

Strengthening the role of Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points in the implementation of Target 23 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Key points

Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points (GBFPs) play a critical role in translating Target 23 and the Gender Plan of Action into national biodiversity policy and action. Drawing on a global survey, interviews and peer exchanges, this briefing provides new evidence on the experiences, challenges and priorities of GBFPs.

Many GBFPs operate with limited time, resources and institutional support, reducing their effectiveness. Funding constraints, limited capacity, weak coordination mechanisms, and gaps in data and monitoring systems remain significant barriers to implementation.

Although the Gender Plan of Action is widely recognised as a valuable framework, its influence on implementation remains uneven in the absence of adequate financial resources and support for alignment with national policy processes.

Parties should move beyond the formal appointment of GBFPs to ensure that they are in dedicated roles with sufficient financial and technical support, access to decision-making processes, and the ability to facilitate coordination across ministries, levels of government and women's organisations.

The CBD Secretariat, Regional Technical Support Centres and partners can further support implementation by strengthening international and regional peer learning networks, co-developing practical context-relevant guidance and building the strategic leadership capacities of GBFPs.

Gender equality is increasingly recognised as essential to effective biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource governance. With Target 23 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and its accompanying Gender Plan of Action (GPA), Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are committed to ensuring gender equality and a gender-responsive approach across biodiversity policy, planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting. However, translating these commitments into meaningful actions remains a significant challenge.

Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points (GBFPs) are among the individuals specifically tasked with supporting gender-responsive biodiversity governance at the national level, yet little is known about the opportunities and constraints they face in fulfilling this role. This policy brief draws on evidence from a global survey, interviews and peer exchanges to examine the role of GBFPs in practice and identify challenges and priorities for strengthening their contribution to the implementation of Target 23 and the GPA.

Framing the Challenge: Implementing Target 23 and the Gender Plan of Action

In December 2022, Parties to the CBD adopted Target 23 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), committing to ensuring gender equality in the implementation of the Framework through a gender responsive approach for biodiversity action. While some progress has been made in incorporating these commitments into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), there are varying levels of ambition. As of June 2026, 110 countries had adopted at least one national target aligned with Target 23, yet only 19% of Parties reported national targets that addressed all three elements of the target, and fewer than half reported clear means of implementation.¹

A major challenge is moving from high-level commitments to practical action across national institutions, sectors and levels of governance. Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points (GBFPs) act as an important mechanism for advancing gender-responsive implementation and in 2023, the CBD Secretariat issued a reminder encouraging Parties to appoint and support GBFPs for “biodiversity negotiations, implementation, and monitoring”. Actions relating to GBFPs identified in the GPA are to enable knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning, sharing of best practices, and instituting coordination mechanisms among women’s and girls’ organisations, relevant ministries, GBFPs and local partners.²

60 Parties to the CBD have appointed at least one GBFP as of July 2026³, but representation remains uneven across regions. Africa accounts for the largest share, with 24 Parties, followed by Asia-Pacific (14 Parties) and Latin America and the Caribbean (12 Parties). In contrast, only 8 Parties from the Western European and Others Group (WEOG), including the European Union, and only 2 Parties from Eastern Europe have a GBFP. Beyond this formal appointment, there is little evidence on whether and how GBFPs are fulfilling their role and the challenges they face. This briefing is the outcome of a knowledge exchange project that seeks to identify the needs and priorities of GBFPs and support peer learning to advance the implementation of Target 23 and the GPA. The analysis draws on a global survey (n = 39) involving GBFPs (31) and National Focal Points (6)⁴, seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with GBFPs representing each of the UN regional groups, and follow-up discussions with the Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points Network.⁵

Understanding the Reality: The roles and experiences of Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points

While national targets and plans provide a formal picture, the experiences of Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points reveal how gender commitments are operationalised or constrained in practice.

The role of Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points

Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points (GBFPs) occupy a unique intermediary space between domestic implementation and international negotiation processes, supporting the translation of Target 23 into national policy and action. However, many GBFPs are positioned in advisory roles with limited authority, time, and resources, restricting their influence on implementation. Work on embedding gender equality in biodiversity is often irregular and highly time-constrained and layered on top of their formal roles and workloads, with limited institutional support.

