

BirdLife International's position on an implementation mechanism for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework – September 2019

Implementation is a key component of any post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Please note that this paper does not cover all aspects of implementation, but focuses on changes that, we hope, will improve transparency and accountability of the framework: global targets, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), National Reports, and Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments. Some other elements which impact on the implementation of the framework (e.g. resource mobilisation, capacity, governance, mainstreaming and international and national cooperation) are covered in our key elements overview paper and/or separate position papers.

SUMMARY

- It is important to ensure that the process leading to the Convention on Biological Diversity's Conference of the Parties in 2020 (CBD COP15) has sufficient time to discuss the implementation mechanism. We recommend that thematic consultation(s) as part of the CBD's post-2020 Open-Ended Working Group process be dedicated to this issue (at a minimum).
- Global and national targets (and elements of targets) need to be significantly improved so that they are more SMART (Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Time-bound, Unambiguous and Scalable). Indicators and milestones need to be proposed alongside the targets.
- To ensure transparency and that progress can be assessed at the national scale, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and National Reports need to be more uniform and have consistent requirements that apply to all parties, including for example a standardised core set of independently verifiable indicators.
- Such targets/indicators could take the form of a twin-track system whereby nations could report progress towards elements of targets based on nationally relevant indicators, alongside one or more standardised indicators for each target, that can be aggregated up to global level and compared between countries.
- Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments should be made as part of an ambition-raising 'pledge' process ahead of COP15 and the agreement of the post-2020 framework. They should be made by Parties and other stakeholders to demonstrate an uplift in ambition beyond what has already been committed to under the Aichi Targets, and have their progress reported as part of the future national reporting process to ensure accountability.
- Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments are in addition to, and on top of, NBSAPs and current national reports. They should not replace these mechanisms.
- The proposed 'ratchet and review' style process for implementation cannot be achieved without addressing the underlying issues of consistency and accountability above; NBSAPs are already a national commitment to the global targets, so if the NBSAPs and National Reports are sufficiently strengthened they should provide some of the accountability, transparency, and stocktaking/ambition-raising processes needed.

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1. GLOBAL TARGETS

CONTEXT

The Aichi Targets have been much praised for being broadly based (covering the state of biodiversity, pressures acting upon it and responses to biodiversity loss), ambitious in some cases, and for seeking to achieve specific end points or states for conservation management. They have also however been criticised for ambiguity; lack of specificity and quantifiable objectives, both in terms of measuring progress and for baselines and indicators; un-comprehensiveness; and questionable ambition in terms of sufficiency to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services. Recent RSPB/BirdLife research¹ has shown a relationship between how 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Time-bound, as well as Unambiguous and Scalable) a global biodiversity target is and how much progress has been made towards it. This lack of SMART-ness, alongside other factors, has made it difficult to assess progress, whether nationally or globally, and to apply the targets at a national scale. It is also worth considering that the current Aichi Biodiversity Targets are made up of multiple elements per target which progress is measured towards, and that SMART-ness at the element level will be a determining factor of how SMART a target will be.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We would like to see a significant improvement in the SMART-ness of the post-2020 targets. The new targets should:

- be ambitious but realistic, recognising that ambition without realism can undermine confidence in the ability to deliver on targets, but equally that ambition also promotes and drives progress;
- be clearly and unambiguously worded, and provided with necessary definitions, so that the intent and necessary action or actions is apparent;
- be clear and well-defined, with explicit deliverables, and therefore amenable and easy to measure in any realistic way;
- include quantifiable elements wherever practicable to facilitate both action and the tracking of progress;
- be considered and framed against an extended SMART-type set of criteria, similar to that used by Green et al. (2019)¹ and as suggested by others.

2. NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS (NBSAPS) AND NATIONAL REPORTS

CONTEXT

The CBD currently has a process of implementation (**see Annex 1**) whereby Parties develop a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) that sets out their actions and national targets to implement the current Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Parties then report on their progress towards their NBSAP goals and targets in national reports which are submitted twice every decade (which does not allow for rapid reporting or adaptive management). These national reports are used to report on global progress against the CBD Strategic Plan (via the Global Biodiversity Outlook reports) and indicate whether collectively Parties are on track to meet their agreed global targets. One of the issues with the current process is that NBSAP and national reports vary significantly in content and scope, are often not comparable in a systematic way, do not report indicators that can be compared or summed across countries, and are

