

Agreement reached at UN biodiversity convention

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Sujata Gupta, reporter

In the wee hours of Friday morning, delegates attending the United Nations [Convention on Biodiversity](#) in Nagoya, Japan, reached an ambitious agreement to save the world's ecosystems.

Representing almost 200 countries, the delegates [pledged](#) to protect 17 per cent of land and inland waters and 10 per cent of the oceans by 2020. Today, 13 per cent of land is protected but only 1 per cent of the oceans.

Those conservation measures fell under a [20-point plan](#) calling for, among other things, habitat conservation, reductions in pollution and an end to "perverse subsidies" for environmentally destructive practices.

Until Friday morning, though, one point in particular threatened to derail the entire plan: the equitable sharing of biological resources between rich and poor countries.

The issue, known as Access and Benefits sharing ([factsheet pdf](#)), centres around how poor countries – which largely harbour the most biodiversity – can benefit from rich countries' use of those resources to develop everything from pharmaceutical drugs to cosmetics.

Delegates have now adopted the [Nagoya Protocol](#), a document that lays out how to prevent resource exploitation in poor countries, or bio-piracy. The protocol, which goes into effect in 2020, will likely compensate poor countries for those resources through a special fund.

Bio-piracy has been a contentious issue since the Convention on Biological Diversity was created in 1992. For that reason, environmental leaders have applauded the results. "We've seen history in the making here in Nagoya with a landmark agreement now in place that defines the future for life on Earth," Julia Marton-Lefèvre, director general of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, said in a statement.

Others, however, remain more cautious. The UN conventions on climate change and biodiversity both emerged from the watershed Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 18 years ago, but only the former convention has had any real clout. Indeed, at the start of the previous biodiversity convention in 2002, delegates established a simple goal: reduce the rate of species extinction by 2020. That goal is [nowhere near being met](#).

Even now, the conservation measures remain "voluntary" and the US is not a signatory. And though Japan [pledged \\$2 billion](#) to the effort, most countries refused to make monetary commitments. "We were disappointed that most rich countries came to Nagoya with empty pockets – unable or unwilling to provide the resources that will make it possible for the developing world to implement their ambitious targets," said Jim Leape, director general of [WWF International](#).

Will these new measures have teeth? Time will tell. Delegates have two years to come [back to the table](#) with a funding plan.

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Biodiversity talks end with call for 'urgent' action

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya



Japan are likely to emerge with credit after ensuring tough negotiations were not derailed. The UN biodiversity meeting in Japan has agreed a 10-year plan aimed at preserving nature.

Targets for protecting areas of land and sea were weaker than conservation scientists wanted, as was the overall target for slowing biodiversity loss.

Most developing countries were pleased with measures aimed at ensuring they get a share in profits from products made from plants and other organisms.

Nations have two years to draw up plans for funding the plan.

"This agreement reaffirms the fundamental need to conserve nature as the very foundation of our economy and our society," said Jim Leape, director-general of WWF International.

"Governments have sent a strong message that protecting the health of the planet has a place in international politics, and countries are ready to join forces to save life on Earth."

The meeting settled on targets of protecting 17% of the world's land surface, and 10% of the oceans, by 2020.

These are regarded as too small by many conservation scientists, who point out that about 13% of the land is already protected - while the existing target for oceans is already 10%.

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Nature talks heading for success, delegates say

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya



Delicate coral reefs, rich in different types of marine life, are among the areas most under threat UN talks on a new deal aimed at protecting nature and equitably sharing in its benefits seem to be on course for a positive conclusion.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meeting saw intense diplomacy in its final hours as delegates tried to iron out remaining differences.

The Japanese hosts in particular have been desperate for a successful end.

Western nations appear to have given ground on the thorniest issue - sharing of natural genetic resources.

It is not yet clear how - or even if - resolution has been reached on other outstanding points, such as how much of the Earth's lands and oceans should be placed under protection.

China has been criticised by environment campaigners for insisting that the agreement in Nagoya should call for protection of no more than 6% of the marine environment - and none at all outside coastal waters.

The current global target is 10%.

The other outstanding issue has been money, with Brazil and its allies arguing that by 2020, \$200bn (£125bn) per year should be made available for biodiversity conservation.

BBC News understands that a deal has been reached under which countries will agree to have such a plan in place by 2012, when Brazil will host the second Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

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Nature deal 'on knife-edge' as nations clash on money

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya



Protesters are reminding delegates of the need

to protect plants

Talks have run through the night at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity meeting as delegates tried to salvage talks on protecting nature.