“What sometimes doesn’t make sense is the workload and the number of tasks we are asked to do. My main role is biodiversity coordinator...not specifically gender.”

20 respondents (51%) reported spending less than 4 days per month working on gender and biodiversity, with 9 (23%) spending less than 1 day per month. Some respondents explained that their time was limited due to other responsibilities, e.g. being based in ministries primarily responsible for gender or social affairs rather than biodiversity, or also being the National Focal Point which was the case for seven GBFPs in our sample.⁶ By contrast, respondents who worked more frequently on gender and biodiversity saw it as integral to many aspects of their daily work, e.g. in biodiversity programmes and planning, reviewing biodiversity targets, or they were in a dedicated role. Respondents who were most active in advancing gender-responsive biodiversity governance often had prior experience working on gender equality issues before their appointment as GBFPs.

GBFPs often perform multiple functions, weighted towards policy integration and coordination, especially on NBSAPs (90%), with just under half (49%) providing technical support through, for example, developing and using indicators and data (26%), capacity building (28%) and resource mobilisation (23%). Limitations in this role come through resource and staffing constraints, as well as by the institutional complexity of coordinating across multiple governmental entities and administrative levels. There may be national regulations on gender equality addressed by multiple

ministries on which the implementation of the GPA is layered and must be implemented across a diverse set of socio-economic and cultural sub-national contexts.

“The work falls back on a single person, and that’s how it will be in many countries.”

Additionally, many GBFPs are expected to guide the gender-responsive implementation of CBD commitments without direct exposure to CBD processes: 38% of respondents reported having never participated in CBD meetings, and several noted limited familiarity with advocacy and CBD negotiation mechanisms.

72% of respondents reported supporting women-led organisations in their role, plus 21% through partner organisations. This support is mainly delivered through consultation and participation processes rather than more direct or material forms. In many countries women-led action at the local level is vitally important in conserving, restoring, sustainably using and defending biodiversity including beyond formal policy structures and generating data,⁷ with a strong need for direct support.⁸ Respondents consistently described women-led groups as key actors in sustainability and important sources and transmitters of ecological traditional knowledge. There was a strong stated need to better understand and showcase women’s contributions, but there was also recognition of limited existence or use of channels for GBFPs, and government in general, to effectively engage with and support women’s organisations.

Regional differences and contexts

Despite evidence that gender shapes biodiversity and sustainability outcomes in the Global North, particularly in the agricultural sector⁹, gender dimensions are often perceived as relevant to environmental policy primarily in the Global South.¹⁰

Several GBFPs described a paradox whereby strong national commitments to and frameworks for gender equality can lead to an assumption that biodiversity-specific gender issues are already adequately addressed. Established equality legislation and mainstreaming mechanisms were often viewed as sufficient domestically, whilst social equity considerations remain more explicitly integrated in compliance standards in overseas development programming.

“Because there are strong overarching [gender equality] mechanisms, it feels from senior management or a political perspective, that we’re already ticking those boxes”

Respondents highlighted the need for stronger evidence, indicators and case studies demonstrating how gender influences biodiversity outcomes in high-income countries. Examples such as Spain's Biodiversity Foundation, which embeds gender equality as a key principle in ecological transition funding, project design and governance systems, provide potential learning opportunities for other WEOG countries.¹

Integration of Target 23 into NBSAPs

The sample of countries represented by the survey respondents largely reported including gender targets in their strategies (50% of countries have adopted a stand-alone gender target, while 26 % report cross-cutting integration across biodiversity targets). Respondents highlighted how dedicated targets can improve visibility and accountability, while mainstreaming can ensure gender is embedded across all biodiversity targets, reflecting a dual track approach.¹² In both cases, however, policy aims can remain symbolic in the absence of budget allocations and measurable indicators.¹³ GBFPs reported a variety of barriers to effective integration of Target 23 in NBSAPs (Figure 1).

