

Will this year's UN Biodiversity Conference be the Paris Agreement for nature?

COP 15 explained

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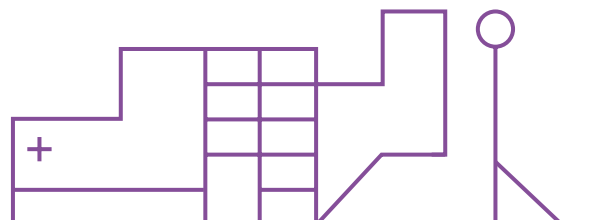


Introduction

This year, a major event will happen in international negotiations on biodiversity that could have significant impacts on nature and climate. From 7th to 19th December 2022, representatives from 196 countries will meet in Montreal, Canada, for the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN (United Nations) Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹. At the Conference, the Parties will finalise what has become known as the 'Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework', which includes a set of Targets.

If this sounds familiar and interesting but you feel that you don't quite know enough, then you're not alone. This paper intends to unpack what's going on at this hugely significant event and, most importantly, why it's relevant to the risks and opportunities around nature faced by you and your business², and why COP 15 might be the new Paris Agreement.

1. Biodiversity comes from the two words, biological and diversity.
2. In this paper we use 'business' to mean private, public and third sector organisations.



Why is nature important for business?

Benefits from biodiversity and nature include not only food and social value but also minerals for our mobile phones, water for manufacturing, pollination for coffee crops, wood for paper and furniture, medicines, and much more. Biodiversity and nature also provide nature-based solutions to climate mitigation and adaptation, and regulate disease. They are important to the functioning of business, and the continual economic growth that business strives for cannot continue into the future if the supply of biodiversity and nature is threatened.

In his review, 'The Economics of Biodiversity in 2021', Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta noted:

'The risks associated with biodiversity loss – reductions in the productivity and resilience of ecosystems along supply chains – have significant macroeconomic and financial implications.'³

One of the headline messages of this review was that we need to understand and accept that economies are rooted in nature, not external to it.⁴

However, the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and the 2022 WWF (World Wildlife Fund) Living Planet Report found that, globally, 69% of species have declined since 1970 and the decline continues⁵. The IPBES⁶ (Intergovernmental Science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem

Services) global assessment report noted that the diversity between species and ecosystems (i.e. biodiversity) is declining faster than at any time in history and that direct and indirect drivers of this change have accelerated during the last 50 years⁷.

As nature begins to become scarcer, the costs of production will inevitably increase. Despite this, biodiversity and nature are often absent from decision-making in business.

'Some business leaders and decision makers seem to think that nature and biodiversity are "nice to have" elements of sustainability. In fact, unless we prioritise looking after our fragile and finite natural systems, we will not have the natural resources and supply chains that our economy and indeed our very existence rely on.'

Sarah Mukherjee, MBE, CEO IEMA

3. The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review (Abridged): The Economics of Biodiversity The Dasgupta Review: Abridged Version (publishing.service.gov.uk)

4. The Economics of Biodiversity The Dasgupta Review: Headline Messages (publishing.service.gov.uk)

5. WWF Living Planning Report - lpr_2022_full_report_1.pdf (panda.org)

6. IPBES home page IPBES Home page | IPBES secretariat

7. IPBES Global Assessment Report: Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services | IPBES secretariat

What is the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and COP 15?

The Convention

The UN CBD⁸ is a written agreement – a legally binding treaty with three core goals:

- the conservation of biological diversity
- the sustainable use of its components, and
- the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.

The Convention was opened for signature in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, often known as the 'Rio Earth Summit' and has now been ratified by 196 nations who are obliged, among other commitments, to create strategies and action plans to implement the provisions of the Convention in their country.

The Conference of Parties (COP)

The Conference of Parties is a biannual meeting of the countries who have signed the Convention, also attended by many stakeholders from civil society, indigenous people and local communities, business and intergovernmental organisations such as IUCN and other parts of the UN. The first Conference of the Parties – 'COP 1' – was held in 1994 in the Bahamas, with further meetings in 1995 and 1996 and thereafter every two years. This year's COP was due to be held in China in October 2020 but was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic to May 2021, with a partial event finally held online in October 2021. The second part of the meeting was to be held in person earlier this year in China but due to ongoing coronavirus restrictions was moved to Montreal, the seat of the CBD Secretariat, in Canada. China continues the role of the host nation.

