

EMG Issue Management Group on Biodiversity
Common Approach to Biodiversity – Webinar Series

Human Rights and Biodiversity: Three-part Sub-series

Incorporating human rights-based approaches to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity: A UN inter-agency and multi-stakeholder discussion

Outcome Document

On Tuesday 9th July 2024, the [United Nations Common Approach to Biodiversity](#) (Common Approach) [webinar series](#) introduced a new sub-series focused on human rights and biodiversity, with the inaugural webinar titled “Incorporating human rights-based approaches to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity: A UN inter-agency and multi-stakeholder discussion”. The sub-series aims to:

- Build capacity on and promote human rights-based approaches to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the equitable sharing of the benefits from its utilization
- Promote awareness and implementation of the Common Approach and the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (GBF) in the UN system, as well as exchange and disseminate best practices and lessons learned from actions that consider rights-based approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Hosted by the [United Nations Environment Management Group](#) (EMG) in collaboration with the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) and the [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP), the webinar featured a panel discussion between representatives from the UN system, Indigenous Peoples and local communities representatives and Youth Organizations on the importance, opportunities and existing gaps for the incorporation of human rights-based approaches to biodiversity conservation, restoration and sustainable use.

Event rundown and key messages:

Ms Jannica Pitkanen (EMG Secretariat) provided a brief introduction to the webinar, highlighting the Common Approach as a strategic framework designed to ensure a cohesive, systematic, and collaborative effort across the UN system to address the critical challenges posed by biodiversity loss. Ms. Pitkanen observed that one of the three impact areas of the Common Approach correspond to “*Human rights, peaceful societies and planetary stability*”, with five objectives that address the intersection of humans and biodiversity, including the protection of the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; and recognizing the links between biological and cultural diversity.

The keynote speech was provided by Ms. Astrid Puentes Riaño the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Ms. Puentes Riaño advocated for human rights mainstreaming as a catalyst for transformative action, urging for a more holistic approach rooted in communities that respects Indigenous Peoples and incorporates human rights and sustainable development. Moreover, she noted that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 and beyond can only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political, and technical factors, emphasizing the importance of incorporating human rights in such actions.

The panel discussion was moderated by Mr Terence Hay-Edie (UNDP), who introduced the panellists; Mr. Benjamin Schachter (OHCHR); Ms. Phoebe Ndiema ([Chepkitale Indigenous People Development Project](#) (CIPDP)); and Ms. Josefa Tauli ([Global Youth Biodiversity Network](#) (GYBN)). The discussion was shaped around four guiding questions:

1. What are the interlinkages between biodiversity and human rights? Why is it important that biodiversity action respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, and who are the duty/responsibility bearers and rights-holders?
2. What are the main challenges and opportunities for incorporating and implementing human rights-based approach for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity?
3. Examples of concrete strategies, guidelines, flagship initiatives, projects and/or best practices that are integrating human rights-based approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. And, if possible, how they support the implementation of the GBF.
4. In light of the upcoming CBD COP16, to be held in Cali, Colombia, what are the key human rights considerations for the COP16 negotiations and main expected outcomes?

Main Takeaways:

Humans and biodiversity are interconnected

Biodiversity loss undermines not only the right to a healthy environment but a broad range of human rights. Biodiversity action shall respect, protect and consider rights-based approaches

- Healthy biodiversity and ecosystems are essential for human well-being and the fulfilment of a wide range of human rights for present and future generations.
- The interdependence, indivisibility, and universality of human rights shall be recognised.
- Human rights, and the human rights-based approach is included in Section C of the GBF, which acknowledges the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
- Historically, human rights and conservation efforts have been separated. Today, it is well recognised that human rights and the protection of the environment are inextricably intertwined. There is a need to reconnect people and nature as a sustainable whole, to achieve better outcomes in addressing the triple planetary crisis.

- Biodiversity conservation and biodiversity loss can impact a wide range of human rights such as rights to life, health, food, water, cultural rights, and Indigenous people's rights.

All people are rights-holders as all people can be affected in the context of biodiversity loss.

- There is a disproportionate impact on the people most dependent on biodiversity, many of whom are already in vulnerable situations. For example, Indigenous people that depend on natural resources for their existence, food, shelter, medicine, culture and identity. Often, the loss of Indigenous Peoples' forests and lands has been driven by systems of inequality, injustice and disregard for human rights.
- The groups that are essential for biodiversity conservation are those most affected by impacts of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.

Key stakeholders such as Indigenous communities, women and youth organizations play a crucial role in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

- Indigenous communities contribute to the protection of ecosystems by implementing actions such as sustainable agriculture, traditional and ancestral practices.
- The youth and indigenous movements have centred their fight for the environment around justice and equity. In this context, such groups shall be seen as partners in support of biodiversity action, ensuring their full engagement in planning and decision-making processes.