Major differences remained on targets for protected areas, equitable access to genetic resources, and funding.

France followed Japan in pledging funds for conservation; but the sums were well short of what poorer nations want.

Brazil is arguing that by 2020, \$200bn per year should be made available for biodiversity conservation.

By comparison, the new pledge by French Ecology Minister Chantal Joannou amounted to \$4bn over a decade.

China was criticised by environment campaigners for insisting that the agreement here should call for protection of no more than 6% of the marine environment - and none at all outside coastal waters.

The current global target is 10%.

Differences on the draft agreement on ensuring developing countries receive recompense when products are made from genetic material of organisms from their territory - known as Access and Benefit-sharing (ABS) - came down to seven crucial words, according to Hugo Schally, EU lead negotiator on the issue.

"These words are not just words, they mean differences in economic circumstances," he told BBC News.

"What material does this protocol actually apply to? That means in terms of research-based industry, in terms of... economic exchanges - they're literally worth billions of dollars or euros or pounds, or whatever you want."

'Only so far'

In essence, developing nations have been demanding that the agreement cover anything made from this genetic material - technically known as "derivatives" - whereas western nations, where the world's pharmaceutical giants are principally based, want a far smaller scope.

At one point during the negotiations, agreement was reached on this issue in a small group including Brazil, the EU, Namibia and Norway.

But other developing countries did not accept it.

"[In the] critical part of the changes, that would allow derivatives to be included, they draw the line there and said 'no' - so what can we do, we can only go so far," said Gurdial Singh, chief negotiator for Malaysia.

Guide to biodiversity



Biodiversity is the term used to describe the incredible variety of life that has evolved on our planet over billions of years. So far 1.75m present day species have been recorded, but there maybe as many as 13m in total.

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"We cannot go all the way until we get no real benefit. We cannot have an empty protocol. If I take an empty bottle of beer and I go home, I cannot drink anything."

Negotiations on the draft ABS treaty - which have been going on for nearly two weeks here, as well as in a number of preparatory meetings - were suspended by Japan, as conference chair.

A "chair's text" is being considered as an alternative.

See-saw mood

Failure here would be a major blow for Japan, which has invested a lot of political capital in securing a protocol with the name "Nagoya" on it.

Other delegations - most of which currently include environment ministers - seem equally keen to leave with something.

"Clearly things are on a knife-edge," said James Leape, director-general of WWF International.

"It comes down now to whether ministers are ready to find a political deal.

"It does seem, though, that many ministers are aware there's a need to make the most of this opportunity to go forward."

The mood has veered between optimism and despair; and this appears likely to continue up to, if not beyond, the scheduled close at 1800 local time (0900GMT) on Friday.

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Nagoya biodiversity talks stall on cash and targets

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya



The Nagoya conference aimed to secure a future for the endangered natural world. Conservation groups have expressed concern that a major UN conference on nature protection is stalling, with some governments accused of holding the process hostage to their own interest.

Their warning comes halfway through the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meeting in Nagoya, Japan.

During negotiations some countries have proposed weaker rather than stronger targets for protection, they say.

Some developing countries say the West is not meeting their concerns.

"The most optimistic assessment is that we have not gone far towards a deal," said Muhtari Aminu-Kano, senior policy advisor with BirdLife International.

"The main reason is that there are several delegations that are not showing the political will needed to break the deadlock here," he told BBC News.

"It's your usual story - it's people putting their national interests far above the importance of biodiversity."

Having failed to meet the target set in 2002 of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, the draft agreement before this meeting contains a set of 20 targets.

But there is fundamental division between those demanding tough pledges, such as ending biodiversity loss by 2020, and those who argue this is not possible.

Another draft clause calls for a 100-fold increase in international financing on biodiversity, which would be raised principally in industrialised nations and primarily spent in the developing world.

'Shocking and pitiful'

While the main priority for Western nations is to secure tough targets for protecting plants and animals and the habitat they need, developing countries are in general more concerned about international finance, and about an agreement on fair and equitable access to the Earth's natural genetic resources.



Negotiations have been under way for a week, but progress has been slow

Such an agreement - known as access and benefit sharing (ABS) - was prescribed when the CBD came into existence 18 years ago, but successive attempts to negotiate it have failed.

Developing nations - where most of the planet's unexplored genetic resources lie - want an equitable share in the profits generated when Western companies develop drugs or other products from plants or anything else that came from their territory.

