



CBD Women

Policy Analysis

CBD COP16' outcomes from a gender lens

Biodiversity policy is not just about nature—it's about people. And for it to succeed, it must be just.

The sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP16) held in Cali, Colombia (21st October to 1st November), was widely anticipated as a milestone in advancing an inclusive, people-centered biodiversity agenda. As the first implementation COP under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), governments were expected to present updated National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

Key operative decisions like the updated resource mobilisation strategy and the monitoring framework to measure progress in implementation were expected to be adopted. However, decisions over these critical elements could not be reached at the conference, and on the last day, the COP16 had to be suspended due to a lack of quorum before an agreement was reached on those critical elements.

COP16 was announced as a "People's COP", aiming to amplify diverse voices and strengthen inclusivity and the whole-of-society within the global biodiversity agenda. However, despite the unprecedented participation of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities representatives, and civil society and social movement representatives, critical gaps remain for the integration and implementation of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and gender justice in the negotiations and its outcomes.

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Challenges and gaps at the COP16: procedural and political barriers

The CBD Women's Caucus celebrated notable wins outside the negotiation rooms—such as the highly successful Women's Forum, the launch of the Gender & Biodiversity Champions platform, and a very well-attended Women's Pavilion. Moreover, women and girls' voices resonated strongly in side events, panels, and informal spaces resulting in increased recognition of women's contributions to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and restoration, and more effective inclusion of women in the works of the Convention.

However, these successes contrasted sharply with the realities inside the negotiation rooms, where gender equity and human rights were sidelined. Negotiations revealed a complex interplay of procedural and political barriers, and a general reluctance to integrate human rights into the language of the decisions.

Procedural barriers such as lack of transparency in contact groups further marginalised civil society voices, especially when observers attempted to raise concerns. In many instances, interventions were dismissed due to time constraints or procedural pressure. Undoubtedly, co-chairs were also under pressure to deliver, but not allowing the interventions and contributions of observers, especially major groups, constitutes a dangerous precedent in the otherwise inclusive practices established in CBD so far.

Conflicting views on the human-rights-based approach, gender equity and the whole of society continue to emerge and were played out during negotiations of key items like items 11, 14, 16, and 20, with some delegations resisting progressive language on gender equality and human rights, and thus weakening previously agreed commitments. As a result, in many negotiations, some Parties consistently objected to the inclusion of references to Target 23, the Gender Plan of Action, as well as other relevant considerations including the recognition of contributions by non-state actors to the Global Review, as one way to ensure that the whole of society approach is implemented.

Key Policy Outcomes: A gender assessment

The discussions and decisions at COP16 revealed a recurring tension: although gender justice and human rights were addressed in the rhetoric, these principles were often sidelined in the formal policy outcomes. In this context, the CBD WC offered an assessment of these outcomes from a gender lens, highlighting the areas where significant strides were made, as well as key shortcomings that must be addressed moving forward.

- **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (Item 8):** Inclusive participation was emphasised in NBSAPs, but proposals for stronger gender and rights-based implementation were largely missing. Gender-responsive approaches and alignment with the Gender Plan of Action (GPA) remain limited to symbolic references.
- **Digital Sequence Information (Item 9):** The establishment of the Cali Fund marked progress, with 50% of monetary benefits allocated to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. However, women and youth in other sectors like science and academia were overlooked, thus perpetuating invisibility.

- **Mechanisms for Planning, Monitoring and Reviewing (Item 10):** The inclusion of binary indicators for Target 23 and the component indicator of GPA implementation are steps forward, but the lack of a headline indicator for gender equality and limited disaggregation by sex/gender weaken the ability to track progress effectively.
- **Resource Mobilisation and Financial Mechanism (Item 11):** Divisions between developed and developing countries delayed decisions on financial mechanisms. Direct funding for women, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities remains a critical unmet demand. Gender-responsive financing continues to face resistance
- **Capacity-Building and Knowledge Management (Item 12):** While women are encouraged to participate in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing, a lack of clear pathways and resources risks sidelining their engagement, particularly in under-resourced regions.
- **Article 8(j) on traditional knowledge (Item 14):** The adoption of a New Programme of Work and the establishment of a permanent Subsidiary Body mark milestones for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and people of African descent. Gender-responsive language is included, but operational mechanisms for women and girls' leadership and enhanced contributions need strengthening.
- **Scientific and Technical Needs for the GBF (Item 16):** Human rights, gender equality, and equity were reinstated as key 'needs' in the decision on scientific and technical needs for GBF implementation. The decision identifies these as critical gaps and invites submissions from Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, and youth organisations, enhancing opportunities for their participation.
- **Coastal, Marine, and Island Biodiversity (Item 20):** The decision highlights opportunities to enhance women's participation in the workshops for the description and modification of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) and other marine biodiversity processes. Women experts must be involved early in decision-making, ensuring their knowledge informs conservation outcomes. The decision also encourages synergies with the BBNJ Agreement under UNCLOS for marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.
- **Synthetic Biology (Item 24):** Negotiations on synthetic biology shifted focus from broad oversight to promoting biotechnology solutions. While references to women, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and youth were retained in capacity-building contexts, robust mechanisms for horizon scanning and monitoring were weakened. A new action plan emphasises capacity-building, technology transfer, and knowledge sharing, aligning with GBF targets but with limited safeguards for risks.
- **Biodiversity and Climate Change (Item 25):** References to strong gender-responsive and human rights language were diluted, and women's land rights were largely ignored in decisions about adaptation and mitigation policies.