Challenges, opportunities and best practices

- **Promoting a whole of society approach:** Collaboration and cooperation is required across all society to achieve biodiversity goals. Duty bearers for the human right to a healthy environment include Member States and the private sector, who have a responsibility to act.
- **Dismantling silos:** Multidisciplinary approaches are required to breakdown silos within and between stakeholders, for example in the fields of environment and finance. Breaking down silos will reduce the risk of creating blind spots such as abuses against Indigenous Peoples. The Common Approach and the GBF offer opportunities to address this challenge.
- **Ensuring inclusive decision making:** Environmental decision-making should prioritise inclusivity. All on-the-ground actors should be fully engaged in the planning and decision-making processes to ensure effective and equitable plans, policies and actions. Communities should be empowered to take leadership and self-determine the actions best suited for their land. The protection of environmental defenders shall be increased.
- **Recognising land ownership, as well rights over knowledge, resources and territories:** Recognising full land ownership can pose challenges to implementing global and national biodiversity-related frameworks. In some instances, establishing protected areas may displace Indigenous Peoples and erode their cultural heritage. Indigenous Peoples' rights to their lands, resources, territories, and traditional knowledge shall be acknowledged.
- **Resource mobilization:** While significant resources are allocated to subsidising environmentally destructive activities, there is a lack of resources to properly address biodiversity loss at all levels, as well as resources to facilitate appropriate inclusion and participatory processes (e.g.: NBSAPs process)
- **Framework dissemination:** Global and national frameworks are not effectively communicated to the grassroots level where implementation is needed, such as the [National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans](#) (NBSAPs).

- **Global engagement:** Utilise platforms which provide clear opportunities for Indigenous communities and other stakeholders to provide inputs to global activities, such as the [International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity](#) (IIFB). Coalitions of Indigenous groups are valuable for enabling participation in national and global initiatives, including the NBSAPs process.
- **Knowledge sharing:** Indigenous People play a crucial role as guardians of well-conserved territories, there is a need to document, learn, leverage and mainstream their knowledge. In addition, there is a need to better integrate scientific and traditional knowledge around biodiversity conservation by research organizations.
- **Scale-up best practices, such as community-led biodiversity monitoring:** Establishing community-driven biodiversity monitoring systems can showcase a community's stewardship and effectiveness in conserving biodiversity, as data can assist communities to gain recognition of their role supporting sustainable use of biodiversity. There are increasing opportunities for Indigenous communities to collaborate with research and academic institutions, for example the [University of Oxford](#), who are incorporating traditional knowledge of conservation with scientific knowledge.

Best practices and guidance:

General guidance and materials

- The EMG [Issue Management Group on Human Rights and Environment](#), in collaboration with OHCHR, have developed “[Guidance on integrating human rights in National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans \(NBSAPs\)](#)”.
- “[From Agreements to Actions - A guide to applying a human rights-based approach to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)” produced by Forrest Peoples Programme.
- “[Guidance note for United Nations Resident Coordinators & Country Teams: Supporting governments to better respect, promote and protect environmental human rights defenders](#)” UN publication.
- OHCHR is developing, with partners such as the Secretariat of the CBD, guidance on human rights-based approaches and the specific targets of the GBF.
- OHCHR is working with other organisations, including the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN), to identify promising practises where a human rights-based approach is being effectively applied.
- While referencing human rights-based approaches can be seen as a new area of the CBD work, different organizations are supporting the development of specific guidance and materials on the matter

Scale-up actions and best practices at the regional, national and local level

Alongside general guidance, panellists underscored key actions implemented at the regional, national, and local level, such as:

- Regional level: analyse and map contributions of youth to GBF targets (e.g.: Youth Initiative by GYBN Southeast Asia).
- National level: strengthen collective action by Indigenous Peoples’ organizations and their engagement in NBSAP process (e.g.: Philippines).

- Local level: support self-determined community-based biodiversity actions, develop community-led biodiversity monitoring, implement community mapping actions, development of participatory spatial planning initiatives, recognize traditional knowledge practices and innovations in biodiversity conservation, among others.

CBD COP16: human rights considerations and expected outcomes

- Increase the integration of rights in guidance for implementing global frameworks.
- Promote the continued integration of human rights within NBSAPs. Investigate how to conduct consultation at sub-national level within the NBSAPs process.
- Develop a clear plan on how to document and integrate Indigenous and traditional territories on national plans and strategies.
- Ensure agile resource mobilisation to guarantee resources are reaching on-the-ground actors, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women groups and youth.
- Ensure that financial mechanisms consider strong social and environmental safeguards.
- Support the documentation of traditional practices that are effective in maintaining and restoring biodiversity.
- Recognise the human-rights gap in implementation and monitoring.

CBD COP16 annotated provisional agenda and other key documents area available [HERE](#).

Conclusions:

Human rights and biodiversity are inextricably intertwined. Collaborative, well-coordinated and consistent efforts are required by all of society, including Indigenous Peoples and youth, to implement holistic human-rights-based approaches to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity. The Common Approach is well placed to coordinate the UN system to integrate human-rights based approaches, support the implementation of the GBF, breakdown silos and encourage multisectoral action to the conservation of biodiversity.

Looking ahead, the upcoming CBD COP16 represents a pivotal moment to advance these discussions and solidify commitments to human rights within global and national frameworks.

Credits:

The EMG, OHCHR and UNDP would like to thank the speakers and organizations for their valuable time and contributions to the webinar.

Moderator: **Mr. Terence Hay-Edie**, Local Action, Indigenous Peoples and Nature Global Programme Manager, [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP)

Keynote Speaker: **Ms. Astrid Puentes Riaño**, Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR)

Panellists:

- **Mr. Benjamin Schachter**, Coordinator, Environment and Climate Change Team, [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR)
- **Ms. Phoebe Ndiema**, Project Officer, [Chepkitale Indigenous People Development Project](#) (CIPDP)
- **Ms. Josefa Tauli**, Policy Co-coordinator, [Global Youth Biodiversity Network](#) (GYBN)

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