Effectiveness of the Gender Plan of Action

The GPA is widely perceived as a valuable instrument, with 67% of respondents describing it as very useful. It is viewed as a reference framework for strategic direction and planning, and it has directly informed strategies in several countries. However, this perceived usefulness does not consistently translate into national policy or action: around 40% of respondents reported that the GPA has had no influence on their work or were unsure of its impact. Respondents emphasised that the effectiveness of the GPA remains limited in the absence of adequate financial resources, contextualised tools, and stronger linkages to national policy processes.

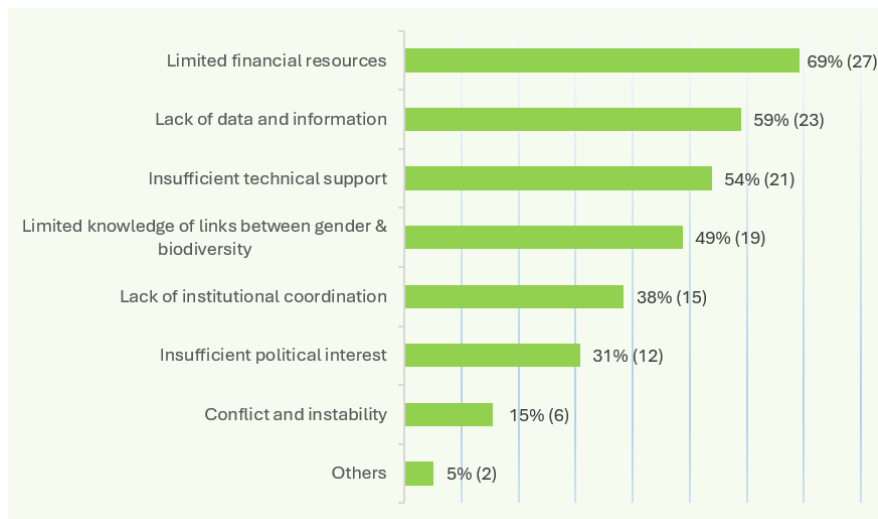


Figure 1: Reported barriers to effective integration of gender responsiveness and Target 23 in NBSAPs (survey findings n=39)

Improving gender responsive implementation

In implementing the GPA and gender responsiveness in biodiversity policy and action, respondents identified mutually reinforcing gaps and a package of support needed.

Political or institutional support was highlighted by 17 GBFPs (44%). In some cases, other priorities such as defence and issues of conflict and instability (15%) had undermined commitment to gender equality. Some reflected that other Targets are considered by decision-makers as more central to biodiversity. Given that respondents were mainly from countries that had already appointed a GBFP, these findings suggest that appointment alone does not necessarily translate into political and institutional support for gender-responsive implementation.

“Once we get the commitment, and it’s not easy, we can get the support for easier coordination and technical support, and from that the consequence is finance...political commitment underpins everything”

Even for those countries with a stated commitment, finance and resources dominated responses on challenges and needs (85%). There was a common narrative that there are policy commitments but a lack of funding for implementation, with operational funding being emphasised rather than further policy development.

Capacity-building and sharing was identified by 80% of respondents. GBFPs emphasised the need to move beyond theoretical frameworks to practical,

contextualised support at multiple levels, from government agencies to community groups, to develop and/or strengthen technical skills and coordination between sectors. Participation by women was consistently linked to successful implementation of Target 23 but with a continuing gap between formal recognition and full and effective participation, requiring capacity building and the removal of structural barriers to enable genuine influence and leadership.

The need for strengthening capacity was also reflected in calls for technical guidance and tools (67%) specifically around methodologies for integrating gender into NBSAPs, indicators and monitoring systems, data collection and analysis.

“We know what Target 23 is, but we need help implementing it”

GBFPs often lack the data, indicators, monitoring frameworks, and evidence needed for accountability, learning and to demonstrate results. Many (62%) are seeking technical tools to collect gender-disaggregated data (such as on participation, contributions to biodiversity and access to natural resources), develop meaningful indicators, track implementation, and generate evidence on effective practice. Several respondents in countries where progress has been limited highlighted the need for stronger evidence on inequalities to establish baselines upon which to inform strategies.

Respondents also emphasised the value of peer learning and regional exchange (72%), as well as access to case studies of good practices (56%), reflecting a strong demand for opportunities to learn from GBFPs and countries facing similar implementation challenges.

