

Biodiv-COP16 – Muscles for conservation

Edition 3, 25 March 2025 // Author: Dr Timo Schönfeld, Editor: Friederike Bauer; Susanne Brösamle

One Pager

Susana Muhamad, President of the COP16 conference, was delighted at the end of the three-day event in Rome: She highlighted that while before, only the skeleton of the “global framework” for protecting biodiversity was in place, now it had been “given legs, arms and muscles”. The pending decisions had been made and the outcome had been a successful one. This was not necessarily what was expected, as the actual conference, which took place in Cali in November, had to be suspended due to the lack of quorum. This was the first conference after the historical adoption of the “Global Biodiversity Framework” (GBF) in 2022, and its aim was to further flesh out the details of the targets set back then. The fact that, at a time when multilateralism is under pressure, the community of states was able to achieve such unanimity is a positive sign amidst a difficult world situation.

The main outcomes

Key decisions from the COP16 encompass financing, monitoring and the rights of indigenous groups and local communities. Here are the main outcomes:

- **Cali Fund:** The community of states made this new fund operational in Rome for the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of digital sequence information; genetic information gathered from organisms which plays a key role in industries such as the pharmaceutical and chemical industries. Developing countries have so far not been benefiting sufficiently from this. However, through the Cali Fund, they will now have access to a greater share of the income generated from sequenced genetic resources. The fund will be built up using voluntary payments of 0.1% of the turnover of companies that profit from this invaluable natural resource. According to projections, this could easily mobilise USD 200 billion annually from the pharmaceutical industry alone by 2030.
- **Financing mechanism:** Article 21 of the Convention provides for the establishment of its own financing mechanism. The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBBF) was created at the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Montreal as an interim solution. In light of their lack of co-determination rights, developing countries requested the establishment of their own fund, located at the Secretariat of the Biodiversity Convention. This was met with resistance from developed countries, including the EU, due to qualms regarding the creation of a further structure. The opposing demands made this the decisive negotiation point at COP16. It was not possible to reach a final decision in Rome. Therefore, a process was agreed to define the problems and develop solution proposals by the time COP18 takes place. The GBBF shall remain at GEF as an interim solution in the meantime. A total of 20 billion dollars are set to be deposited into the fund annually until 2030, then this figure is to rise to a total of 30 billion. This relates to another decision of Rome to gradually increase global spending on biodiversity over the next few years, so that spending from all sources amounts to at least 200 billion dollars annually from 2030.
- **Monitoring framework:** Agreements were also made on a framework for measuring changes in biodiversity. This includes indicators and mechanisms crucial to ensuring the implementation of the 23 objectives from the GBF.
- **Indigenous groups:** It had already been decided in Cali to establish a subsidiary body for questions and concerns of indigenous and local communities (IPLCs). As a result, a working party will be created to act as a permanent subsidiary body in acknowledgement and appreciation of the key contribution made by indigenous

communities to biodiversity protection and nature conservation.

Much remains to be done

Regardless of the delight about the decisions made, this is just the beginning of the further implementation of the GBF: around three quarters of Member States have not yet adopted any “National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans” (NBSAPs). They are regarded as a decisive instrument for countries to implement the goals from Montreal on a national level. In order to achieve the important 30x30 target, the land surface area under conservation will have to be roughly doubled by 2030 (size of Russia), while marine areas under conservation must be quadrupled (twice the size of Africa).

There's a lot of work to do in this regard. Although the financial mechanism is now in place, it has so far lacked the necessary funds: payments to the Cali Fund and the GBBF are voluntary. In recent years since Montreal, the fund has received less than 400 million dollars, yet a total of 20 billion is expected for the end of this year. Whether this target can be achieved remains to be seen – the same is true regarding the 200 billion dollars spent on biodiversity by 2030. Particularly when it comes to the financing, a lot of investment and creativity is still required. The first indication of whether COP16 has really made a substantial impact will be in 2026, when the global biodiversity situation will be measured for the next time.

Hopefully there will be more progress than setbacks. The climate conference in Bélem in autumn 2025, also known as the “Forest COP”, represents an important intermediate step in this direction: here, the Brazilian government wants a greater focus to be placed on bringing climate and biodiversity considerations together in order to achieve a significantly greater impact in both areas overall. ■