



Elephants in the Room

Third World Network

The world is facing a polycrisis rooted in an inequitable model: Biodiversity loss, climate breakdown and pollution are interlocking symptoms of a system that rewards short-term extraction and profit for a few, placing economic growth above social and environmental wellbeing for all.

The ‘elephants in the room’ – the structural root causes of biodiversity destruction – remain unaddressed. A new report, *We Need to Talk About the Elephants in the Room (And Why Ignoring Them Perpetuates Biodiversity Destruction)*, focus on four distinct ‘elephants in the room’ that are unaddressed, or at any rate not squarely addressed. The global review is not designed to contend with these issues, and its focus on gaps in implementation and finance is insufficient. Addressing symptoms without tackling these deeper structural root causes will not halt biodiversity loss and harm to peoples.

The first elephant is the rules of the global economic and financial system, which actively drive extraction at the expense of social and environmental priorities. States caught inside this system find themselves on a perpetual treadmill. Many are structurally pushed to maintain and expand extractive industries to sustain their financial stability and investability, servicing debt and balancing external accounts within a system whose rules they neither wrote nor can easily change.

The second elephant is the harmful financial flows, both private and public, that continue to pour into the sectors driving biodiversity loss. Resource mobilisation for biodiversity cannot be reduced to a search for new funding; it must equally confront the vastly larger flows of harmful finance already at work. This is finance that enables, cheapens, insures or lends legitimacy to biodiversity-destructive activities – and no amount of new ‘green’ funding can outweigh it while it remains unaddressed.



How many “elephants” can the web of life sustain?

The third elephant is the corporate capture of the institutions and laws meant to govern this system. Powerful corporations and business interests shape global and national institutions, laws and policy to serve their own vested interests: pressing regulators to bend standards to fit existing production models, threatening relocation when standards tighten, and using instruments such as Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) to sue governments that attempt to raise environmental protections. This effectively results in corporate rights being privileged over environmental regulations.

The fourth elephant is the transformation of the crisis itself into a financial opportunity for the profit of a few, enabled by a market logic that is flawed when applied to nature. A growing industry of market-based 'solutions' – biodiversity offsets and credits, green bonds, and private and blended finance mechanisms – is being touted as generating biodiversity finance. In practice, however, these schemes fail to generate the necessary finance and often deepen social and ecological harm. These false

solutions serve an additional function: they allow Global North countries to appear to be acting, while they are in fact sidestepping their financial obligations to the Global South.

These four elephants all work together to protect the interests that profit from biodiversity destruction. No strategy to address the biodiversity crisis can succeed while these actors, drivers and the structures that empower them remain unnamed and unchallenged.

To effect real systemic and transformative change, action is needed to transform economic and financial conditions and challenge powerful lobbying blocs and industries. The crisis also has colonial roots, and those who contributed least bear the heaviest burdens. The 'elephants in the room' rest on inequitable systems of exploitation and control, and create a 'justice gap' that must be recognised and addressed.

Download the report *We Need to Talk About the Elephants in the Room (And Why Ignoring Them Perpetuates Biodiversity Destruction)* [here](#):



30x30, but for whom?

COP17 must put rights before hectares

Emily Mutota (socio-ecologist and researcher) & Mariam Mayet (African Centre for Biodiversity)

The CBD's first global review should be the COP17's reckoning moment. It must ask not whether governments have updated plans, announced finance, or placed more hectares on a map, but whether implementation restores biodiversity while strengthening the rights and authority of those sustaining living landscapes. Otherwise, the review **risks becoming an exercise in global greenwashing.**

This is the central warning of the *African Centre for Biodiversity's* new study "Biodiversity, land, and power: 30x30, communal livestock systems, and food sovereignty in South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana." It finds that biodiversity governance is moving into communal and productive landscapes, while policy alignment is advancing faster than community decision-making power and accountability. For COP17, the critical test is therefore not whether communities are recognised or consulted, but

whether they can **shape, refuse, or renegotiate decisions affecting their land, resources, and livelihoods.**

This makes 30x30 a struggle over land and power, not simply an area target. Protected areas, prospective other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), stewardship sites, and community-managed landscapes are not interchangeable hectares. Recognition does not secure tenure, protect grazing and water access, or confer binding community authority. People may remain on their land yet lose control over the resources sustaining them: **displacement by function if not by fence.**

The global review must reject the fiction that designation equals delivery. Parties should report ecological effectiveness, connectivity, and

representativeness separately from governance quality. They must identify rights-holders; customary and seasonal uses; decision-makers; and effects on grazing, cultivation, fishing, harvesting, water, and cultural places. **30x30 must not turn communal lands into conservation assets while landholders remain powerless.** No hectare should count where rights-holders cannot say yes, say no, renegotiate, control benefits, and seek remedy.

Implementation activity is not proof of success. An independently evaluated Namibian rangeland programme reached 58 communities yet delivered no significant gains in cattle productivity, household income, or nutrition, while four of 10 ecological indicators worsened. COP17's global review must therefore measure verified outcomes, not participation or spending alone.

