

The Biodiversity COP

Countries are currently meeting in Cali, Colombia, for the 16th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which aims to protect global biodiversity and restore natural ecosystems

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Updated: October 23, 2024 06:48 IST

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So far, only 32 countries out of the total 196 parties to CBD, have submitted their NBSAPs. Many more are likely to do so during COP16. (File Photo)

Ahead of the [annual climate change meeting](#), scheduled in Baku, Azerbaijan, this year from November 11, countries are currently assembled in the Colombian city of Cali for the UN Biodiversity Conference that takes place every two years.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came out of the same 1992 Rio Earth Summit that gave rise to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). CBD aims to protect global biodiversity, restore natural ecosystems, and ensure that benefits from the world's biological resources are equitably distributed.

This year's meeting — the 16th Conference of Parties to CBD, or COP16 — is the first after a landmark agreement on biodiversity was finalised two years ago. This agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework that was concluded at COP15 in Montreal in 2022, lay down four goals and 23 targets to be achieved collectively by 2030.

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These include the so-called 30 x 30 targets — a commitment to put at least 30% of the world's lands and oceans, especially biodiversity rich areas, under conservation by 2030, and to initiate restoration work in at least 30% of degraded land or marine ecosystems by 2030.

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The discussions under CBD, which have been extremely low-profile in comparison to climate change negotiations so far, are slowly gaining in prominence because of the growing realisation of the severity of the issue, and the implications of it being left unaddressed.

The climate crisis and the threat to biodiversity are closely linked — both are caused by indiscriminate extraction of natural resources, over-consumption, and unsustainable human activities. The two crises also feed off each other. Climate change has been expediting the loss of biodiversity, while changes in land and oceans have been contributing to global warming.

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While climate change and biodiversity discussions have taken place on separate tracks over the last three decades, their interlinkages are becoming increasingly evident. This has resulted in a growing convergence in the goals and outcomes of these two negotiations.

Momentum for 30 x 30

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One of the main objectives of COP16 is to expedite progress on the 30 x 30 targets which are the most immediate. Under the Kunming-Montreal Framework, each country is supposed to prepare and submit action plans to halt and reverse biodiversity loss within their jurisdiction.

These National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, or NBSAPs, are similar to the Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs, that countries have to submit under the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, mentioning their time-bound goals and actions being taken.

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The High Seas Treaty, also known as the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions or BBNJ, which was finalised last year as a separate international agreement to maintain the ecological health of oceans, was a major step forward in meeting the 30 x 30 targets.

One of the objectives of the High Seas Treaty is to demarcate protected areas in biodiversity-rich parts of the oceans — just like national parks or wildlife reserves on land — where human activities can be regulated and restricted.

Shared genetic resources

Another goal of the High Seas treaty is to ensure that the benefits from exploitation of genetic resources in the oceans outside of national boundaries of countries, are equitably distributed among all. Oceans host a massive variety of life forms from tiny microbes to giant fish, some of which may be beneficial for medical, commercial, or scientific reasons.

This also fits in with COP16 discussions, where the sharing of benefits from common genetic resources is expected to figure prominently. Back in 2010, at COP10, countries had finalised an Access and Benefit Sharing mechanism, also called the Nagoya Protocol, that lay down the general principles of the rights and claims of countries on their bio-resources and rules for their commercial utilisation.

At COP16, countries are negotiating the sharing of benefits from the use of genetic information of plants and organisms that has been made possible by advances in modern science. The genetic sequences, stored digitally, are commercially lucrative, and are used by corporations for making a variety of items, including high-yield crops, beauty products or medicines.

COP16 is expected to deliver some decisions on how these digital sequences can be used, who can use them, and what a fair and equitable mechanism for sharing of profits would be, particularly for the indigenous populations who might have been the original owners of the bioresource.

Question of finance

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Like in climate change negotiations, finance is crucial in CBD discussions as well. One of the 23 goals of the Kunming-Montreal Framework is to mobilise at least \$200 billion per year by the year 2030, from all sources, for spending on biodiversity conservation. Out of this, developed countries must provide at least \$20 billion every year to developing countries to support their biodiversity-related work.

This money has to increase to at least \$30 billion every year by 2030. Ways and means to mobilise these financial resources is one of the main items on the agenda at COP16.

Countries are also supposed to ensure that perverse incentives or subsidies that are harmful for biodiversity are phased out, eliminated, or repurposed. These can be incentives that allow over-fishing, encourage deforestation, or subsidise the use of fossil fuels. Under the Kunming-Montreal Framework, such measures should scale up to at least \$500 billion by 2030.



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Countries at COP16 are also expected to discuss the possibility of setting up a biodiversity fund, new finance mechanism