



# General review of the binary Indicators: questions and answers for the monitoring framework of GBF

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SEPTEMBER 2023

This document is structured in three parts: (1) general recommendations regarding the Monitoring framework of the GBF topic for the next SBSTTA 25, (2) specific issues regarding the binary indicators to be used in the Monitoring framework of the GBF, and (3) annex - general thoughts about broader questions to be considered in the process of GBF/CBD.

## **1 - General recommendations regarding the Monitoring framework of the GBF topic for the next SBSTTA 25**

After careful consideration of document SBSTTA/25/2, our panel of experts provides the following comments and recommendations.

**Exclusively Positive Framing.** We have noticed that most of the indicators make use of exclusively positive phrasing to ask whether a country has, for example, implemented a specific action or plan. We see this as a source of potential bias given the possibility of finding loopholes through the flexibility of interpretation. If such a situation occurs across most countries, the results of the global stock-takes would provide an overly-optimistic picture of the progress towards the goals and targets of the GBF, threatening its chance at success. Furthermore, we find that tackling the current biodiversity crisis often requires restrictions: a decrease in consumption, a banning of conversion, a restricting of pollution, a reduction in defaunation pressures, etc..

**Lack of consistency and explicitness.** There is a lack of consistency in both terminology and scale across the document. There is a need to standardise the use of words that refer to important elements of the GBF. For example, the indicators refer to both “inland water” and “fresh water”. We recommend using fresh-water or, if an important difference exists, making this distinction explicit. Similarly, it is important to consider the terminology of other frameworks and international bodies. For example, we recommend using “nature’s contribution to people” instead of “ecosystem services”.

We see similar issues with consistency across scales. We ask that all binary indicators explicitly refer to the scale at which they should be reported whether national, regional or local. The lack of this clarification could lead to an overestimation of implemented policies and a lack of consistency across answers.

Finally, we recommend improving the clarity of the questions to provide details for each of the possible answers. Options like ‘not applicable’ may be appropriate in cases where, for example, countries do have any marine areas under their jurisdiction.

**Accessibility.** While we acknowledge the complexity of this and other international cooperative frameworks, we see it as important to, wherever possible, make the process more accessible to those who may not have extensive experience with such processes. To this end, we recommend including the complete reference of relevant documents in the introductory page(s) of every document and providing a short descriptor beyond the document code. References to the full names and links of documents would simplify the understanding and facilitate the reading of the document. A glossary of terms that have been agreed to by the parties should also always be provided.

**More emphasis on capacity building.** Overcoming the unequal ability and opportunities for parties to implement and pursue progress in the GBF is a key element that will dictate its success. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that steps be taken to enable Parties to implement and monitor GBF and produce standardised data for the aggregation of the binary indicators. Therefore, we suggest negotiators discuss the questionnaire with special consideration for the parties that require support and capacity building. This could take the form of introducing further answer categories that make explicit that a lack of progress is dependent on insufficient international support or capacity building. We further recommend the establishment of relevant capacity-building activities such as training programs, direct financing mechanisms and guidelines on how to fill out the national reports. These processes should then be tested in a pilot reporting session such that remaining gaps in knowledge or capacity can be identified and remedied in pursuit of improving these national reporting guidelines.

**The use of binary indicators.** We recommend emphasising that binary indicators may be useful for communication purposes and evaluating the existence of policies and frameworks, but they do not indicate the success of a given program. Therefore, they should not be seen as replacements for the headline indicators and when possible binary indicators should include hard metrics and targets that would allow a more detailed analysis of progress.

## **2 - Specific Recommendations on the binary indicators of the Global Biodiversity Monitoring framework**

In the following section we provide specific recommendations for the binary indicators.

**GOAL B:** There is a further need for clarification. We recommend a focus on the accounting of ecosystems/ecosystem functions/services on a national scale that can easily reflect processes in the country. Furthermore, there should be questions that explicitly aim to track maintenance and enhancement of ecosystem functions and services, which currently don't exist.

**Target 1:** Ambiguity as to what is meant by “participatory biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning”, which may lead to over-estimations. We recommend a rephrasing focused on nationwide standards for spatial planning.