Some - notably within the African bloc - are insisting that such an agreement should be retrospective, which would imply Western companies would have to pay compensation for products already on the market.

"Some countries are holding everything hostage to resolving ABS," said Sue Lieberman, director of international policy with the Pew Environment Group.

"I'm not saying that's not important, but if you look at the status of the marine environment, it's shocking and pitiful to think there might be no progress here at all.

"We're particularly disappointed in Brazil."

Some governments, she said, were arguing that the CBD should not discuss conservation on the high seas, while others were proposing that only 1% of the world's coastal waters should be protected.

The existing global target for marine protection is 10%.

Echoes of Copenhagen?

Although Brazil has a special place in the history of environmental protection, having hosted the 1992 Earth Summit, Dr Lieberman has not been alone here in pointing to its substantial presence and robust negotiating style as being an impediment to progress.

"It's hard to see how we can enhance and stimulate more sustainable use of biodiversity if the rules on benefit sharing are not agreed"

Braulio Dias Brazilian delegation

Braulio Dias, secretary of biodiversity and forests with the Brazilian environment ministry and a key member of its national delegation, said a lack of movement on its concerns could mean blocking tougher protection.

"We see this as a big negotiating package; we can't commit ourselves to ambitious targets if we don't see an equivalent commitment to the means to meet those targets, and on the other agreement to finalise negotiations on the ABS protocol," he told BBC News.

"It's hard to see how we can enhance and stimulate more sustainable use of biodiversity if the rules on benefit sharing are not agreed."

The ABS negotiations, like some of the other components here, have seen through long and arduous sessions - and will continue over the weekend, given the lack of agreement.

But Ahmed Djoghla, CBD executive secretary, said things were moving.

"There has been tremendous progress on ABS, with more than 20 articles adopted - and after one week of negotiations, this is tremendous progress," he told reporters.

"I've seen references to [the climate summit in] Copenhagen. There's no comparison with Copenhagen at all - the spirit is there, the spirit of conciliation, the spirit to continue discussing."

Most countries are sending environment ministers to the final three days of the meeting, and some observers are hopeful about the extra momentum that may create.

There is also hope that the arguments made here about the economic value of biodiversity, contained in the final report from the UN-backed Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (Teeb) project, will persuade governments that meeting the targets on the agenda here would create wealth rather than damaging it.

"It's ironic that at this meeting there's been the release of the Teeb report, which has wonderful information about the economic benefits from conservation of the natural systems and the risks of losing those benefits to human well-being as a whole," noted Andrew Rosenberg, senior

vice-president for science and knowledge with Conservation International.

"In a meeting where that's coming up, to make the argument that 'we can't afford it' is really depressing."

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'Ten years' to solve nature crisis, UN meeting hears

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya, Japan



Delegates will consider adopting new set of targets for 2020 that aim to tackle biodiversity loss. The UN biodiversity convention meeting has opened with warnings that the ongoing loss of nature is hurting human societies as well as the natural world.

The two-week gathering aims to set new targets for conserving life on Earth.

Japan's Environment Minister Ryo Matsumoto said biodiversity loss would become irreversible unless curbed soon.

Much hope is being pinned on economic analyses showing the loss of species and ecosystems is costing the global economy trillions of dollars each year.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, executive secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), described the meeting in Nagoya, Japan, as a "defining moment" in the history of mankind.

"[Buddhist scholar] Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki said 'the problem of nature is the problem of

human life'. Today, unfortunately, human life is a problem for nature," he told delegates in his opening speech.

Referring to the target set at the UN World Summit in 2002, he said:

"Let's have the courage to look in the eyes of our children and admit that we have failed, individually and collectively, to fulfil the Johannesburg promise made by 110 heads of state to substantially reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010.

"Let us look in the eyes of our children and admit that we continue to lose biodiversity at an unprecedented rate, thus mortgaging their future."

Earlier this year, the UN published a major assessment - the [Global Biodiversity Outlook](#) - indicating that virtually all trends spanning the state of the natural world were heading downwards, despite conservation successes in some regions.

"We are about to reach a threshold beyond which biodiversity loss will become irreversible"

End Quote Ryo Matsumoto Japanese environment minister

It showed that loss and degradation of forests, coral reefs, rivers and other elements of the natural world was having an impact on living standards in some parts of the world - an obvious example being the extent to which loss of coral affects fish stocks.

In his opening speech, Mr Matsumoto suggested impacts could be much broader in future.