Table 1: Summary of support identified for GBFPs to advance gender responsiveness in biodiversity policy and action

Thematic area	Key needs identified
Finance and resources	Dedicated funding for implementation activities including technical tools, training, participation and monitoring
Capacity building	Training of national agencies, improving inter-agency collaboration and coordination, building capacity of women and communities in biodiversity governance, and technical tools to translate concepts into action
Data, indicators and monitoring	Stronger data systems, practical indicators, and monitoring tools to measure progress and translate gender commitments into measurable outcomes
Networking and evidence	Regional networks and knowledge exchange, to access peer experiences, lessons learned, and relevant examples of good practice for advocacy and adaptation to national contexts
Institutional & political support and coordination	High-level leadership, clear institutional responsibilities, and improved coordination across government sectors

Recommendations

Appoint well-resourced, experienced GBFPs in strategically important roles: Parties should ensure that GBFPs have clear mandates, access to decision-making processes, dedicated time, and sustained technical and financial support. Evidence shows that when adequately resourced, GBFPs can champion gender equality within national policy processes and contribute to the institutional momentum needed to move from commitment to action (Box 1).

Enable coordination across institutions and spatial scales: Parties should ensure GBFPs are supported and positioned to facilitate coordination across relevant ministries, levels of government, as well as to engage with women's organisations and networks. This coordination can help integrate gender considerations across the design, implementation, monitoring and review of biodiversity policy. Coordinating mechanisms can support these efforts (Box 1), for example in Costa Rica a collaboration is emerging between five core biodiversity and gender institutions to support a shared agenda and approach with plans to formalise the arrangement.

Dedicate adequate, timely and flexible financial resources to gender-responsiveness: International biodiversity finance mechanisms, donors and Parties should move beyond fragmented project-based funding and invest in sustained implementation of Target 23 and the GPA. At the global level, financing institutions should establish dedicated funding windows for gender-responsive biodiversity action. At the national level, governments should establish budget allocations and gender-responsive budgeting mechanisms that support GBFPs, institutional

coordination and the full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership of women and girls. This can include dedicated budget lines within biodiversity programmes that address barriers to participation. For example, Mexico's National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) has introduced a care-economy provision that enables payments to cover unpaid care work, facilitating women's participation in forestry initiatives.

Strengthen learning by documenting and sharing implementation experiences: The CBD Secretariat, Regional Technical Support Centres and partner organisations should develop and disseminate real-world case studies that demonstrate how gender has been integrated into biodiversity policy, planning, financing and monitoring. Sharing implementation experiences, challenges, enabling factors and lessons learned can help Parties move beyond general commitments and adapt successful approaches to their own contexts.

Co-produce practical tools, guidance and tailored technical support: Parties should, with support from the CBD Secretariat, Regional Technical Support Centres and partner organisations, work with GBFPs and sectoral ministries, gender experts, subnational authorities and women's organisations to adapt and develop context-appropriate practical tools adapted to national legal frameworks, land and resource governance systems, institutional mandates, and local realities. Special attention must be given to the experiences, rights and priorities of women and girls from Indigenous Peoples, local communities, people of African descent and those facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

Provide targeted tools, guidance and technical support: The CBD Secretariat, Regional Technical Support Centres and implementation partners should develop practical resources and provide tailored support to help Parties operationalise Target 23. This could include guidance on integrating gender into NBSAPs, developing indicators and monitoring systems, applying gender-responsive budgeting approaches, and designing inclusive participation processes.

Strengthen the GBFP Network and enable regional exchanges: The Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points Network, facilitated by the CBD Women's Caucus, should be adequately resourced and supported as a dedicated global space for GBFPs to connect, exchange experiences, learn from one another and strengthen peer support. This global network should be strengthened and complemented by opportunities for

regional exchanges supported by Regional Technical Support Centres to enable more contextualised peer learning and collaboration among GBFPs facing similar regional challenges and opportunities.