**Target 6:** We recommend the inclusion of an indicator to identify whether countries curate a list of invasive species such that policy efforts can be targeted. We also recommend hard targets be included (e.g., a reduction of impact by a given percentage) to avoid the use of subjective words like “significant”. We also recommend replacing the words in 6.2 from “the prevention or control of invasive alien species” to “reduce the impact of invasive alien species”.

**Target 8:** Questions 8.1, 8.3, 8.4 should include "No" as a possible answer. Further clarification is also required, such as providing examples of relevant plans or activities. Furthermore, we suggest the splitting of questions 8.2 and 8.4 such that Yes/No answers can be provided for climate change and ocean acidification separately.

**Target 9:** Hard targets are preferred (e.g., achieve monitoring of % of species) to subjective words such as "effective". Question 9.3 should specifically refer to CITES to make clear whether policy instruments go beyond or meet those required by other international frameworks.

**Target 12:** Need for clarification. We recommend the indicators and questions reference specific standards and technical requirements for urban planning aimed at significantly increasing the area and quality of urban planning. We also recommend introducing hard targets and metrics (e.g., % of cities under sustainability planning).

**Target 14:** Need for clarification. The term "mechanism" should be clarified and defined to avoid over-estimation. For consistency with the target, indicators should also refer to "biodiversity and its values" rather than just "the values of biodiversity". We suggest tracking the establishment of national targets for the integration of biodiversity into all national and sectoral levels of policy making. This target could also benefit from the inclusion of hard targets and metrics.

**Target 15:** We recommend adding hard metrics and targets to track the impact of private entities. Furthermore, considering the outsized impact of business on biodiversity, we recommend negatively-phrased indicators such that a limitation and reduction of their impact can be explicitly pursued. Furthermore, questions should make explicit whether countries are monitoring the impacts of their companies only within their own national boundaries or beyond. Lastly, indicators should make clear whether legal and policy tools are in place to require adherence to standards.

**Target 16:** Indicators should make explicit that the current imbalances in that some countries must drastically reduce consumption while others need to allow for the sustainable increase to meet human needs. We also recommend hard targets and metrics for those countries that must reduce their consumption. Finally, we encourage concrete legislative policy recommendations to counter unsustainable production and consumption that could be built into indicators such as "right to repair"/"product longevity" laws.

**Target 17:** We appreciate the inclusion of question 17.2, which explicitly asks about whether the necessary capacity to achieve the target exists and we encourage similar questions to be added across the binary indicators. We recommend that further opportunity for Parties to indicate the need for (financial / institutional / human or knowledge etc.) capacity be included. The term "scientifically-sound" in 17.4 requires further clarification.

**Target 20:** Question 20.5 should be split into multiple questions or answers should make explicit reference to the type of capacity development that the country is involved in.

**Target 22:** Clarify the relevant scale in 22.1 or split into multiple questions for national and subnational frameworks. Considering the increased danger that environmental defenders experience, question 22.c should be rephrased to clarify whether specialised protection (e.g., beyond that offered to regular citizens). We appreciate the inclusion of questions 22.3 and 22.4, which ask about the availability of finance and capacity to implement such measures. We recommend that these questions be added across the binary indicators or that an alternative method of indicating need be provided to countries.

### **3 - Comments on the limitations of the Global Biodiversity Framework that threaten its success.**

*(We all agree that a change is needed, but this section was not written with one voice, but it's important to share all points of view with you.)*

Finally, while our official mandate was to advise on binary indicators for SBSTTA25, we cannot ignore what we believe are **critical failures in the wider structure of the GBF**. We believe the impact of our scientific expertise is limited by these structural weaknesses and therefore see challenging them as directly pertinent to the work we were called to do. We understand your limited power to address these issues but we encourage you to take these into account, as uncomfortable as they may be, to repeat them, because they bear repeating, and to, whenever you can, fight for true transformation.