¹ Green et al. (2019) Relating characteristics of global biodiversity targets to reported progress, Conservation Biology, Volume 0, No. 0, 1-10. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cobi.13322>

highly resource-intensive to keep up to date. As stated above, the national (and global) targets within the NBSAP are often not comparable and can't be aggregated to give a scaleable global picture of ambition. This means that assessments of global progress derived from the national reports are necessarily unsystematic and anecdotal. These factors are a large reason for the lack of national-level accountability and transparency within the framework, also making it hard to exchange lessons of best practice and direct capacity and resources to the right places in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parties should be encouraged to revisit their NBSAP within a specific timeframe in response to the new post-2020 framework to ensure that national commitments meet or exceed an appropriate contribution to the global ambition (without decreasing their current level of national ambition).
- Uniformity in the format and comparability of the content contained in NBSAPs should be increased while retaining national flexibility and autonomy over specific priorities. How this is achieved must be decided in parallel with the development of any post-2020 targets.
- As well as increasing consistency between NBSAPs, a similar change is needed for national reporting against these commitments to ensure national-level transparency of progress. National reports need to be designed in a way such that they can be aggregated more easily, using indicators based on independently verifiable data to report against elements of global targets, and the requirements and templates associated with them must be updated and improved.
- National implementation should be regularly reviewed, and a mechanism developed to call Parties to account for lack of action within a legally binding treaty.
- One option could be to improve the guidance for national strategies and have a 'core' set of requirements on which every NBSAP must include targets and/or actions. This could take the form of a summary presented upfront in the strategy (for example) with clear connections to a headline set of indicators to be used in national reporting. Alternatively, these headline indicators could be developed and reported independently or to assist national reporting (e.g. global and national protected area coverage of KBAs, a current Aichi Target and SDG indicator which is provided by BirdLife), and where necessary verified at national level.
- Under this sort of twin track system, it should be feasible for Parties to submit national reports every four years (in line with the timetable of COPs every two years), but with the independent headline indicators collated and reported every year or two years. This would also help align reporting with the SDGs (and other processes), which require annual reports at global level.
- This enhanced process would facilitate a proposed 'ratchet and review' system, with improved stocktaking providing a better and more frequent review of progress and providing a basis for the ratcheting up of ambition and action where necessary.

3. VOLUNTARY BIODIVERSITY COMMITMENTS

CONTEXT

The CBD is calling for Parties to submit Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments (VBCs) as a mechanism for increasing ambition and traction ahead of the agreement at COP15 in Kunming in 2020. As part of this, an Action Agenda² (agreed at COP14) has been established that will facilitate mapping of the current global efforts for biodiversity and future commitments. The Action Agenda will largely be an online platform to

² Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People: <https://www.cbd.int/action-agenda/>

host these commitments. Commitments to the platform can be made by Parties and other stakeholders, and it is encouraged that they do so in conjunction with key international moments/events/meetings.

There has been some confusion over the role of the VBCs and whether they are being proposed as an additional instrument alongside the NBSAP/national reporting processes. Clarity has now been given by the CBD Secretariat that the VBCs should build upon and be an add-on to, and not in replacement of, the NBSAP.

Proposals for a pledge, ratchet and review mechanism have also gained some traction alongside VBCs. This is where national commitments are made, progress is measured through national reports and a global stocktake is made, then the gap between progress and the 2030 ambition is assessed, and Parties are asked to increase their level of ambition regarding implementation to fill the gap. It can be argued that the NBSAP and national reporting processes already in place can provide the tools to implement this without needing a different system of Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments to replace them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Voluntary Biodiversity Commitments should:

- be an ambition-raising ‘pledge’ or uplift made by Parties and other stakeholders ahead of COP15 in Kunming to galvanise momentum;
- see ambition go beyond existing policy and action and represent progress beyond current commitments;
- be SMART, and monitored, preferably using the suite of indicators agreed for monitoring elements of targets mentioned above;
- not be a replacement or parallel mechanism to the NBSAP/national reporting process, which, if strengthened as above, could function as a more robust ratchet and review mechanism. NBSAPs should continue to serve as the instrument for national implementation post-2020. The co-existence of multiple instruments post-2020 is not necessary and risks defusing political attention and weakening accountability;
- highlight national as well as global priorities and send signals that will encourage other countries to coalesce around successful action and support others with less capacity to achieve both national and global goals for biodiversity. National VBCs could link to global priorities to ensure a focus on the most important actions for biodiversity globally;
- to ensure transparency of progress towards these commitments, be integrated into revised NBSAPs post-2020 and reported on as part of the review process;
- achieve a review and ratchet process through the existing NBSAP and National Report mechanisms – IF they are strengthened to be more transparent and nationally add up-able.