'In 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity was a ground-breaking treaty, shaped to acknowledge the interdependence of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and benefit-sharing. Thirty years later, at COP15 in Montreal this December, the 196 Parties have an historic opportunity and pressing responsibility to create a clear and measurable framework for actions that halt and reverse the catastrophic losses of biodiversity we continue to see. Governments must work harder than ever with businesses, communities and conservation organisations to ensure the new framework is embedded in all economic decision-making'

Kerry ten Kate, trustee and board member at the RSPB, Natural England and Finance Earth, and former member of the Secretariat of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, which negotiated the CBD.

8. Convention on Biological Diversity:
Home | Convention on Biological Diversity (cbd.int)



The participation of business at COPs has grown over time, with a series of business and biodiversity fora organised at successive COPs and related events⁹. At this year's COP, a day has been designated for a specific focus on finance, reflecting the important link between nature and the need to finance nature through investment, and nature as a 'capital' at the core of business activity.

Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and failure of the Aichi Targets

In 2002, 10 years after the opening of the Convention for signature, the Parties developed a strategic plan¹⁰ for the years 2002 to 2010¹¹, with four strategic goals and underlying Targets for each. In 2010, this was updated as the 'Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020' including 20 Targets, known as the Aichi Targets¹² (agreed in the Prefecture of Aichi in Japan). These Targets were intended to provide a framework for governments to tackle biodiversity loss and were structured around 5 strategic goals:

- understanding the causes of biodiversity loss and mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society
- reducing pressures on biodiversity and promoting sustainable use
- safeguarding species¹³, ecosystems¹⁴ and diversity
- enhancing the benefits to all derived from eco-system services¹⁵, and
- enhancing implementation through increased knowledge and capacity.

Unfortunately, in 2020, the UN declared that not a single one of the Aichi Targets had been fully met and only 6 of the 20 Targets had been partially met. There were various reasons given for the failure of the Targets including: that they were hard to reach and not realistic, too hard to measure, that some governments did not understand the scale of the challenge, lack of strong implementation and supporting finance, knowledge gaps, and even that some countries simply didn't support the Targets.

The UN publishes an authoritative periodic overview of the state of nature: the 'Global Biodiversity Outlook'. The latest edition, GBO5¹⁶, declared:

'Humanity stands at a crossroads with regard to the legacy it leaves to future generations'.

It also noted, however, that:

'Available evidence suggests that despite the failure to meet the goals ... it is not too late to slow, halt and eventually reverse current trends in the decline of biodiversity'. Good news.

In the upcoming COP 15 meeting in December 2022, a new strategy will be created, known as the 'Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework'. Mindful of the reasons that the Aichi Targets were not met, the Parties to the CBD are negotiating hard to arrive at a realistic, specific and measurable framework.

9. 2016 Business & Biodiversity Forum: CBD COP 13 Business & Biodiversity Forum

10. CBD Strategic Plan 2002-2010: Strategic Plan 2002-2010 (cbd.int)

11. Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020: undb-factsheet-sp-en.pdf (cbd.int)

12. Aichi Targets: Aichi-Targets-EN.pdf (cbd.int)

13. UN World Conservation Monitoring Centre A-Z: Species definition | Biodiversity A-Z

14. Ecosystems description: <https://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.765.aspx.pdf>

15. System of Environmental Economic Accounting: <https://seea.un.org/ecosystem-accounting>

16. Journal of Global Biodiversity Outlook 5: gbo-5-spm-en.pdf (cbd.int)

The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and its Targets

History

It was agreed to start the process of writing the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework in COP 14 in Sharm-El-Sheikh in 2018. The Framework text is created by a sub-group at the CBD called the 'Open-Ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework' who have met in Nairobi in 2019, Rome in 2020, Geneva in March 2022, and Nairobi again in June 2022, and will have a meeting in Montreal from 3rd to 5th December this year, directly before the COP 15 meeting. This is the final chance for member countries to agree the wording of the Framework and the goals and Targets contained therein.