"All life on Earth exists thanks to the benefits from biodiversity in the forms of fertile soil, clear water and clean air," he said.

"We are now close to a 'tipping point' - that is, we are about to reach a threshold beyond which biodiversity loss will become irreversible, and may cross that threshold in the next 10 years if we do not make proactive efforts for conserving biodiversity."

Climate clouds

In recent years, climate change has dominated the agenda of environmental politics.

And Achim Steiner, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, suggested there is a lack of understanding at political levels of why tackling biodiversity is just important.



2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity

"This is the only planet in this Universe that is known to have this kind of life," he said.

"This fact alone should give us food for thought, But more importantly, we are destroying the

very foundations that sustain life on this planet; and yet when we meet in these intergovernmental fora, society somehow struggles to understand and appreciate what it is what we're trying to do here, and why it matters."

On the table in Nagoya is a comprehensive draft agreement that would tackle the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, as well as setting new targets for conservation.

At the heart of the idea is the belief that if governments understand the financial costs of losing nature, they can adopt new economic models that reward conservation and penalise degradation.

A UN-sponsored project called The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) calculates the cost at \$2-5 trillion per year, predominantly in poorer parts of the world.

Jane Smart, head of the species programme at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), said that although the problem was huge and complex, there were some encouraging signs.

"The good news is that when we carry out conservation, it does work; we increasingly know what to do, and when we do it, it works really really well," she told BBC News.

"So we need to do a lot more conservation work, such as protected areas - particularly in the sea, in the marine realm - we need to save vast areas of ocean to protect fish stocks - not to stop eating fish, but to eat fish in a sustainable way."

Triple win

Governments first agreed back in 1992, at the [Rio Earth Summit](#) that the ongoing loss of biodiversity needed attention. The CBD was born there, alongside the UN climate convention.

It aims to preserve the diversity of life on Earth, facilitate the sustainable use of plants and animals, and allow fair and equitable exploitation of natural genetic resources.

The UN hopes that a protocol on the final element - known as access and benefit sharing (ABS) - can be secured here, 18 years after it was agreed in principle.

However, the bitter politicking that has soured the atmosphere in a number of UN environment processes - most notably at the Copenhagen climate summit - looms over the Nagoya meeting.

Some developing nations are insisting that the ABS protocol be signed off before they will agree to the establishment of an international scientific panel to assess biodiversity issues.

The Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is due to be signed off during the current UN General Assembly session in New York.

Many experts - and Western governments - believe it is necessary if scientific evidence on the importance of biodiversity loss is to be transmitted effectively to policymakers.

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UN Japan forum 'key time' to solve global

nature crisis

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya, Japan



Delegates will consider

adopting new set of targets for 2020 that aim to tackle biodiversity loss

A major UN meeting aimed at finding solutions to the world's nature crisis is set to open in Japan.

Species are going extinct at 100-1,000 times the natural rate, key habitat is disappearing, and ever more water and land is being used to support people.

Some economists say this is already damaging human prosperity.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meeting will discuss why governments failed to curb these trends by 2010, as they pledged in 2002.

Delegates will also try to finalise a long-delayed agreement on exploiting natural resources in a fair and equitable way.

Before the start of the two-week meeting, Achim Steiner, executive director of the UN Environment Programme (Unep), said it was a crucial point in attempts to stem the loss of biodiversity.

"There are moments when issues mature in terms of public perception and political attention, and become key times for action," he told the BBC.

"And this is a moment when the recognition that biodiversity and ecosystems need preservation urgently is high, when people are concerned by it, and are demanding more action from the

global community."

A UN-sponsored team of economists has calculated that loss of biodiversity and ecosystems is costing the human race \$2 trillion to \$5 trillion a year.

Going downhill

Governments first agreed back in 1992, at the [Rio Earth Summit](#), that the ongoing loss of biodiversity needed attention. The CBD was born there, alongside the UN climate convention.

"[The Access and Benefit Sharing] protocol will be a future investment for the human family as a whole"

End Quote Ahmed Djoghlaif Executive secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

It aims to preserve the diversity of life on Earth, facilitate the sustainable use of plants and animals, and allow fair and equitable exploitation of natural genetic resources.

The convention acquired teeth 10 years later, at the [Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development](#).

Noting that nature's diversity is "the foundation upon which human civilisation has been built", governments pledged "to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth".

Since 2002, most measures of the health of the natural world have gone downhill rather than up.

The majority of species studied over the period are moving closer to extinction rather than further away, while important natural habitat such as forests, wetlands, rivers and coral reefs continue to shrink or be disturbed.