The way forward

COP16 created significant expectations around participation, but it also highlighted how political will—or the lack thereof—limited the meaningful consideration of gender justice and human rights in biodiversity decision-making. In response, the CBD Women's Caucus remains committed to ensuring that the voices of women and girls are not only heard but actively included in driving transformative action.

In this context, we urge Parties to the CBD and relevant actors to:

1. Embed Human Rights and gender-responsive policies at the core

Integrate human rights-based approaches and gender-responsive policies as foundational, operational elements in biodiversity strategies and actions at all levels. These should go beyond symbolic references and be actively incorporated into the core of policy- and decision-making processes.

2. Develop and implement inclusive NBSAPs

Finalise the update of NBSAPs through truly inclusive and participatory processes that engage women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities and other rights holders. Ensure their ongoing involvement in the implementation monitoring and reporting phases, and mobilise civil society at national and local levels to ensure compliance with Section C of the GBF.

3. Establish gender-responsive monitoring and reporting systems

Ensure that the monitoring and reporting are gender-responsive through robust national indicators, gender-disaggregated data collection, and the use of binary and component indicators in the Monitoring Framework. While preparing national reports, ensure that women's contributions are integrated and that women also participate in the drafting process.

4. Enhance the role of gender and biodiversity focal points

Appoint, support, and provide adequate resources to the national gender and biodiversity focal points, ensuring effective coordination with other public institutions to deliver gender-responsive biodiversity policies. Adequate financial resources must be allocated for capacity-building at the national and local levels to address gender-related issues within biodiversity and to implement the Gender Plan of Action.

5. Ensure equitable and fair resource mobilisation

Ensure that financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation are equitable and accessible, prioritising the direct involvement of women, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities in the decision-making process and ensuring their fair access to financial resources, including direct and flexible funds. This includes prioritising gender-responsive financing models and supporting non-market-based mechanisms for sustainable and inclusive resource mobilisation.

6. Ensure capacity building and facilitate networking with TSC Support Centres

Ensure that the capacities of women, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities are developed to use the central portal of the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) to ensure reporting of capacity-building needs, as well as planned and organized capacity-building activities. In addition, contacts should be facilitated by the Secretariat between women, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities and the respective subregional Technical and Scientific Cooperation Support Centres (TSCs), once operational, in order to promote inclusiveness.

As we prepare for the resumed sessions of COP16 and look ahead to COP17, we remain committed to building the necessary momentum to hold Parties accountable for their commitments. Gender justice must no longer be seen as an optional add-on, but as a core principle that is integral to achieving biodiversity goals, clearly embedded in the adopted Target 23 and GPA. We will continue to advocate for a future where gender equality is integral to all aspects of biodiversity policy and financing, ensuring that the voices of women and girls are central to the decisions that shape our planet's future.

APPENDIX.

Detailed review of key items

- **Item 8: Progress on the preparation of targets and updating of national biodiversity strategies and action plans by Parties in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.**

By 31st October of 2024 only 43 Parties had submitted revised NBSAPs, though some were not in an official UN language or only included summaries, and 119 Parties had submitted national targets aligned with the GBF using the CBD's online reporting tool. However, many Parties were yet to submit NBSAPs or targets in compliance with Decision 15/6, and were urged to do so promptly.

Decision COP/16/L/25 was built upon the pre-existing Decision 15/6, which emphasised NBSAPs as the primary mechanism for implementing the CBD at the national level. Guidance was provided to Parties on the revision and updating of their NBSAPs to align with the GBF, supported by a reporting template.

It is key to note that the decision urged Parties to ensure the inclusive participation of diverse groups, including indigenous peoples and local communities, women, youth, civil society, academia, and the private sector, in the development and revision of NBSAPs.