Build policy, negotiation and strategic leadership capacities of GBFPs: Parties, with support from the CBD Secretariat, should invest in strengthening the negotiation, advocacy, and strategic leadership skills of GBFPs to enable them to effectively engage and influence decision-making, mobilise institutional support and secure resources, and advance gender priorities in cross-ministerial and international processes. Regional Technical Support Centres are well placed to lead this effort by delivering regionally tailored training, mentoring and peer-learning programmes, in collaboration with CBD Women's Caucus, women's organisations and gender experts.

Box 1: Guatemala case study

Guatemala's experience illustrates how a strategically positioned GBFP can catalyse institutional progress towards Target 23 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Located within the pre-existing Gender Unit of the National Council of Protected Areas, the GBFP entered the role with prior experience and a clear strategic vision for advancing gender mainstreaming in biodiversity governance. This positioning highlights the importance of appointing GBFPs within influential governmental institutions where they can shape policy processes and implementation pathways. In this context, the GBFP developed a Methodological Guide for Mainstreaming Gender into the Management Plans of Guatemala's Protected Areas, and advanced an Institutional Policy for Social Participation and Strengthening Governance in the Management of Biological Diversity and Protected Areas, with a strong gender component. This work extended beyond formal compliance with National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the Gender Plan of Action, and international reporting requirements. Instead, it enabled the operationalisation of gender commitments across national and sub-national levels, supporting practical implementation.

A defining feature of the Guatemalan experience is its territorial approach. The GBFP prioritised engagement at municipal and community levels, organising women's meetings and congresses in collaboration with Municipal Women's Directorates. Methodologies were adapted to reflect the diversity of the four peoples that coexist in Guatemala, including the country's 24 linguistic communities, while participation was strengthened by linking training activities with economic opportunities, such as the exhibition and sale of local products. These locally grounded strategies enhanced relevance, ownership, and sustained engagement. This does not imply that GBFPs must directly deliver on-the-ground activities; rather, it underscores the need for sufficient institutional capacity, resources, and inter-institutional coordination to enable such work through partnerships.

Strategic alliances with public institutions and external actors such as NGOs and multilateral organisations were therefore central, allowing the pooling of technical expertise and mobilisation of resources, including external funding, to address staffing and capacity constraints. The Guatemalan case also shows that progress towards gender-responsive biodiversity governance did not begin with Target 23 or the formal establishment of GBFPs. Additional institutional efforts were needed to create momentum that the GBFP could then leverage to overcome persistent barriers, such as limited high-level political will, patriarchal social norms, and chronic resource constraints.

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Notes

¹ CBD/SBI/6/INF/5: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/4fc4/fb7a/ae60317b2bf743207635649/sbi-06-inf-05-en.pdf>

² COP-15 decision 15/11: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-11-en.pdf>

³ CBD Gender and Biodiversity National Focal Points: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/lists/nfp-gender.pdf>

⁴ 31 of the respondents were Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points; 6 were National Focal Points taking on gender responsibilities; and 2 preferred not to disclose their role.

⁵ Gender and Biodiversity Focal Points Network: <https://cbd womenscaucus.org/initiatives/gender-and-biodiversity-focal-points-network/>

⁶ As of June 2026, there were 12 Parties which listed the same individual/s as both the GBFP and CBD National Focal Point.

⁷ IIED & CBD Women's Caucus. (2026). Findings Report: Advancing gender justice in biodiversity data and policy: <https://cbd womenscaucus.org/findings-report-advancing-gender-justice-in-biodiversity-data-and-policy/>

⁸ Rights and Resources (2024). Is Global funding reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant and local community women? https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/GenderBrief_GlobalFundingWomen_v7.pdf

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¹⁰ Arora-Jonsson, Seema. (2011). Virtue and Vulnerability: Discourses on Women, Gender and Climate Change. *Global Environmental Change* 21 (2): 744–751. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.01.005>

¹¹ EIGE (2024). Good practices on gender mainstreaming in the European Green Deal: Towards a more gender equal and greener Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/good-practices-on-gender-mainstreaming-in-the-european-green-deal.pdf#page=25>

¹² Council of Europe. (2016). Achieving Gender Mainstreaming in All Policies and Measures: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/gender-equality/6932-achieving-gender-mainstreaming-in-all-policies-and-measures.html>

¹³ Hannan, C. (2022). Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/02/handbook-on-gender-mainstreaming-for-gender-equality-results>