The Action Agenda should be the umbrella for mobilising ambition ahead of 2020 for governments and other sectors, however significant effort needs to be made to raise its profile and utilise the potential otherwise the 2020 space could be crowded with pledge-style platforms and mechanisms and become confusing.

The UN General Assembly Biodiversity Summit in 2020 should be a key moment for Heads of State to make public VBCs ahead of COP15.

Annex 1 – Current Decisions on Implementation and Review

Current implementation and review mechanisms in place under the CBD and the decisions associated with them

- **COP Decision X/2 on review process**
 - 3. (b) Monitor and review the implementation of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans in accordance with the Strategic Plan and their national targets making use of the set of indicators developed for the Strategic Plan as a flexible framework and to report to the Conference of the Parties through their fifth and sixth national reports and any other means to be decided by the Conference of the Parties
 - (b) (14) Develop national and regional targets...as a flexible framework, in accordance with national priorities and capacities and taking into account both the global targets and the status and trends of biological diversity in the country.
 - (14) The Strategic Plan will be implemented primarily through activities at the national or subnational level... National biodiversity strategies and action plans are key instruments for translating the Strategic Plan to national circumstances
 - (14) The means for implementation may vary from country to country, according to national needs and circumstances. Nonetheless, countries should learn from each other when determining appropriate means for implementation
 - (18) Parties will inform the Conference of the Parties of the national targets or commitments and policy instruments they adopt to implement the Strategic Plan
 - Suggested milestones, as well as suggested indicators, are to be developed in accordance with the processes laid out
 - (SBI formerly the working group on review of implementation) will keep under review implementation of this Strategic Plan, and support effective implementation by Parties ensuring that new guidance is informed by the experience of Parties in implementing the Convention.
 - (SBSTTA) should develop a common set of biodiversity metrics to be used to assess the status of biodiversity and its values.
- **Self-Assessment of effectiveness of measures taken as part of National Reports (CBD Article 26)**
 - Each Contracting Party shall, at intervals to be determined by the Conference of the Parties, present to the Conference of the Parties, reports on measures which it has taken for the implementation of the provisions of this Convention and their effectiveness in meeting the objectives of this Convention.
- **Assessment of effectiveness of types of measures used by Parties as one of SBSTTA's mandate (CBD Article 25)**
 - Provide...timely advice relating to the implementation of this Convention.
 - Prepare scientific and technical assessments of the effects of types of measures taken in accordance with the provisions of this Convention
 - Technology transfer
- **Assessments conducted by the Subsidiary Body on Implementation created in 2012 (Decision XII/26)**
 - Requests the Subsidiary Body on Implementation to support the Conference of the Parties in reviewing progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets

- The SBI Should: Review relevant information on progress, preparing decisions on enhancing the implementation, recommendations to overcome, obstacles encountered in implementing, strengthen mechanisms to support implementation, Review the impacts and effectiveness of existing processes,
- **Voluntary peer-review process** of NBSAPs Review and Implementation developed since COP12 (Decision XIV/29)
 - Proposed pilot voluntary peer-review process for the national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and requests the Executive Secretary, subject to the availability of resources, to develop a methodology for a voluntary peer-review process and to report to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation
- **NBSAP Forum established by the CBD Secretariat**
 - The NBSAP Forum is a global partnership aiming to support the revision and implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). The Secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) host it in partnership. The purpose of our web portal is to support countries in finding the information they need to develop and implement effective NBSAPs.

Annex 2: Other processes with review mechanism

OECD peer review process and methodology - <https://www.oecd.org/site/peerreview/>

Among the OECD's core strengths is its ability to offer its members a framework to compare experiences and examine "best practices" in a host of areas from economic policy to environmental protection. OECD peer reviews, where each country's policy in a area is examined by fellow members on an equal basis, lie at the heart of this process. A country seeking to reduce unemployment, for example, can learn valuable lessons from its peers on what has worked and what has not. This can save time, and costly experimenting, in crafting effective national policies. The recommendations resulting from such a review can also help governments win support at home for difficult measures. And perhaps most importantly, because everyone goes through the same exercise, no country feels it is being singled out. Today's reviewers will be in the hot seat themselves tomorrow.