Key proposed additions into the operative part of the decision to strengthen gender and human rights-based implementation, including but not limited to aligning national targets with Target 23 on gender equality and encouraging gender-responsive NBSAPs and leveraging the Gender Plan of Action (GPA), were largely excluded from the final text, despite repeated requests by observers to incorporate them during the negotiations.

Furthermore, there was only one reference to the GPA included in the preamble, which was later removed upon request by some Parties during the contact group negotiations.

- **Item 9: Digital sequence information on genetic resources.**

The Multilateral Mechanism for benefit sharing from the use of Digital Sequence Information (DSI) on genetic resources was adopted by COP16, and the global fund, the now-called Cali Fund, was established as a mechanism to ensure just and equitable participation in the benefits derived from the use of DSI. According to the decision, users must contribute to the fund with 1% of profits or 0.1% of revenues obtained from the use of DSI. It is also stipulated that at least half of the funds raised must be allocated to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, either directly or through country governments.



The participation in non-monetary benefits complements the provisions related to monetary benefit-sharing included in these modalities. The Annex to the decision emphasises that the distribution of non-monetary benefits must support the self-identified needs and priorities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, with particular attention to women and youth within these communities. It also establishes that scientific research should focus on addressing the needs of these communities regarding the generation, access, use, analysis, and storage of digital sequence information, promoting their inclusion in technological and knowledge processes.

Regarding the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (ATHEG) that the COP mandated to be established to devise the monetary benefits allocation formula, its composition is to include 15 technical experts designated by Parties, along with seven representatives from Indigenous Peoples and of local communities from the seven different socio-cultural regions and four representatives of civil society. Addressing the challenge of ensuring the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in this ATHEG is still pending, as well as for the expert group that will follow up on the allocation and use of shared monetary benefits.

The fund's sustainability remains fragile, as robust financial mechanisms and clear commitments from developed countries to ensure its long-term continuity have not been defined. Many decisions regarding contribution percentages, including their implications for revenue generation and competitiveness, are expected to be made by COP17, ideally.

Furthermore, although the clear mention of women and youth from Indigenous Peoples and from local communities as beneficiaries is celebrated, this scope is insufficient as it limits benefit sharing with the whole collective of women and youth, for instance those involved in sectors such as science, research and academia. This perpetuates their invisibility as key actors in environmental governance, underestimating their knowledge, capacities and contributions.

- **Item 10: Mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review.**

The final adoption of the two draft decisions to finalise technical updates of the GBF's Monitoring Framework and mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review (PMRR) was suspended until the continuation of COP16 in February 2025. Negotiations were challenging and needed several contact groups to resolve some contentious issues, including the form of participation and voluntary 'contributions' of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth in the global review.

From the point of view of ensuring a gender-responsive GBF implementation as mandated by decisions 15/6 and 15/4, the draft decision is positive: the component indicator on the national implementation of the GPA is included as clean text, and the indicator on land use change and land tenure for target 22 was also included and agreed by Parties.

Disaggregation of data for headline indicators by sex/gender, age and other demographic factors is critical to implement a gender-responsive GBF. However, disaggregation is still optional and there is still no disaggregation by sex/gender for Targets 3, 10, 22.

Target 23 is still without a headline indicator, and only has binary indicators for reporting on advances to promote women's rights over land and resources, access to information, participation and justice, and stop gender inequality and violence. Binary indicators are clearly not enough to measure progress, but the final draft has clear language to allow for more submissions and continue the development of new headline, component, and complementary indicators in the period between COP16 and COP17.

Regarding the draft decision on PMRR submitted by the COP President, Parties that originally held contrasting views on the issue, in the end agreed for the global review to be based on, among others, "including disaggregated information on contributions from indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth."

In the same decision, the template for the seventh and eighth national reports was agreed and it includes questions on the whole-of-society approach, all sections of the GBF -which includes Section C-, and also the communication of commitments by actors other than national governments. Lastly, the Ad Hoc Scientific and Technical Advisory Group for the Preparation of the Global Report shall be composed of 15 experts nominated by Parties and 10 representatives nominated by observers, including 5 from Indigenous Peoples and local communities and women and youth groups.

- **Item 11: Resource mobilisation and financial mechanism.**

As expected, resource mobilisation was one of the most difficult and contested discussions during COP16 due to the divided positions of developing and developed countries, and after two weeks of intense work and a final overnight negotiation, no decision was adopted.

