

The United Nations Summit on Biodiversity met in September 2020, hot on the heels of the 75th UN General Assembly in New York. Convened under the theme “Urgent Action on Biodiversity for Sustainable Development”, the meeting aimed to highlight the urgency of action needed at the highest political levels in support of a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and places the global community on a path towards realising the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, “Living in harmony with nature.”

EDITORIAL

The post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework will replace the 20 biodiversity targets that were adopted by Member States of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Aichi, Japan, in 2010. A CBD report released earlier in September, the fifth Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5), assessed progress against the nature conservation commitments made by world governments in 2010 and suggested that none of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets will be fully met in 2020. Needless to say, this was a hugely disappointing, if not unexpected finding. Clearly “business as usual” is not an option moving forward. Perhaps the silver lining in the dark cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic is it has forced world leaders to think more carefully about humankind’s impact on the environment and catalyse the high-level political will needed to ensure that, when eventually finalised, the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework does provide ambitious and accelerated positive actions that benefit both biodiversity and people, as well as the resources needed to implement the framework effectively. In the lead up to and after the Summit, representatives of some 78 countries, including Germany’s Angela Merkel, Canada’s Justin Trudeau, New Zealand’s Jacinda Arden and the United Kingdom’s Boris Johnson took a Leader’s Pledge for Nature to preserving biodiversity. The challenge now is to turn such words into action to ensure that the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework will indeed prompt the transformative changes needed to reverse the rapid decline in nature.

The current draft of the Framework features, for the first time, a target on wildlife trade, calling on governments to ensure that the harvesting, trade and use of wild species of fauna and flora is legal, at sustainable levels and safe by 2030. A global landmark report from the UN’s Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2019 revealed that the rate of species extinctions is accelerating and identified the direct exploitation of animal and plant species, including harvesting, hunting, fishing and logging, as the second biggest driver of negative impacts on nature, after changes in land and sea use. TRAFFIC believes that the establishment of a wildlife trade focused target within the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is essential to ensure the political commitment and levels of implementation to address this global issue.

Recent years have seen the issue of poaching and illegal wildlife trade at the forefront of global attention. However, not enough consideration has been given to sustainable and legal trade in wild animals and plants and its role in conservation and socio-economic development. TRAFFIC hopes that ongoing negotiations on the Framework give due attention to how sustainable use contributes to species’ long-term conservation and the multiple benefits for people reliant on use and trade of them.

The primary issue that now dominates the world agenda is the COVID-19 pandemic. It has shown how human health and well-being is inextricably linked to biodiversity and planetary health. Efforts by just one sector or one single nation cannot prevent or eliminate the outbreak of future pandemics caused by zoonotic diseases. A well-co-ordinated “One Health” Approach is needed, with the collaboration of many with a range of expertise who are active in different sectors, such as public health, animal health, plant health, wildlife management, economic development, wildlife use and trade, nature conservation, environmental protection and climate change—at the national, regional and international levels—to maximise co-operation, synergies and sharing information and best practices.

In October, TRAFFIC joined other members of the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) in issuing a statement setting out guiding principles aimed at reducing the risk of future pandemics originating from wild animals while strengthening the conservation of wildlife, and at the same time respecting livelihoods, food security and the culture of diverse groups of people. The CPW is a voluntary partnership of 14 international organisations, including the Secretariats of the CBD, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, World Organisation for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization. The CPW principles stress the importance of maintaining and restoring healthy and resilient ecosystems to reduce risks of zoonotic spill-overs and future pandemics, while recognising the importance of the use of wildlife for many communities, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in policy responses.

Most importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that now is the time to value and invest in nature by developing integrated socio-economic stimulus packages that address long-term planetary health, food security, poverty alleviation, climate change, biodiversity loss and other aspects of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. The set of important multilateral negotiations taking place in the coming months, such as the CBD CoP and the UN Climate Change Conference, present a unique opportunity to integrate these ideas into a strategic vision for biodiversity, climate, and planetary health.

*Sabri Zain, Director of Policy, TRAFFIC.
E-mail: sabri.zain@traffic.org*