



PRESS RELEASE

Government pandemic spending measures continue to harm biodiversity UN Biodiversity Convention discusses biodiversity, One Health and response to COVID-19

- *Links between pandemic risk and biodiversity reinforce need to address drivers of biodiversity loss.*
- *Many opportunities to build back better by integrating biodiversity in economic stimulus and recovery programmes, but currently, spending potentially harmful to biodiversity outweighs the volume of spending beneficial to biodiversity.*
- *COVID-19 pandemic highlights urgency of addressing biodiversity crisis with climate crisis, and the need for transformative change.*

15 December 2020 – Government recovery spending continues to harm biodiversity, even as scientists show the importance of halting the loss of nature to prevent future pandemics, the global body charged with protecting the variety of life on Earth heard today.

A special virtual session of the scientific and implementation bodies of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) convened on 15 and 16 December (www.cbd.int/conferences/sbstta24-sbi3-prep-02), discussed work by IPBES, OECD, GEF, WHO, CBD and others (www.cbd.int/doc/c/83a8/3f70/ac783158faabde9a8e72cacc/sbstta-sbi-ss-02-02-en.docx) to show that the underlying causes of pandemics are the same global environmental changes that drive biodiversity loss and climate change.

“The links between pandemic risk and biodiversity add further weight to the rationale for addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss to prevent or reduce risk of future pandemics” said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, CBD Executive Secretary.

“We are standing at a crossroads. The way we steer our recovery out of this pandemic will either lock us into a “business as usual” unsustainable path or will enable our societies to rebuild our relationship with nature and unlock its potential.”

Biodiversity loss and pandemics: common policies to prevent future crises

The links between pandemic risk and biodiversity show the need for an inclusive, transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral One Health approach, as identified in the fifth Edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook 5*, (www.cbd.int/gbo5) released in September 2020. Such an approach includes the following:



- A need to integrate human health considerations into land-use planning
- Improve the regulation and management of the use of, and trade in, wildlife
- Reform food and agricultural systems, particularly the management of livestock
- Lower pandemic risk by promoting responsible consumption and reducing unsustainable consumption of commodities from emerging disease hotspots, and of wildlife and wildlife-derived products, as well as by reducing excessive consumption of meat from livestock production.

Pandemics and other emerging zoonoses cause more than a trillion dollars in economic damages annually, with COVID-19 already costing tens of trillions.

Conversely, change and increasing One Health surveillance are estimated to cost one or two orders of magnitude less than the damages pandemics produce. Thus, reducing disease risk through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is highly cost-effective.

Governments continue to spend in ways harmful to biodiversity

Measures implemented by governments aimed at protecting jobs and incomes, and to promote economic stimulus and recovery, are overwhelmingly potentially harmful to biodiversity and outweigh the volume of spending beneficial to biodiversity.

Only three of the 17 countries analysed are estimated to be net-positive in environmental terms,¹ and even among these, less attention has been given to addressing biodiversity loss as compared to climate change.

There is an overall tendency to introduce stimulus measures that threaten to drive further biodiversity loss, for example by weakening environmental regulations or increasing harmful subsidies. This is likely to be counterproductive in the long term since the further loss and degradation of biodiversity will likely increase pandemic risk and jeopardize achievement of most of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Build back better: Many options available

“There are many opportunities for responses to COVID-19, including both short term stimulus measures and longer-term approaches to ‘build back better’ to contribute to sustainable development, and reduce the risk of future pandemics” said Elizabeth Mrema. These options include:

- Maintain and strengthen regulations on land use, wildlife trade and pollution, and ensure that they are effectively enforced
- Ensure that COVID-19 economic recovery measures contribute to and do not compromise biodiversity. Governments may wish to consider the following options to ensure that public financial support for stimulus and recovery measures is positive for biodiversity:
 - (i) Attaching environmental conditionality to bailouts of companies to drive sustainability improvements, particularly for bailouts in sectors with a large biodiversity footprint such as agriculture, energy and industry;
 - (ii) Screening (*ex-ante*) and monitor (*ex post*) stimulus measures for their biodiversity impacts to ensure they are aligned with long-term policy goals for sustainability;
 - (iii) Setting biodiversity spending targets for COVID-19 stimulus measures and recovery plans, similar to recovery measures which contribute to climate goals;
 - (iv) Employing public procurement to support companies and producers that meet biodiversity criteria;
 - (v) Employing fiscal policies to reward biodiversity positive outcomes when financing subnational governments to balance their budgets.

¹ www.vivideconomics.com/casestudy/integrating-climate-change-and-biodiversity-into-the-response-to-covid-19-green-employment-and-growth/

Governments should promote jobs and income support for biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and restoration to stimulate economic recovery. These activities tend to be labour intensive and quick to implement. Aid finance is needed for developing countries to safeguard their biodiversity, both in the short term and in the longer term.

Clearly, governments need to improve incentives for biodiversity conservation. Subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity could be redirected to activities that have larger socioeconomic benefits and positive impacts on biodiversity.

Similarly, governments should maintain or increase taxes on activities that harm biodiversity. Revenue from biodiversity-relevant taxes and other environment-relevant taxes could be re-directed towards green stimulus measures or used to reduce budget deficits.

It is also clear that businesses and the finance sector should be engaged for a biodiversity-positive recovery. For example, by requiring or encouraging disclosure by companies of impacts and dependencies on biodiversity and to integrate biodiversity considerations across all areas of business, including risk management.

Governments could also require or encourage national central banks and all public development banks to reorient their strategies, investment patterns, activities and operating modalities to contribute to sustainable development including the conservation and sustainable development.

Opportunity for transformative change

The evidence presented to the meeting shows that this moment is an opportunity to promote transformative change. For example, the pandemic has led many people to question what is truly “essential” and this may have shifted what is regarded as necessary and desirable for a dignified and good quality of life. Governments may also consider moving from indicators such as gross national income to more inclusive measures of progress.

With a view to promoting a just transition, attention will be needed to ensure that measures contribute to reducing inequalities.

These measures may be reflected in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, expected to be agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit, planned for China in 2021.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 196 Parties so far, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing are supplementary agreements to the Convention. The Cartagena Protocol, which entered into force on 11 September 2003, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 173 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies. It entered into force on 12 October 2014 and to date has been ratified by 129 Parties.

For more information, visit: www.cbd.int. For additional information, please contact David Ainsworth on +1 514 561 2720 or at david.ainsworth@cbd.int; or Johan Hedlund at johan.hedlund@cbd.int.