On the financial mechanism stream, discussions were mainly focused on whether to establish a dedicated global biodiversity fund under the authority of the COP, or maintain the existing Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). Developing countries favour adopting a dedicated fund since it would balance access and geopolitical asymmetries, while developed countries support the latter, which has been deemed as a politically motivated fund and not inclusive for Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and youth by different stakeholders, including CBD major groups.

In parallel, there are diverse concerns regarding the revised strategy for resource mobilisation. While the latest version states that its implementation "can" be enabled by ensuring gender-responsive representation and participation in the decision-making of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth, at the same time different wording related to investment in biodiversity raises concerns over the financialisation of nature and the controversial market-based mechanisms.

While unprecedented corporate lobbying reached record levels in COP16, sparking concerns over the growing influence of such actors, human rights-based and gender-responsive approaches were erased with a big brush from the whole document and kept mainly on the preambular parts of the decision or general operative paragraphs but minimally included into the body of the strategy. This lack of ambition to ensure gender-responsive and human rights-based solutions perpetuates inequalities and might have severe impacts on biodiversity and frontline communities, particularly women and girls.

Direct access to funding for Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and youth, is still a pending issue that needs to be strategically raised in the resumed sessions of COP16.



- **Item 12: Capacity-building and development, technical and scientific cooperation, clearing-house mechanism and knowledge management.**

Decisions on capacity building (CBD/COP/16/L.13) and knowledge management (CBD/COP/16/L.16) emphasise the critical role of women in biodiversity initiatives and create opportunities for their active engagement. However, challenges persist in providing clear pathways for effective implementation and ensuring equitable participation.

The capacity building and development decision (CBD/COP/16/L.13) invites women and other stakeholders to share information on ongoing and planned capacity-building activities to support the implementation of the GBF through the central portal of the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM). In parallel, under the same decision, Parties are encouraged to collaborate with women and other stakeholders in identifying and addressing biodiversity-related capacity-building needs via the CHM. And lastly, the newly selected Subregional Technical and Scientific Cooperation Support Centres are tasked with developing guidelines to ensure active engagement of women in their capacity building programs.

With regards to Knowledge Management decision (CBD/COP/16/L.16), the adoption of a whole-of-society approach, inclusive of women, is emphasised for the 2024–2030 implementation period, and women are urged to play active roles in all phases of the knowledge management cycle, from identifying knowledge gaps to co-creating solutions and establishing multi-stakeholder mechanisms.

Despite these advances, there are still significant gaps in defining clear steps for implementing gender-focused actions effectively. These challenges include a lack of operational clarity; for instance, women are encouraged to share information and collaborate through the CHM portal, but no detailed explanation is provided about how they can access or utilise this platform.

Another gap appears when the global coordination entity for regional TSCs is expected to develop guidelines for engaging women, but there is no timeline for implementation or clarity on how women across different regions can support and participate in TSC programs.

Lastly, while women are invited to contribute to the different phases of the knowledge management cycle, the documents fail to specify how and who initiates these processes or provides the necessary resources for their participation. In general, there is a lack of a clear roadmap detailing how Parties and other entities should collaborate with women to achieve those COP decisions.

- **Item 14: Implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions.**

One of the most monumental decisions to be adopted during COP16 was Article 8(j) and related provisions, which aims to recognise the pivotal role that Indigenous Peoples and local communities play in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

In the two weeks of negotiations, through several contact groups and plenary sessions, five critical decisions were adopted under this item. Those included the New Programme of Work (PoW), the establishment of a permanent Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and related provisions, the recognition of the unique role of people of African descent, the decision on the role of languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices and the relationship of the CBD when addressing the recommendation on the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues pertaining to CBD.

Within the PoW, the nine general principles and eight elements have reflected a robust human rights-based approach and gender-responsive language ensuring full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities, including women and youth from those collectives.

The Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and related provisions would be a stepping stone towards greater visibility and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in informing the decisions emerging from future COPs and for the effective implementation of the PoW. This also indicates that Parties would have to build institutional mechanisms and financial arrangements at the national level to implement the PoW.

- **Item 16: Scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including implications for the programmes of work of the Convention.**

The recognition that equity, gender equality and a human rights-based approach to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are a key gap to be addressed in the implementation of the GBF was dismissed during SBSTTA 26. But the COP decision on this point was adopted with the decisive and important reintroduction of language on human rights, gender equality and equity.

The draft text was the result of negotiation at SBSTTA26 where the point (d) in paragraph two was removed upon opposition of one Party, but now the decision has reintegrated the human rights language after difficult negotiations that saw deep differences among Parties on the matter. Moreover, the decision invites submissions also from indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth organisations, which represents an additional opportunity for participation.

