
Biodiversity Justice: The way forward for life on earth

In 2010, we face compounding biodiversity, food, fuel, economic and climate crises. The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is fundamental to addressing these crises, and charting a truly sustainable path for humanity.

In Nagoya, governments are gathering for a critical international negotiation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in hope of stemming the ongoing losses of biodiversity – the stuff of life. Since the inception of the CBD in 1992, governments have failed to make much progress, with scientific consensus projecting more habitat loss and high rates of extinctions, including losses of food and livestock varieties, with drastic consequences to human societies. While the CBD is often described as a great compromise between the North and South (so called developed and developing), the North has not lived up its end of the compromise, especially in terms of financial resources, and also the lack of progress on the critical issue of access and benefit sharing of genetic resources (ABS).

In Nagoya, will governments agree to business as usual economic growth and overconsumption, deferring to market opportunities and techno-fixes? Or will they agree to actually address the root causes of biodiversity loss, and set forward a bold new pathway that will defend and support the custodians of biodiversity - Indigenous Peoples, local communities and small-scale food providers like farmers, fisherfolk, and pastoralists?

Over the past two months, civil society groups from all over the world have been discussing, debating and coming to agreement on what they believe to be the key issues for the Nagoya COP. We call on Parties to strengthen (not weaken) the Convention's core principles – like the ecosystem approach, the precautionary principle, and an understanding that biodiversity cannot be separated from those humans who nurture, defend and sustainably use it. Parties should stay clear of the market approach of other agreements, like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and not permit biodiversity agreements be subservient to other international agreements, including trade.

Instead, Parties should adopt a biodiversity justice approach, which means not only upholding the rights, dignity, and autonomy of all peoples, but also respecting the rights of all living things. A biodiversity justice approach places the custodians of biodiversity at the centre of policy making, and as the most critical beneficiaries of biodiversity policies. These critical communities and their conservation and management systems should be rewarded, not commoditized or forced into neo-liberal economic agendas.

Many civil society groups, from all over the world, have come together to create a set of 10 collective briefings: the “Top 10 issues for COP 10”. On the next page we highlight our key demands.

Civil society groups call for the following commitments in Nagoya:

1. Parties urgently need to fulfil their obligations as signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity and agree to a strong and ambitious strategic plan; this plan must contain targets that will:

-
- integrate biodiversity and its pivotal role in ecosystem functioning and resilience in international institutions and agreements, especially trade, and also in national policies, including economic development and accounting
 - eliminate subsidies and perverse incentives harmful to biodiversity by 2020 (particularly for oil and gas, agriculture, agrofuels/bioenergy, fishing)
 - reduce deforestation and destruction of natural habitats to zero by 2020
 - end current unsustainable production and consumption patterns
 - end overfishing and destructive fishing practices
 - make agriculture, forestry and other land use sustainable and reduce nutrient loading below critical load levels
 - achieve a representative system of protected areas based on full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and respect for their rights (including free, prior and informed consent)
 - increase public finance tenfold
 - defend, and increase genuine representation in decision making of, local conservers, users and developers of biodiversity,

2. Parties need to adopt a legally binding ABS Protocol that will have strong enforcement and compliance measures that can stop biopiracy, respects and protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and questions the primacy of intellectual property rules. The ABS Protocol should also ensure real and actual benefits for Indigenous Peoples and local communities and that the Protocol will not result in further privatization of genetic resources and monopolies on technologies.

3. Parties should address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, starting with eliminating perverse subsidies that promote the expansion of monocultures, bioenergy, biomass and other commodities.

4. Parties should avoid risky, unproven approaches like forest carbon offset markets (e.g. in REDD), biodiversity offsets and the Green Development Mechanisms that lack appropriate safeguards for biodiversity and for Indigenous Peoples rights and Human Rights.

5. Parties should adopt and uphold moratoria on the development, testing, release and use of new technologies which pose potential threats to biodiversity, including geoengineering and synthetic biology.

6. Parties should focus on implementing decisions by developing compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

7. Parties should put the real custodians of biodiversity center stage in the implementation of the Convention and in decision-making, this includes adopting a strong new work programme to enhance customary resource management and sustainable use.

8. Parties should establish a definition of forests and sustainable forest management that excludes monoculture tree plantations and prevents invasion of alien species, in line with the objectives and principles of the CBD that include the rights of communities to access, control, and govern forests.

9. Parties should defend and protect the smallholder and peasant farmers, herders, fishers and other small-scale food providers who conserve and develop agricultural biodiversity thereby securing future food. In so doing, they must prohibit any systems, methods, processes or technologies, which might damage biodiversity and related ecosystem functions in managed ecosystems.

10. Parties should agree to improve support, management and governance of existing protected areas, and ensure that any new protected areas are based on full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and respect for their rights (including free, prior and informed consent).

11. Parties should agree to expand protected areas (terrestrial and marine) to include a greater representation of biodiversity. Any new protected areas must not be part of biodiversity offset or other compensation programmes that allow business as- usual practices to continue elsewhere.

COP 10 must be turning point for biodiversity policy. We need to strengthen and renew efforts to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ensure benefits flow to those who nurture it. We need to strengthen the CBD's role in international policy and to strengthen its implementation at all levels. Civil Society calls upon parties to take heed of these imperatives for the sake of humanity and all living things.