'The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and its Targets will provide a blueprint for action to transform society's relationship with biodiversity and nature and to achieve a common global vision of 'living in harmony with nature' by 2050'

Bianca Lisboa Da Brasil, Programme Manager, Business Engagement, Convention on Biological Diversity, UNEP

Vision, mission and goals

According to the report from the Nairobi meeting in 2022 (including the latest, and nearly final, draft of the plan), the vision of the Framework is:

'a world of living in harmony with nature where by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved,

restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people¹⁷ .

The mission to work towards this vision, leading up to 2030, and onward to 2050, is to:

- Halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 to achieve a nature positive world
- Put nature on a path to recovery
- Act now to conserve, restore, sustainably use, and fund the halt and reversal of biodiversity loss
- Ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits of genetic resources for the benefit of planet and people
- Achieve a nature positive world in a fair and equitable way for the benefit of present and future generations.

There are four goals that support the mission that build on the vision and provide Targets – still under discussion – that include end dates, percentages of change to be made, and various specific requirements.

Theory of change

The Framework is built around a Theory of Change. This recognises that urgent action through policy is required at all levels, from global to local, to achieve the ambitions set out. The Theory of Change provides transformative actions to address drivers of biodiversity loss, put in place tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming of biodiversity actions, reduce threats to biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity is used sustainably. It assumes that work will be transparent and accountable and will be built on SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bounded) Targets.

17. Report of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Targets: REPORT OF THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE POST-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework on its fourth meeting (cbd.int)

22 Targets that can impact on business

There are currently 22 Targets in the Post-2020 Framework with a deadline of 2030. Although the Targets will be actioned by the governments of signatory countries, many if not all the Targets will affect business to a greater or lesser extent, and, below, some specific examples have been picked from the 22.

Target 5

This Target is on sustainable harvesting, trade and use of wild species. It aims to prevent exploitation and ensure that trade and use of terrestrial and marine wild species is sustainable and also aims for the safeguarding of customary sustainable use of nature by Indigenous people and local communities.

Target 7

This is on the reduction of pollution that is harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions. This includes promoting best practice and establishing frameworks to reduce nutrients lost to the environment and reduce risks from chemicals and toxic pesticides.

Target 8

This Target aims to minimise the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and eco-system services and contribute to mitigation and adaptation through nature-based solutions.

Target 10

This is a requirement to ensure that all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, contributing to the resilience of these systems, and conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining its ecosystem services.

Target 14

This aims to have governments integrate biodiversity values into policies, regulation, planning and development processes, and include strategic

environmental impact assessments across all sectors, aligning public and private activities and financial flows with the aims of the Framework.

Target 16

This Target is focused on consumers and that they are encouraged and enabled to make sustainable consumption choices, reduce food waste by half and reduce waste generation.

Target 15

This is the most important Target for business. Although the Target will be implemented by the governments of Parties to the CBD, this Target is specifically aimed at business. The (as yet unagreed) proposals include that business regularly monitor and report their impacts and dependencies, including across the supply chain, to significantly reduce (perhaps by half) negative impacts on biodiversity, also increase positive impacts, reduce their biodiversity-related risks, and move towards sustainable production and foster circularity. Also, that business provide information to consumers to help them make informed decisions and that their legal responsibilities for business for infractions of Target 15 requirements. The implication is currently that this will be applicable to all business regardless of size, and sectors, although there is a suggestion to add text to tackle the companies with the biggest impacts. Like everything in the Framework, the timeline is to 2030.

Target 21

This aims to ensure equitable and effective participation in biodiversity-related decision-making and access to information by indigenous people, women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities.

Reflections: Why is COP 15 important for business?

What needs to be achieved from COP 15?

The proposals for Targets set by member countries should be ambitious – the current biodiversity and nature crisis demands this. The Targets should also be workable and this will very much depend on the ability of governments to create robust and nuanced requirements (and finance) within their countries to support businesses to start to work towards being nature positive.