"Since the 1960s we've doubled our food consumption, our water consumption," said Jonathan Baillie, director of conservation programmes at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).



2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity

"The world's population has doubled, and the economy has grown sixfold; in 2050 there will be 9.2 billion people on the planet."

There are signs of change in some regions. The forest area is growing in Europe and China, while deforestation is slowing in Brazil.

About 12% of the world's land is now under some form of protection.

But in other areas, countries - particularly in the tropics - have made little progress towards the 2010 target.

Government delegates here will consider adopting a new set of targets for 2020 that aim to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss - the expansion of agriculture, pollution, climate change, the spread of alien invasive species, the increasing use of natural resources - which conservationists believe might be a more effective option than setting targets on nature itself.

Difficult birth?

Delegates will also be negotiating a draft agreement on exploiting the genetic resources of the natural world fairly and sustainably.

The protocol, named Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), aims to prevent "biopiracy" while enabling societies with abundant plant and animal life to profit from any drugs or other products that might be made from them.



Deforestation is slowing in Brazil

Agreement on ABS has been pursued since 1992 without producing a result. But after four years of preparatory talks, officials believe the remaining differences can be hammered out here.

"We are confident that on 29 October, we'll celebrate the birth of another baby, with the support of all parties, and we'll have a protocol on access and benefit sharing," said Ahmed Djoghlaif, CBD executive secretary.

"This protocol will be a future investment for the human family as a whole."

However, the bitter politicking that has soured the atmosphere in a number of UN environment processes - most notably at the Copenhagen climate summit - threatens some aspects of the Nagoya meeting.

Some developing nations are insisting that the ABS protocol be signed off here before they will agree to the establishment of an international scientific panel to assess biodiversity issues.

The Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is due to be signed off during the current UN General Assembly session in New York.

Many experts believe it is necessary if scientific evidence on the importance of biodiversity loss is to be transmitted effectively to governments, in the same way that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assembles evidence that governments can use when deciding

whether to tackle climate change.

Big promises ahead of biodiversity conference

15:00 15 October 2010

[Environment](#)

[Life](#)

Michael Marshall, environment reporter

The promises are coming thick and fast in the run-up to the [United Nations biodiversity conference](#) in Japan later this month, as countries fall over each other to commit to protect the world's endangered species.

The US announced today that it was writing off \$30 million of Costa Rica's debt. In exchange, Costa Rica will create a host of new [protected areas](#), increase the management of its existing ones and create a series of protected corridors between them so that species can move freely.

This follows a 2007 agreement that saw \$26 million of [Costa Rica's debt wiped out](#) in exchange for protecting 1000 hectares of tropical forest. Debt-for-nature swaps like this were [pioneered in 1987 by the US and Bolivia](#). Despite some [early failures](#), [more recent deals have worked well](#).

\$17 million has already been pledged to Costa Rica by private donors. A spokesperson for the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD), the international treaty that administers UN biodiversity programmes, was "hopeful" that a further \$3 million would be committed during the conference, meaning Costa Rica could receive \$50 million in new donations.

More such announcements are [expected over the next few weeks](#).

But just to put a damper on the good news, the latest word from conservation scientists is that the proposed targets being discussed at the UN conference - you've guessed it - won't go far enough.

Yesterday the non-profit organisation Conservation International issued a [technical brief](#) which argues that we need to protect 25 per cent of Earth's land area and 15 per cent of its oceans.

By contrast, the [latest draft text for the conference](#) says:

Target 11: By 2020, at least [15%][20%] of terrestrial, inland-water and [X%] of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved. (square brackets indicate contentious numbers that are in negotiation)

So the target for protected areas on land might be too low, and they haven't managed to agree a target for marine areas.

Conservation International says its proposed targets would both preserve the majority of Earth's range of species and ensure that 90 per cent of the planet's biomass was retained - as opposed to being destroyed and releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Jo Mulongoy, a spokesperson for the CBD, had this to say:

Constraints on land use may make it difficult to exceed far beyond 20 per cent for terrestrial areas globally. For marine areas 30 to 40 per cent is regarded on scientific grounds as a good long-term target. The targets for 2020 should be steps towards those. Against this background, 15 to 20 per cent by 2020 may be seen as reasonable for both terrestrial and marine. In a sense, making progress on marine is more urgent, but perhaps also more challenging, given the low existing levels.

All in all, lots of good news has come out and there's more to come. But we're not out of the woods yet.