UNFCCC monitoring, reporting and verification

<https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10190IIED.pdf>

Over the past two decades, the arrangements for national reporting of the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol have evolved into a more comprehensive measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) framework. Measures to significantly enhance transparency of action and support under the Convention were adopted as part of the Bali Action Plan at COP 13 and elaborated in decisions adopted at subsequent COP sessions. The requirements are different for developed and developing countries – developed countries submit their progress annually and developing countries bi-annually

- The current MRV involves international assessment and review (IAR) for developed country Parties, and international consultation and analysis (ICA) for developing country Parties.
- NDCs are national climate plans highlighting climate actions, including climate related targets, policies and measures governments aims to implement in response to climate change and as a contribution to global climate action. Central to the NDCs is the concept of national determination.

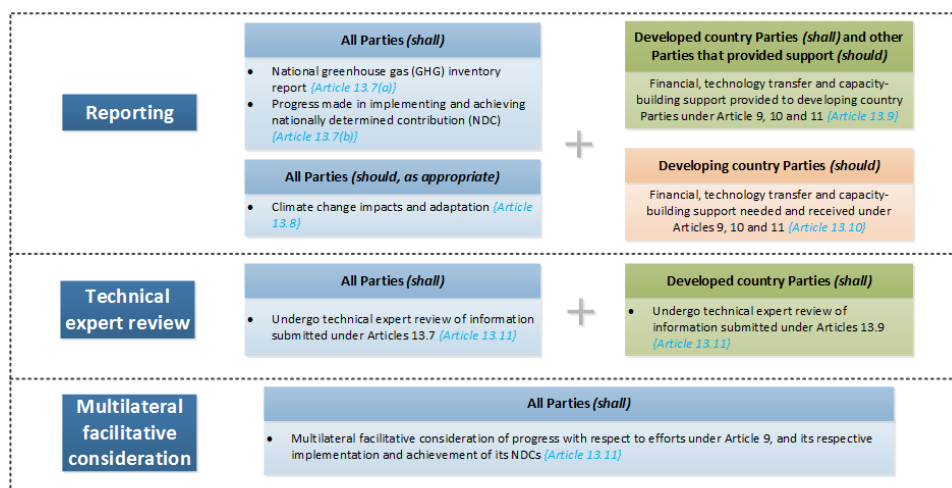
- Through the detailed guidance on the reporting/review/consideration processes for the information to be submitted and by making these reports publicly available, the enhanced transparency framework will make it possible to track the progress made by each country. In this way, it will be possible to compare a country's actions against its plans and ambitions as described in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- Reporting happens on an annual basis for developed countries. To improve the quality of greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories the Conference of the Parties (COP) has developed standardized requirements for reporting national inventories.
- In addition to the IPCC reports, the national climate and greenhouse emission reports of countries will create an important input into the global stocktake. The first global stocktake will be in 2023 and every five years thereafter, unless otherwise decided. A pre-2020 stock take was done in 2018 in order to inform more ambitious commitments in countries NDCs for 2020.

An overview of the current MRV arrangements

MRV elements	Annex I Parties	Non-Annex I Parties
Reporting	National communications (4 years) National GHG inventory (annually) Biennial reports (2 years)	National communications (contain GHG inventory) (4 years) Biennial update reports (contain GHG inventory) (2 years)
Technical review or analysis	Technical review of biennial reports (2 years) In-depth review of national communications (4 years) Annual review of national GHG inventories (annually)	Technical analysis of biennial update reports (2 years)
Multilateral process and compliance	Multilateral assessment (2 years) Compliance (standing arrangements)	Facilitative sharing of views (2 years)

Color coding	
	Convention only
	Kyoto Protocol only
	Both Convention and Kyoto Protocol

Article 13 of the Paris Agreement: transparency of action and support



* The transparency framework shall provide flexibility in the implementation of the provisions of this Article to those developing country Parties that need it in the light of their capacities [\(Article 13.2\)](#);

* The transparency framework shall recognize the special circumstances of the least developed countries and small island developing States [\(Article 13.3\)](#).

CMS review mechanism – to be completed