group 1 meeting room

Open Letter to the
Executive Secretary



DSI: An obligation or a mere trickle of funds?

Antje Lorch, Ecoropa



The third objective of the Convention is an obligation to “the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources”.

The world was a different place in 1993 when this was decided. When the genome of whole organisms were sequenced it was a mile stone, but not many could have envisioned a point where samples can be sequenced and uploaded in the field; with GPS coordinates of the exact sampling location as additional metadata - and where digital biopiracy would be possible without physical material leaving the country.

And even now, the idea that this information can be shared across databases, seems to be settling in only slowly. Even harder to grasp is the idea, that these databases can include tools to find similar sequences, to include metadata such as use, traditional knowledge and locations, and to take that information and generate a new sequence from it: a digital sequence that might not exist in nature, but that is *only* possible because so many genetic resources and additional information were collected and added.

But while science has developed fast and far: the obligations of the Convention still stand.

Searching for sequences, comparing them with others, generating new ones: none of this is a goal in itself. It can result in ideas that can be marketed, into products that can be sold, and it requires equipment and services that users pay for. Even running the databases can be a business in itself. All of this is benefiting from the use of digital sequence information of genetic resources. And these benefits have to be shared with those that provided them, with those who conserve biodiversity and protect it against many forms of destruction, espe-

cially with IPLCs as stewards of biodiversity. But the current negotiations on DSI are not just chipping away on the obligation to share benefits: they take a sledge hammer to it. On one hand, access to genetic resources and thereby access to DSI is held up high: Nothing should even inconvenience science in the slightest, not even something as simple as asking whether a sample was acquired legally, or where it's coming from.

Private databases are not even talked about even though they have access to all the data in the public ones, and can combine it with other DSI as well as additional information that they keep to themselves and their customers.

But on the other hand, the draft decision excludes an evergrowing number of those who benefit from DSI a from the obligation to share benefits: users in developing countries, users that rely on DSI but not heavily, whole sectors such as databases, academia, life sciences, plant breeding, agricultural biotechnology, laboratory equipment required for DSI, or information and technical services related to it. So will we be left with just a few users in developed country parties, from sectors that heavily rely on DSI, voluntarily contributing based on their self-identification? Probably hoping that their shareholders don't objects to such voluntary contributions when so many other businesses won't be contributing to the Global Fund.

And then in four years the COP might look at whether this actually worked... Four years during which more and more genetic resources will have been fed into the databases, will have been consumed by AI tools - and will never come out of the databases again - even if the benefit-sharing did not function at all.



Horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment

Fundamental in ensuring equity and precaution in synthetic biology development

Eva Sirinathsinghji, Third World Network

Novel synthetic biology applications, such as those designed to possess self-spreading capabilities, to perform wild ecosystem-wide engineering, or to use the world's genetic biodiversity for the production of AI-generated artificial genetic sequences, pose serious challenges to biosafety regulations and risk assessments. Such conceptual and biological novelties raise a wide range of ecological, health, socio-economic, cultural and ethical concerns. Significant hype also surrounds the industry, warranting careful scrutiny over which are the most viable, locally appropriate and less risky approaches for protecting biodiversity and human well-being.

Novel 'synbio' technologies urgently require a precautionary approach to their regulation, including *broad and regular horizon scanning and in-depth assessments* of their potential impacts on biodiversity.

Broad, multidisciplinary expertise, including of rights-holders, are required to assess the full range of potential biosafety, socio-economic, ethical and cultural risks, as well as provide broader scientific assessments e.g. of cumulative/long term impacts, efficacy, veracity of claims of benefits. Such assessments can complement, not duplicate the work under the Cartagena Protocol. They can also include interrelated issues such as fair and equitable benefit sharing arising from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources.

Lessons can be learnt from the parallel situation with LMO crop technologies. After three decades of LMO crop commercialisation, there is an accumulation of evidence linking them to adverse socio-economic impacts on farmers' livelihoods, repeated technology

failures, pesticide-associated health impacts, and potential biodiversity loss. Calls for more holistic assessments have ensued.

Without the *capacity for countries to be able to horizon-scan, monitor and assess novel and potentially risky synthetic biology technologies*, countries may be exposed to bearing the brunt of risks, and potentially paving the way for inequitable 'technology dumping' of ineffective technologies.

Capacity building and development, access to and transfer of technology, and knowledge sharing, and the proposed *thematic action plan* in section (A) of the draft decision, needs to thus be developed in the context of precaution, by incorporating elements of Section (B), to include on broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment, with a *thematic action plan* developed in this context. Technologies assessed and transferred need to be *locally appropriate and environmentally-sound, in accordance with Article 7, 14, and 19, paragraph 4.*

A continued *broad and regular horizon-scanning, monitoring and assessment process* (Section B) is also required through re-establishment of the multidisciplinary AHTEG, and adopting the recommendations of its recent work to perform in-depth assessments of the prioritised topics of self-spreading vaccines for wildlife, the integration of AI and machine learning with genetic engineering, and engineered gene drives. Otherwise the process risks becoming empty.

For precaution and equity to prevail, balance between capacity building for R&D, and the capacity to assess against risks, must be restored.



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