We found the **GBF fails to identify and confront the true drivers of the biodiversity crisis**. We must dismantle colonial structures that perpetuate extractivism in the majority world for the Global-North's benefit. We invite you to campaign for **financial indicators and targets that go beyond simple aid payments**, which are often not met and obscure oppressive relationships that lead to a net appropriation of value from aid recipients. Similarly, a successful protection of biodiversity requires **the elimination of the violent competition** that has dominated political and economic thinking for centuries. Biodiversity itself teaches us that the flourishing of the whole is necessary for the flourishing of its parts. As opposed to true and earnest cooperation the GBF relies on the same financial, banking and profit-seeking institutions that threaten indigenous, local and national sovereignty. We urge you to propose targets and indicators that transform these systems by, for example, eliminating unjust debt, reforming international financial bodies and inhibiting the financialisation of nature. Finally, the GBF relies heavily on a neo-liberal policy making philosophy, which de-prioritises the role of democratically elected governments and empowers private and vested interests, allowing them to take advantage of crises to accumulate wealth and sabotage human rights. We advocate for stronger legislation, regulation and control so that the very entities that caused the global biodiversity crisis will not be the ones to profit off of efforts to solve it.

These statements may face resistance, but they're crucial for the preservation of biodiversity and human society. History will judge our efforts. Please consider these recommendations as you continue your work. Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

## WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

**Pedro Cardoso** is a researcher at the University of Lisbon. His work focuses on conservation biology and macroecology, often implying the development of novel methods for data analysis. He is also involved in conservation action through IUCN and numerous NGOs.

**Ioan Cristian** is Professor in the Faculty of Geography at the University of Bucharest and Senior Researcher in the Centre for Environmental Research. The research activities are focused on urban ecology, human-nature connections and environmental planning. He has experience in working on national and local strategies related to sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation, including the indicators development.

**Arildo Dias** is a researcher at Goethe University and leader of the Biodiversity Research Section at Single. Earth. His research focuses on biodiversity and ecosystem services and sustainable use of natural resources and combines analytical and theoretical approaches to understand the interlinks between ecological and social systems. He is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion of under-represented and marginalised ethnicities in academic and research institutions participating in the REED Network of the British Ecological Society and ODU Initiative.

**Giacomo Delgado** is a researcher at ETH Zürich and a doctoral candidate within the Crowther Lab. His research focuses on the ways that equitable wealth redistribution and other progressive policies interact with and strengthen biodiversity protection and ecological outcomes. He is an expert in ground-up scaleable biodiversity monitoring technologies and systems. He is also an environmental and human-rights activist, with an interest in international diplomacy and cooperation, pursuing these passions with active memberships in the COP youth delegation (YOUNGO) and the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)

**Céline Eson** is a sustainable development expert with a background in ecology and environmental management. Over the last few years, she has supported companies in implementing sustainable development strategies and has participated in the development of environmental assessment tools for various sectors, most recently for the financial sector. She is also a member of the French National Biodiversity Committee, one of whose roles is to ensure the alignment of the French Biodiversity strategy with the GBF.

**Garima Gupta** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow working on the Beacon Project at the University of Stirling. The Beacon Project uses hydropower development as a model system and employs interdisciplinary thinking and methods to quantify the trade-offs, conflicts and synergies between SDGs and stakeholders. Her PhD research focused on the importance of historical databases in decision-making and conservation science where she used the IUCN Knowledge Products such as IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and she also tested the then proposed IUCN Green Status of Species protocol for 12 Himalayan Galliformes species.

**Luna Milatović** is a biodiversity expert with a background in biology and environmental policy. She works on policy related to protected area designation and management, sustainable wildlife management, human-wildlife conflict and coexistence, and restoration. Being a policy officer for the IUCN Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence Specialist Group, she is currently coordinating the development of the indicator framework for human-wildlife conflict for Target 4.

**Dr. Olesya Petrovych** is a biologist and ecologist, an independent expert on nature conservation and restoration, and a lecturer. Her work portfolio includes various positions in state bodies, educational organisations and NGOs among which are the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine and WWF-Ukraine. In recent years, her work has been devoted to the preparation of policy proposals for the implementation of nature-based solutions for adaptation to climate change and the post-war recovery of Ukraine and assessment of the impact of the war on the environment and protected areas in Ukraine.