Any Target set for any business to report their impacts on biodiversity across the supply chain will be challenging but this does not mean that there should not be a Target. The Target for business provides an opportunity for governments to create a smart, proportionate and pragmatic framework for business to report. Such a framework should recognise the size of businesses and the scale of their impact.

SMEs undoubtedly have a role to play in reaching all the Targets. Reporting might seem a tough ask for an SME but they dominate the business landscape in the UK and their cumulative impacts could be significant. Governments and companies can help streamline the approach to help SMEs, for instance by arriving at workable metrics, indicators and reporting requirements.

There should be a good reporting system in place that includes a way to monitor the reporting.

Targets to reduce negative impacts will only be effective if there is an understanding of what 'impact' means, methods for measuring, and what baseline to use. It must be recognised that not all businesses

are starting from the same position – there will be many who have done no work on biodiversity impacts and others who have a full understanding.

One of the most fundamental approaches companies can take to biodiversity is to follow the mitigation hierarchy rigorously. As a priority, companies should avoid impacts on biodiversity to the extent possible, then minimising impacts that can't be avoided, restore biodiversity where it has been affected by the company's operation and value chain and, as a final step, offset or compensate for the residual losses.

Business has a role to play in the recovery of biodiversity and nature. Indeed, the future viability and success of business depends upon it. The Targets developed in COP 15 will undoubtedly further guide what that role might be. However, businesses themselves do not have to wait until such Targets are set by the international community. They can – and many do – lead the way in tackling biodiversity impacts within their companies.

'COP15 and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be setting the agenda for the next 30 years on what businesses need to be doing to reverse the loss of biodiversity – this is not about business as usual; this is about a transformation in the way we do business.'

Mark Johnston, Chair UK Business and Biodiversity Forum, members of the UN Global Partnership for Business and Biodiversity

Transformational actions

The Convention talks about 'transformational actions' and this is appropriate for business too. This can include:

- building knowledge, skills and capacity for effective management of biodiversity and nature
- integrating carbon and biodiversity into objectives and reporting
- integrating biodiversity into the business strategy
- identifying and using technological solutions for measuring and monitoring
- avoiding a silo approach to biodiversity, carbon, waste, and circularity, etc.
- recognising overlaps and synergies across environmental actions and making considered decisions on impacts of one on another (i.e. trade-offs)
- mainstreaming biodiversity and nature into decision-making across the business
- working across organisations, e.g. private companies, NGOs and communities, to share knowledge and skills.

Will this be the new Paris Agreement?

There are many who are saying that COP 15 will be the 'Paris Agreement' for nature. The Paris Agreement¹⁸, established at the UN Climate Change Conference, COP 21 in Paris in 2015, created the now well-known agreement to limit global warming to 2°C, preferably, 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. For the first time, a binding agreement created a common goal for all the participant countries. 196 member countries signed.

The Paris Agreement also created a common goal for business and for environmental and sustainability professionals, as well as popularising the phrases 'net zero' and 'carbon' in business as well as the public spheres.

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP 15 meeting in Montreal, Canada, in December 2022, and the agreement of a new framework for biodiversity actions by member countries, is an important opportunity to create a similar momentum for nature. The Targets can be used to create a successful roadmap for nature's recovery.

Governments and businesses have the chance to take a leadership role and to include biodiversity into decision-making processes just as they have included carbon. Indeed, business can start to set their own Targets immediately.

The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is essential to 'bend the curve' of biodiversity and nature loss from a downwards trajectory to a nature positive, upwards trajectory. Let's hope that it inspires businesses and their stakeholders to embrace the change and make a difference.

18. The UN Paris Agreement: The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC

Further Information

For more information from IEMA, the professional membership body for environment and sustainability or to join IEMA's Biodiversity and Natural Capital Network please contact:

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About IEMA

IEMA is the professional body for everyone working in environment and sustainability. We're committed to supporting, encouraging and improving the confidence and performance, profile and recognition of all these professionals. We do this by providing resources and tools, research and knowledge sharing along with high-quality formal training and qualifications to meet the real-world needs of members from their first steps on the career ladder, right to the very top. We believe that together we can change perceptions and attitudes about the relevance and vital importance of sustainability as a progressive force for good. Together we're transforming the world to sustainability.

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