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## COP15 of Convention on Biological Diversity: India's Priorities and Opportunities

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As India formally took over the presidency of the G20, climate change, food security, sustainable living, climate finance, and energy security would be high on India's G20 agenda. This sharpened focus will undoubtedly provide the burgeoning climate dialogue, innovations, and business models in India and around the world a multifaceted boost. Additionally, it will solidify India's position as a world leader in climate change negotiations. In fact, biodiversity is facing a greater threat due to anthropogenic actions. The Living Planet Report of 2022 highlights that there has been an average decline of 69 per cent in species populations since 1970.<sup>1</sup> The stakeholders are indeed making efforts for conservation; however, expedited actions are needed to redress the damage already done. Taking these factors into account, the representatives of 190 countries met in Montreal, Canada, between December 7 and 19, for the United Nations Biodiversity Conference of Parties summit (COP15).

There are various international organizations and treaties to ensure the conservation of biodiversity. Mostly, these efforts are voluntary in nature, but some treaties, like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are legally binding.<sup>2</sup> The CBD functions under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).<sup>3</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> meeting was held in December 2022. The major aim of the CBD includes the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.<sup>4</sup>

### **Landmark outcome of United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15)**

Chaired by China, the COP15 was concluded with the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).<sup>5</sup> The major goals of GBF include: addressing biodiversity loss, protecting indigenous rights, and restoring ecosystems.<sup>6</sup> The framework aims to take concrete measures to reverse the nature loss by putting 30 per cent of the degraded ecosystem and 30 per cent of the planet under protection by 2030.<sup>7</sup> It emphasizes on increasing the finances of developing countries.

The GBF includes four major global objectives to preserve nature. These are as follows: stopping the anthropogenically caused extinction of threatened species as well as limiting the rate of extinction of all species by 2050; ensuring the sustainable use and management of biodiversity to guarantee that the benefits of nature to people are acknowledged, preserved, and improved; the benefits of using genetic resources as well as the digital sequence data on genetic resources should

be fairly distributed; and means of implementing the GBF should be easily available to all parties, especially Small Island Developing Countries and Least Developed Countries.<sup>8</sup>

The GBF also includes 23 goals to accomplish by 2030, such as ensuring that at least 30 per cent of the world's land, marine, and coastal areas are effectively conserved and managed. Currently, 8 per cent of marine regions and 17 per cent of land areas are protected. Reduce the loss of regions with high ecological integrity and biodiversity value to almost zero; reduce global overconsumption and waste production significantly, cut global food waste in half; the amount of positive incentives for biodiversity preservation and sustainable use should be increased while removing or reforming the incentives that harm biodiversity; securing at least US \$200 billion annually from both public and private sources for funding related to biodiversity; increasing international financial transfers to at least US \$30 billion annually from the global north to the global south; requiring multinational corporations and financial organizations to examine, monitor, and publicly report risks to and effects on biodiversity related to their business operations, portfolios, supply chains, and value chains.<sup>9</sup>

Finance was a major point of discussion during COP 15 in the context of how much money developed countries should transfer to developing countries for the conservation of biodiversity. Hence, the Global Environment Facility was requested to set up a special trust fund, the 'GBF Fund,' to ensure a timely and adequate transfer of funds as well as to support the implementation of the GBF.<sup>10</sup>

### **India's position at COP15**

Developing states have argued that the current multilateral sources are inadequate to meet the GBF's requirement at CBD COP15 and have called for the creation of a new, specifically designated biodiversity fund. India has claimed that because developing countries primarily bear the burden of carrying out the goals for biodiversity protection, these countries need significant funding and technology transfer. India has asserted that the targets of GBF should be both ambitious as well as realistic. India has claimed that biodiversity conservation should also be based on common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and respective capabilities.<sup>11</sup> The application of CBDR has been a point of contention in climate negotiations between the global north and the global south.

Further, at the COP15, the parties also attempted to agree on eliminating environmentally detrimental subsidies, such as those for producing fossil fuels, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, by at least US \$500 billion annually. However, India disagreed with cutting the subsidy for agriculture

and diverting the savings to biodiversity preservation because there are other national objectives.<sup>12</sup> India has argued that agriculture is the primary economic source for rural people in developing countries, and that the crucial support given to these sectors cannot be diverted. In order to assist the livelihoods of farmers, mostly small and marginal ones, who make up the majority of the rural population in India, the government offers a number of subsidies, including those for seed, fertilizer, irrigation, agricultural equipment, and infrastructure. Hence, diverting these subsidies would adversely affect the agriculture sector.

Further, the proposed GBF includes measurable targets such as a two-thirds reduction in pesticide use.<sup>13</sup> India has claimed that the prescription of numerical targets for pesticide reductions when food security is of the utmost significance for developing countries is unwarranted and must be left to the countries to decide, depending on their conditions, priorities, and capabilities.<sup>14</sup> India highlighted at COP15 that the GBF must take into account science, equity, and nations' sovereign rights over their resources. Moreover, India's appeal for Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) found an echo in the GBF.<sup>15</sup> The LiFE initiative aims to promote conscious and purposeful utilization, which is in consonance with the 16<sup>th</sup> target of the GBF, which is sustainable consumption.<sup>16</sup> Further, the Digital Sequence Information (DSI), which was accepted as a part of the historic agreement to conserve biodiversity, would ensure that money is transferred to countries like India from users like biotechnology corporations that access its biodiversity and associated genetic information.

In the context of conserving biodiversity, India can use the opportunity to offer global leadership. Even for the countries in the global north, their customs and community-conserved biodiversity regions serve as a successful example of participatory biodiversity conservation. In fact, climate change and sustainable living will be two of the main agenda items during India's G20 presidency.

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- <sup>1</sup> “Living Planet Report 2022,” WWF, <https://livingplanet.panda.org/en-IN/>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> “COP 15: What Is Convention On Biological Diversity, Its Targets And Why Is It Important?,” *Outlook*, <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/cop15-what-is-the-convention-on-biological-diversity-what-are-its-targets-and-why-is-it-important--news-244432>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>3</sup> “UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15),” *UNEP*, <https://www.unep.org/un-biodiversity-conference-cop-15>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>4</sup> “Introduction,” *Convention on Biological Diversity*, <https://www.cbd.int/intro/>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>5</sup> “Nations Adopt Four Goals, 23 Targets for 2030 In Landmark UN Biodiversity Agreement,” *Convention on Biological Diversity*, [https://prod.drupal.www.infra.cbd.int/sites/default/files/2022-12/221219-CBD-PressRelease-COP15-Final\\_0.pdf](https://prod.drupal.www.infra.cbd.int/sites/default/files/2022-12/221219-CBD-PressRelease-COP15-Final_0.pdf). Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>6</sup> “COP15 ends with landmark biodiversity agreement,” *UNEP*, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/cop15-ends-landmark-biodiversity-agreement>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Convention on Biological Diversity*, n. 5.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> “Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Shri Bhupendra Yadav delivers the National Statement at COP15 of Convention on Biodiversity,” *PIB*, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1884341>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> “India pushes for new biodiversity fund,” *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/cop15-india-pushes-for-new-dedicated-fund-for-biodiversity-conservation/article66277386.ece>. Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>14</sup> *PIB*, n. 11.
- <sup>15</sup> “COP 15: India to mobilise domestic finance for biodiversity conservation,” *Business Standard*, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/cop-15-india-to-mobilise-domestic-finance-for-biodiversity-conservation-122122300572\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/cop-15-india-to-mobilise-domestic-finance-for-biodiversity-conservation-122122300572_1.html). Accessed on January 11, 2023.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*