

How can we increase capacity for species conservation in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework?

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In 2010, to conserve biodiversity and enhance its benefits for people, the 196 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Strategic Plan 2011–2020 for Biodiversity. The Plan's vision was 'Living in harmony with nature', where 'By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.' The plan consisted of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, organized under five strategic goals: (A) addressing underlying drivers of biodiversity loss, (B) reducing pressures, (C) improving the status of biodiversity, (D) enhancing the benefits of biodiversity, and (E) enhancing implementation to achieve all of this (CBD, 2010).

By late 2020, however, none of the targets were achieved fully (Secretariat of the CBD, 2020). Of the 60 elements of the 20 targets, seven were considered achieved and progress made towards 38. The overall picture, however, was of biodiversity declining at an unprecedented rate. Negotiations are now well underway for the successor to that Strategic Plan, and it is hoped they will be concluded at CoP15 in Kunming, China, in late 2022 when a new Global Biodiversity Framework will be agreed. The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) established a Post-2020 Biodiversity Targets Task Force in 2017 to facilitate the provision of scientific information for this process.

It is easy to be cynical about achieving any new global biodiversity targets. Is that the best approach, however, and one that serves our natural world and future generations? We know that the pressures on biodiversity are increasing, yet there is evidence that without conservation action the situation would be even worse. For example, without conservation action bird and mammal extinctions since 1993, when the CBD came into effect, would have been 3–4 times greater (Bolam et al., 2020). The best approach is to work together for a more efficient and effective implementation of whatever is finally agreed in the Global Biodiversity Framework.

For the conservation of species, the need for a stronger response is clear, given that extinction risk continues to

increase and > 40,000 species are threatened with extinction (IUCN, 2022). To support the implementation of the new Global Biodiversity Framework, the IUCN SSC Post-2020 Biodiversity Targets Task Force has been exploring capacity development needs to identify where action for species could have the biggest impact. Here we summarize the proposed Global Biodiversity Framework and offer some thoughts on providing targeted and effective capacity development for species conservation.

The current draft of the Framework includes four overarching Goals that have 21 action-oriented targets (CBD, 2021). In contrast to the 2011–20 Strategic Plan, these Goals describe the outcomes that we want to see, and the Action Targets state what is needed to achieve those outcomes. It will not be possible to achieve the Goals through a focus on specific Action Targets; all of them must be addressed (CBD, 2022). A key challenge is addressing the complex relationships within the Framework and supporting countries to align their conservation policies and actions with the new Goals and Targets. What does this mean for species and how can we best help?

Seven Action Targets of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework aim to address the direct threats to biodiversity: land- and sea-use change (Targets 1–3), overexploitation (Target 5), invasive species (Target 6), pollution (Target 7) and climate change (Target 8). Achieving these Action Targets will benefit many species, but a substantial number of threatened species will continue to decline without additional recovery actions (Bolam et al., 2020) and so Target 4 specifically aims to 'ensure active management actions to enable the recovery and conservation of species' (CBD, 2021).

To conserve species effectively under the new framework, Parties will first need to identify which threats are driving overall species extinction risk in their country and which Action Targets would make the greatest contribution to minimizing those threats and thus extinction risk. A second step is to identify species that require targeted conservation attention under Target 4. Rather than taking a species-by-species approach to tackling threats, these two steps will facilitate a strategic approach to identifying what action is needed to reduce overall national species extinction risk.

Limited capacity was one of the main constraints to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (Peña Moreno & Romero, 2018). To implement the new Action Targets effectively, Parties will require increased support. At present,

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we lack a clear global picture of current conservation capacity development issues or priorities (Elliott et al., 2018). As we look ahead to 2030, we need to ensure that Parties have the capacity and support they need to achieve the ambitious Targets of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Several studies have identified the needs of the new Framework and there have been multiple and extensive capacity development initiatives within the CBD (Peña Moreno & Romero, 2018; Alves-Pinto et al., 2021; Hagerman et al., 2021), including a long-term strategic framework for capacity development to support implementation (CBD, 2020). This strategic framework outlines the most urgent, high-level capacities required globally, but we need to support Parties in developing national capacity for species recovery.

There are two key areas of high-level capacity development: tools and data to identify and prioritize both threats and species that need particular attention under Target 4, and an increase in the capacity of people who can act. There are many initiatives and resources that Parties could draw on. The Global Species Action Plan, developed with input from across IUCN, partner organizations and in consultation with all biodiversity-related conventions, brings together an outline of species conservation actions and the supporting tools, guidance and resources available for effective implementation (IUCN, 2021). For the prioritization of actions, the Species Threat Abatement and Recovery metric (Mair et al., 2021) uses IUCN Red List data to calculate the relative contribution of threats to extinction risk at any spatial scale and can be used to measure how national actions may contribute to Action Targets and the reduction of species extinction risk. For networking and collaboration, the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Reverse the Red movement unites the tools, partnerships and efforts needed to support countries to deliver the Post-2020 Action Targets (IUCN SSC, 2021).

Tackling the global biodiversity crisis is a huge challenge for the Parties. Conservation capacity requirements vary between countries, and each will require different levels and types of development to meet this challenge, in particular to determine which actions are most appropriate for reducing species extinction risk within their country. Meeting these national-level capacity needs is a priority to enable Parties to prioritize and align their conservation actions and policies with the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The good news is that many of the resources and initiatives required by Parties to identify these actions and meet their capacity needs are already available. The important step now is to ensure that Parties are aware of and have access to these resources and initiatives, and that they are able to determine which are relevant to their capacity needs. To achieve this, we need to bridge the gaps between Parties,

resources and initiatives to support access to the resources, tools, networks and knowledge already available. Ultimately, this will increase capacity and effectiveness and enable Parties to achieve the goal of preventing species extinctions and enabling species recovery globally.

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