

How does the Convention work?

The Convention encourages countries to act in the following areas:

- Conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the protection and restoration of populations of species in and outside their natural habitats;
- Sustainable use of biological resources;
- Identification and monitoring of biodiversity;
- Exchange of information relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity;
- Technical and scientific cooperation for meeting the objectives of the Convention;
- Incentives for economically and socially sound conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity;
- Research and training on the identification, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- Public education to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity;
- Impact assessments of proposed projects that are likely to have significant adverse effects on biodiversity;
- Access to genetic resources and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of their utilization;
- Transfer of technology among parties to the Convention to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;
- Handling of biotechnology to ensure the safe transfer, handling and use of genetically modified organisms;
- National reporting to the Conference of the Parties on the effectiveness of measures taken to implement the Convention.

What does the Secretariat do?

The Convention on Biological Diversity also created a Secretariat to assist the Conference of Parties in its work and to perform day-to-day administrative functions. At its first meeting, the Conference designated the United Nations Environment Programme to carry out the functions of the Secretariat of the Convention while ensuring its autonomy to discharge the functions given to it under the Convention.

Located in Montreal, the Secretariat's main function is to arrange and service meetings of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies, including the preparation of expert and other documents. It also assists in the implementation of the programme of work and coordinates activities among Parties and other international organizations. As an important part of its work, the Secretariat forges ties with other environmental Conventions and institutions to exchange information and develop collaborative programmes. To this end, memoranda of cooperation and/or understanding have been concluded with the following institutions, among others:

- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
- Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD)
- Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention)
- Permanent Commission of the South Pacific (CPPS)
- Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)
- World Bank
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- Council of Europe
- IUCN-The World Conservation Union
- Secretariat of DIVERSITAS
- World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC)
- Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
- International Ocean Institute (IOI)
- Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD)
- ICI Environment Inc.
- Genetic Resources Communication Systems Inc.

Want to know more?

If so, write, phone, fax or e-mail the Secretariat. Or visit the Internet website of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

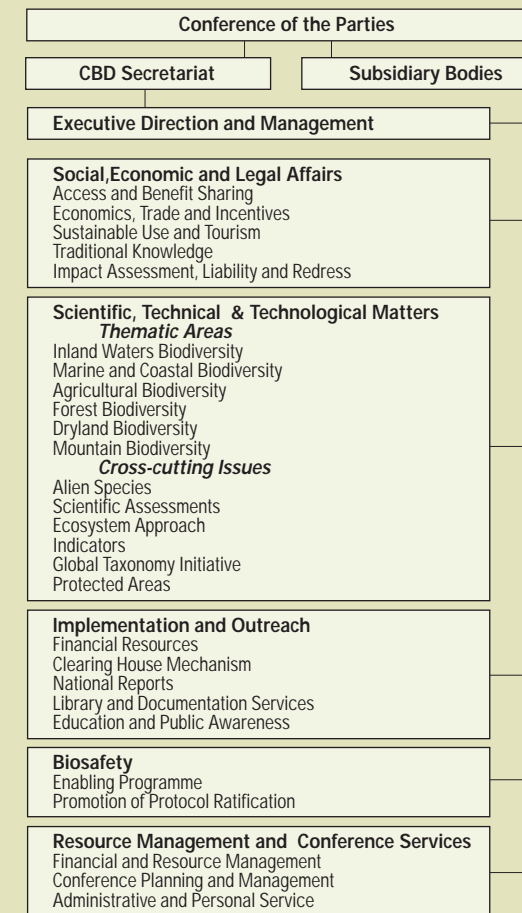
Here you will find a wealth of information about biodiversity and related topics. The website is maintained by the Secretariat's Clearing-house Unit, which disseminates and facilitates the exchange of information by various communications media.

The Secretariat also produces newsletters, brochures and press releases.

Join us and become part of the global campaign to conserve biodiversity. We will provide you with:

- Convention newsletters and reports
- technical background documents
- answers to scientific and technical questions
- details on how to contact your national focal point

SCBD Organization Chart



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Helping our planet through information

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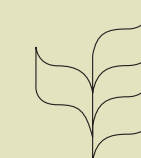
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Sustaining life on Earth

Convention on Biological Diversity



CBD



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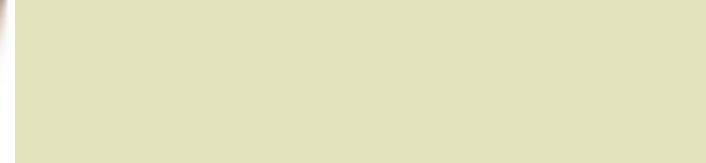


Why does biological diversity matter?

The world's biological diversity is a vast and undervalued resource. It comprises every form of life, from the smallest microbe to the largest animal, and the ecosystems of which they are part. It provides humanity with an abundance of goods and services, from food, energy and materials to the genes that protect our crops and heal our diseases. It also underpins the natural processes that help control soil erosion, purify water and air and recycle carbon and nutrients.

Scientists believe that there are at least 15 million species alive today. Some 100 of them are being lost every day. Most of them vanish unknown – for only about 1.75 million have yet been identified. This loss will hurt mankind – and not only because a world without polar bears, tigers and rhinos would be a poorer place. As the world's biological heritage erodes, the potential for new and useful products diminishes. Only a tiny proportion of plant and animal species have been tested for their usefulness to humanity. Of an estimated 265,000 species of plants, only about 5, 000 have ever been cultivated for food. And even the most insignificant species can play a crucial role in the ecosystem to which it belongs. We simply do not know what we are throwing away.

