

The biodiversity negotiations that concluded 2024

André Mader
Programme Director, Biodiversity and Forests
Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

In the final quarter of 2024 four major environment meetings were convened. These included the “triple COP” – separate meetings of the 16th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP-16), the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP-29), and the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Desertification (UNCCD COP-16); and the 11th meeting of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

The biennial CBD COP is arguably the most significant biodiversity meeting on the global calendar, while the biennial UNCCD COP covers various topics of direct relevant to biodiversity and the UNCCD has followed the CBD lead in many respects including by embracing CBD biodiversity targets. Meetings of the IPBES Plenary are arguably the second most important biodiversity meeting on the global calendar. None of these meetings attract as much public attention, or as many delegates, as the UNFCCC COP (66,000 registrations for COP-29) they still draw substantial participation, with about 23,000 registrations for CBD COP-16, about 20,000 for UNCCD COP-16, and about 900 for IPBES-11. So, what has been all the convening and negotiation around biodiversity focused on, and what are the links between these meetings? Here we focus on the two meetings that are most relevant to biodiversity: CBD COP-16 and IPBES-11.

CBD COP-16 (21 October – 1 November 2024, Cali)

Among the many CBD COP-16 agenda items and outcomes, some stood out as being particularly significant. One of these was the adoption of modalities for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), which followed eight years of prior negotiations. These modalities have the potential to facilitate the conservation of large marine areas in line with the CBD’s “Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework” (GBF), agreed upon at the previous meeting of the CBD COP.

Another potentially game-changing decision was to establish a permanent Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) of the Convention¹ and other provisions of the CBD related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Concerns have, however, been raised that this apparent elevation of status of Article 8(j) could isolate the issue from other important biodiversity discussions, conflicting with recent calls for integrating IPLCs into mainstream negotiations.

The controversial discussions on digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources continued, and a decision was reached on the operationalization of the multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism on the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources. The COP adopted modalities for operationalizing the mechanism, including a

¹ An article of the Convention on Biological Diversity recognizing the dependency of indigenous peoples and local communities on biological diversity and their unique role in conserving life on Earth, under which dedicated meetings have been held for several years.

global fund dubbed the Cali Fund. The decision calls on large companies from sectors benefiting from DSI use, to contribute 1% of their profits or 0.1% of their revenue to the Fund.

Despite these items of progress, due to a shortage of time to resolve all discussion several decisions were left un-adopted by the closing of the meeting. These included decisions on resource mobilization; financial mechanism; the GBF monitoring framework; planning, monitoring, reporting, and review; and the CBD budget. Consequently, the COP reconvened online from 3 – 6 December as the first resumed session of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16 R1), and will reconvene again for a second resumed session of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16 R2) on 25-27 February 2025 in Rome.

IPBES-11 (10 – 16 December 2024, Windhoek)

Assessment remains the most prominent area of work for IPBES, and the two largest items on the IPBES-11 agenda were the summary for policymakers (SPM) for the IPBES nexus assessment report and the SPM for the IPBES transformative change assessment report. Each of these assessments have been under development for the past three years and have already undergone rounds of external review. After lengthy discussions the SPMs were adopted, and their chapters accordingly accepted.

The nexus assessment is a thematic assessment that “addresses the interlinkages among biodiversity, climate change, adaptation and mitigation including relevant aspects of the energy system, water, food, and health and will consider holistic approaches based on different knowledge systems” ([Scoping Report for the Nexus Assessment](#)). Negotiations on the nexus SPM took considerably longer than expected and featured a number of points of contention including a clash between environmental and other priorities. In some cases, actions that are beneficial for biodiversity may create a trade-off with other development priorities, such as food production.

The transformative change assessment assessed and compared “different visions, scenarios, and pathways for a sustainable world, in line with the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity and considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, including visions of indigenous peoples and local communities” ([Scoping Report for the Transformative Change Assessment](#)). Probably the most noteworthy sticking points in the discussion around this SPM were frequent requests, by a small number of delegates, for increased inclusion of IPLC-related text.

Probably the third most significant item discussed at IPBES-11 was the scoping report for the second IPBES global assessment. Approval of the scoping report is a necessary prerequisite to commencing with the assessment itself. Although it took a backseat to the two assessment reports that were up for adoption at IPBES-11, the second global assessment will probably be the main focus of IPBES over the next several years its finalization in 2028. The first global assessment was stated to be “a comprehensive and ambitious intergovernmental integrated assessment of recent anthropogenic

transformations of Earth's living systems, the roots of such transformations, and their implications to society". The second can be expected to follow suit with a few notable exceptions. It was agreed, firstly, that marine biodiversity and ecosystem services would be given much greater prominence, and secondly that there would be a chapter on indigenous and local knowledge. There was a stated intention to keep the scoping report as open as possible to give the authors flexibility when compiling the assessment report itself.

Links between CBD COP-16 and IPBES-11

The CBD was established along with the UNFCCC and UNCCD in 1992 while IPBES is far younger, having been founded in 2012. Since 2012, IPBES has had increasing influence on the CBD. The CBD has increasingly recognized the outcomes of IPBES assessment reports and encouraged their uptake, and IPBES language has been adopted in various CBD texts. IPBES assessment reports have become a key source of reference information for CBD negotiations and cooperation, and IPBES has become a regular topic of discussion at CBD COPs. Meanwhile, IPBES assessments are structured partly around the way in which countries' compile their national biodiversity strategies and action plans and national reports to the CBD, which is currently guided by the CBD's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

More specifically, at COP-16 and IPBES-11 it was noted that the CBD's monitoring framework for the GBF would be a tool to inform the upcoming second IPBES global assessment. The second IPBES global assessment is also expected to inform the way in which countries implement the GBF, though some have expressed concern that the global assessment's completion in 2028 may be too late to do so. Of even more direct relevance to the GBF and its monitoring framework is the currently ongoing IPBES monitoring assessment, which is due for completion in late 2026 or early 2027.

In another example of cross-pollination between the CBD and IPBES, a CBD COP-16 decision suggested topics for future IPBES assessments, while various other COP decisions have encouraged cooperation between the two bodies.

Although the CBD has a subsidiary body on scientific, technical and technological advice (SBSTTA), which meets between meetings of the COP, IPBES appears to be playing an increasingly important advisory role to the COP. Coordination is important from the point of view of providing a cohesive approach for national and subnational actors to follow, which is the point of both the CBD and IPBES. These actors require IPBES to produce high quality and objective assessments of current knowledge, and the CBD to provide coordinated guidance on how to use that information.

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

Strategic Management Office (SMO)

2108-11 Kamiyamaguchi, Hayama, Kanagawa, 240-0115, Japan

Tel: 046-826-9601 Fax: 046-855-3809 E-mail: iges@iges.or.jp

www.iges.or.jp

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