- **Item 20: Marine and coastal biodiversity, and island biodiversity.**

During the negotiations, some parties highlighted the synergies between the EBSAs process and the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). One of these synergies came to reality with the launch of the high-level initiative “BBNJ first movers” led by Chile to promote the establishment of the first generation of High Seas marine protected areas.

The participation of experts from indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth organisations in the workshops to describe or modify EBSAs will be facilitated by the secretariat after the agreement on the workshop modality, increasing the scope of participation. Nevertheless, COP16 discussions under this item were under a reduced participation space for observers, with only one intervention of an observer allowed during all contact groups.



Regarding the marine, coastal and island biodiversity subitem, human rights and gender justice were dismissed even before negotiations started as the document presented by the CBD Secretariat left out crucial text for gender justice and human rights that were included in the results from SBSTTA 26 (CBD/COP16/2Rev.1):

i) "To integrate gender-responsive policies in the conservation and sustainable use of island biodiversity, including through the implementation of the Gender Plan of Action" (subparagraph (u) of the Annex).

ii) "To ensure participation in decision-making, access to justice and information, and the protection of environmental human rights defenders in the context of marine and coastal biodiversity, following a human rights-based approach" (subparagraph (x) in the Annex).

Even more, at the final plenary when this item was being concluded, references to gender-responsiveness and the human rights-based approach in the context of marine and coastal biodiversity were deleted.

Other important points were not discussed due to "lack of time", including the participation of small-scale fisheries and the role of women within them, as well as the proposal to create a standalone agenda for islands. This proposal was raised by Pacific Island states, emphasising that the current ocean agenda is already overly saturated.

- **Item 24: Synthetic biology.**

A multidisciplinary expert group (AHTEG) had spent two years rigorously designing a process and conducting an initial phase of horizon-scanning and assessment (2022, CBD/COP/DEC/15/31). Their findings highlighted the need for the CBD to closely examine five critical areas, including artificial intelligence and self-spreading viral vaccines for wildlife.

This important work was set aside and some Parties wanted to "de-establish" the process, resulting in a significant shift in approach.

A new Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) will mainly review and synthesise relevant information; consider an "independent" scientific study compiling and summarizing existing scientific research, public research and development funding needs and priorities; as well as research ways to implement synthetic biology applications, in line with the thematic action plan. Although part of the mandate of the new AHTEG will be to evaluate both the potential negative and positive impacts of synthetic biology, the emphasis appears to be primarily on the benefits (whether actual or not) of synthetic biology.

The reduction in the capacity of the previous AHTEG to the new one, particularly regarding its ability to conduct horizon scanning, monitoring, and assessment, will likely lead to a reorientation of focus, with a predominant emphasis on capacity-building, development, technology transfer, and knowledge-sharing.

References to indigenous peoples and local communities, women, and youth were superficially retained in the text, particularly in relation to capacity-building and effective participation.

A thematic action plan on capacity-building and technology transfer was identified and pushed to place biotechnology as a solution to implement the GBF. The plan's development will be discussed in future meetings with the goal of presenting concrete progress at COP17.

- **Item 25: Biodiversity and climate change.**

Within the GBF Targets 8 and 11 as context, COP 16 was expected to continue acknowledging biodiversity and climate change interlinkages. The original negotiation document included several important textual recommendations for human rights and gender justice, such as:

(i) Actions taken to meet Targets 8 and 11 have strong environmental safeguards which follow a human-rights-based approach and the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, women and girls, youth and children and persons with disabilities.

(ii) The rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, especially women, over land and territories are protected and their FPIC is taken to use the land.

(iii) That the COP reiterates its decision X/33(w) in which it called for a de-facto moratorium on all geoengineering activities until a set of conditions are met; but also to ensure that experiments are not carried out and that there is reporting of any such experiments, and also that the SCBD reaches out to other UN bodies that are discussing geoengineering with CBD position. Only the decision x/33(w) was retained.

(iv) Solutions like large-scale monoculture and bioenergy plantations are acknowledged as being harmful to biodiversity and livelihoods and other schemes like offsets, nature-based solutions and market-based mechanisms are analysed for their effects on biodiversity.

(v) Parties, governments and other organisations to take into account existing and projected impacts of climate change and climate-related policies on biodiversity with the full and effective participation of women, while implementing the framework.

Regrettably, it was observed that any references to strong text on gender-responsive and human rights language was replaced with the generic phrase 'to be consistent with section C and Target 22 of the GBF'.

While rights over land and territories of indigenous peoples and local communities were considered, women's land rights and their consent over land use were not considered. And the strong precautionary language to address false solutions, especially monoculture plantations and afforestation efforts, was completely deleted from the text.

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