The planet's natural wealth lies not just in the species, but in the genetic coding that gives each living thing the traits that enable it to survive and evolve. Those genes can be used to develop medicines and improve varieties of food. As half of all medicines derive from plants, there could be countless cures still to be discovered. The world's food supply rests on a tiny pinhead of genetic stock. Breeding for high yields, scientists have narrowed down the genetic base of crops, often sacrificing pest and disease resistance in the process. Genes from hardier wild relatives can give this back, but only if we maintain a diverse genetic bank to draw upon.



Biological diversity is therefore a priceless global asset – for all of us and future generations. Nevertheless, the threat to the gene pool, species and ecosystems has never been so great as it is today. As a result of human activities, ecosystems are being degraded and species are becoming extinct or their numbers reduced to non-viable levels at an alarming rate. This loss of biodiversity undermines the very basis of life on Earth and represents nothing short of a tragedy of global proportions.



The aims of the Convention are:

- the conservation of biological diversity;
- the sustainable use of biological resources;
- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising for the use of genetic resources.



Why have a convention on biological diversity?

It has been known for decades that human activities can affect the distribution and abundance of species, ecological systems and genetic variability and thus undermine the basis of life everywhere. The 1970s and 1980s saw a large number of initiatives to stem the loss of species and the destruction of habitats and ecosystems. A consensus gradually emerged, however, that the Earth's priceless reservoir of biological diversity could be saved only through international cooperation and funding, based on the introduction of a suitable international legally binding instrument. It became clear that this new instrument should not absorb existing conservation Conventions, but should build new mechanisms and action plans to plug the gaps between them and to embrace all areas of conservation. It should provide a framework for the gene-rich countries of the South and the technology-rich countries of the North to work together to save the common heritage of humanity.

The result was the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was opened for signing at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Although the preceding years had seen a large number of treaties on the conservation of particular species or types of ecosystem, this Convention is the first global agreement to cover all aspects of biological diversity: genetic resources, species and ecosystems. It is also the first to recognize that the conservation of biological diversity is "a common concern of humankind" and an integral part of sustainable development. To achieve its objectives, the Convention promotes renewed cooperation among countries, in accordance with the spirit of the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development. In particular, it fosters scientific and technical cooperation, the equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources, and the widespread use of environmentally sound technologies.



What is the Convention?

The Convention on Biological Diversity is a far-reaching agreement that has now been ratified by 176 countries and the European Community. This nearly universal participation of governments, its comprehensive mandate and the possibilities of access it provides to financial, scientific and technological resources, have enabled the Convention to begin transforming the international community's approach to biodiversity.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the Convention's decision-making body. It meets regularly to review progress in the implementation of the Convention and to decide on work programmes to achieve its objectives. The Conference also considers reports on measures taken by the Parties to the Convention and is the forum for the adoption of amendments or protocols to the Convention. To date, the COP has adopted programmes of work in four areas: forest ecosystems, marine and coastal areas, agricultural biodiversity and inland water biodiversity.

The Conference is supported by a subsidiary body that provides scientific, technical and technological advice (SBSTTA). All Parties to the Convention are free to participate in this multidisciplinary body, which is made up of government representatives with expertise in relevant fields. It reports regularly to the Conference of the Parties on all aspects of its work and advises it on the course of action that needs to be taken to address various issues relating to the practical implementation of the Convention. SBSTTA has encouraged members of the scientific community and other relevant sectors to contribute to its work.

Other subsidiary bodies established by the Conference of the Parties deal with access to genetic resources and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their use, and with traditional knowledge and biological diversity. Various other expert groups have been convened on an ad hoc basis to provide advice on specific topics such as indicators of biological diversity, agricultural biodiversity, drylands biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

The Convention establishes a Financial Mechanism to provide funds to help developing countries achieve its objectives. This Mechanism is operated by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under the guidance of the Conference of the Parties. To date, GEF has disbursed some \$960 million on biodiversity-related projects.

Also set up under the Convention is a clearing-house mechanism to promote technical and scientific cooperation. The clearing-house mechanism depends on a decentralized process to gather and organize the information that its users need. Driving this process are networks of focal points and partners. These are national and international centres and institutions with expertise that coordinate initiatives among themselves on topics of common interest. Each focal point also contributes to the clearing-house information system, which is accessible to all users. In this way, focal points encourage networking among all levels of government, expert groups, non-governmental organizations and private enterprise.

With the adoption by the Conference of the Parties of a supplementary agreement to the Convention known as the "Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety", on 29 January 2000, the Convention process has been given a new dimension. The Protocol seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. It establishes a procedure for ensuring that countries are provided with the information necessary to make informed decisions before agreeing to the import of such organisms into their territory. It has been hailed as a breakthrough in that it enshrines the "precautionary approach" as a principle of international environmental law and puts environment on a par with trade-related issues in the international arena. The Conference of the Parties, the financial mechanism and the Secretariat set up under the Convention will each perform the same functions under the Protocol as they do for the Convention. The Protocol also establishes a Biosafety Clearing-House to facilitate the exchange of information on living modified organisms and to assist countries in the implementation of the Protocol.