Biodiversity finance is a new frontier of control over land, nature, and livelihoods. Blended finance, offsets, and biodiversity credits can empower investors through contracts, data, and long-term land-use restrictions without changing ownership. **Offsets license destruction here against uncertain gains elsewhere.** COP17 must prevent market finance from displacing binding public finance or opening communal lands to accumulation. The report's forward-looking warning is that finance and conservation obligations are expanding faster than the safeguards needed to govern them.

COP17 should therefore require Parties to show who holds decision-making authority, who can renegotiate or exit harmful arrangements, how benefits and risks reach households, and what remedy is available when ecological or livelihood outcomes deteriorate - before implementation is scaled up. This would turn the global review into an **early-warning and course-correction mechanism** rather than a retrospective record of promises.

COP17 must change the measure of progress: targets versus implementation; hectares versus verified biodiversity gains; pledged finance versus funds received; participation versus decision-making authority; and grievances versus remedies. Every commitment should be traceable through a responsible institution, disbursed budget, site-level action, affected rights-holders, independently verified ecological and social outcomes, and remedy.

The choice is stark. The global review can secure tenure, protect productive access, and strengthen community authority. Or it can legitimise new conservation and financial obligations while power remains concentrated in states, agencies, donors, and investors. 30x30 will command legitimacy only if it protects biodiversity with justice - not at the expense of those already caring for the land.

Download the "**Biodiversity, land, and power**" report here:



(... continuation article Cali Fund on page 4)

Taken together, COP17 risks shifting the burden of making the multilateral mechanism work onto developing countries and communities, from whose resources DSI is extracted and used anonymously, and not on those who extract or facilitate extraction.

Developed countries' failures – to provide sufficient financing for biodiversity in developing countries, prevent their databases from facilitating digital

biopiracy, and to incentivize DSI users in their jurisdictions – create triple jeopardy for developing countries and communities: pressure to waive national ABS laws to mobilize Cali Fund financing; continued inequitable DSI extraction and use without permission or participation; and reduced autonomy over funds they are entitled to receive. Will COP17 correct these inequities or entrench them further?

The Cali Fund: A bargain at developing countries' expense?

Nithin Ramakrishnan, Third World Network

As CBD COP17 opens, the Cali Fund is celebrated as a breakthrough in biodiversity finance, despite limited contributions from DSI users. Behind the celebrations lies a question of justice: who is paying for what, and who is being asked to make concessions? The Cali Fund is the financial arm of the CBD's multilateral mechanism, established to address inequities in benefit-sharing from DSI. Its success must be measured not only by the revenue it raises for biodiversity, but by whether it prevents digital biopiracy and ensures that provider countries and communities can participate in and benefit from scientific progress.

Decision 16/2 requires Parties with DSI users in their jurisdictions, mostly developed countries, to incentivize them to contribute to the Cali Fund. Yet the COP17 draft decision proposes recognition of Cali Fund certificates by DSI provider countries as the main incentive, without mentioning incentives user countries could offer. While calling the Fund a "major innovation in global biodiversity finance", developed countries are in effect shifting responsibility for incentivizing private-sector contributions to developing countries. Meanwhile, developed countries are falling short of their obligations to provide financial resources to developing countries, with target 19(a) of the KMGBF not met.

Decision 16/2 also calls on Parties sponsoring or hosting sequence databases to ensure databases implement the decision. Database accountability and transparency to all Parties are essential for legal certainty, including whether DSI was lawfully published and used. Monetary contributions cannot legitimize unlawfully published DSI or exempt users from non-monetary obligations or requirements for prior informed consent from Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Yet, rather than ensuring database

accountability, developed countries hosting most databases are pressing provider countries to recognize certificates, while their stakeholders seek to make certificates conclusive proof of lawful use and benefit-sharing. The COP17 draft decision risks advancing this agenda, indirectly, if not directly.

COP17 is supposed to consider additional modalities, including making public access to DSI accountable and transparent to all Parties; thresholds and contribution rates, using national and international standards, for small, medium and large entities; and benefit-sharing that accounts for products and services developed using DSI. However, the draft decision does not address these issues effectively. It leaves database accountability to database-managers' discretion; proposes exempting entities classified nationally as small or medium-sized; and calls for work on alternative payment pathways based on DSI's value rather than the total revenue-based calculations set out in decision 16/2. These proposals risk narrowing contributions while pressuring provider countries to waive ABS laws and communities' rights over genetic resources, including DSI.

This imbalance extends to the Fund's governance. Institutional documents such as the Memorandum of Understanding of the Cali Fund risks allowing monetary contributors to evaluate fund utilization, influence priorities and impose conditions, undermining recipient countries' and communities' autonomy. Although developing countries have called for review, pressure is mounting to approve the documents without amendment, with opponents arguing that changes could damage the Fund's reputation.

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