



# COP16: Important outcomes despite crucial issues unresolved

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## Key points

- The United Nations biodiversity conference COP16 was a 'People's COP'. The event delivered important outcomes for indigenous people and local communities, such as a global levy on products using genetic data and stronger representation in biodiversity conservation
- However, it fell short of the expected progress on several critical issues such as funding, and the establishment of a monitoring system
- A record level of private sector participation confirmed that biodiversity is becoming a strategic priority for the sector. COP16 saw new commitments and progress on nature-related-disclosure, measurement, target setting, and transition planning approaches

## More business and finance participation than ever

Whether the private sector would demonstrate as strong a presence and engagement at the United Nations (UN) biodiversity conference COP16, as it did during 2022's COP15, was a central question leading up to the event.

COP16 met these expectations, attracting an unprecedented 23,000 registered attendees, including 100 ministers and approximately 3,000 corporate delegates—a significant increase compared to the previous event.<sup>1</sup> This robust private sector participation, along with numerous new announcements and commitments, reaffirmed the growing momentum and mobilisation around biodiversity action. Meaningful progress was made in areas of relevance for investors, including:

- **Measurement, metrics and disclosure**

More and more businesses are recognising the potential of environmental disclosure as a catalyst for action. The number of companies having publicly committed to adopt the disclosure recommendations of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) reached 502 during COP16, a 57% increase since January 2024.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the Nature Positive Initiative facilitated discussions around its consultation on State of Nature metrics<sup>3</sup> and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development declared its ambition to further harmonise nature-related metrics<sup>4</sup> by prioritising those linked to sector-specific action and developing a nature metrics portal for corporates.

- **Target setting, nature strategies and transition pathways**

The Business for Nature coalition launched the ‘It’s Now for Nature Accelerator’ to encourage businesses to develop and publish credible nature strategies at scale, while the TNFD published draft guidance on nature transition planning. In addition, for the first time ever, the Science Based Targets Network officially recognised several companies that have publicly adopted science-based targets for nature, including Kering, Holcim and GSK.<sup>5</sup> With new publications from environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO) WWF<sup>6</sup>, sustainable design and engineering organisation Arcadis<sup>7</sup> and the Finance for Biodiversity Foundation<sup>8</sup>, among others, progress was also made in clarifying and building a consensus on what ‘nature positive’ means within a business context. It was agreed that ‘nature positive’ should be seen as a global societal goal intrinsically tied to the goals and targets of the Biodiversity Plan and that, under strict conditions, businesses could credibly claim to contribute to nature positive outcomes, rather than being ‘nature positive’ themselves.

- **Advocacy and public-private partnerships**

COP16 also placed significant emphasis on public-private partnerships to fund and support biodiversity conservation. For example, host country Colombia called on private investors to fund its new green investment portfolio, particularly in the sustainable agriculture, transportation and tourism sectors. The Business for Nature coalition also coordinated a statement supported by more than 230 businesses and financial institutions calling on governments to strengthen their policy ambition on nature.<sup>9</sup> The Finance for Biodiversity Foundation, with the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, convened a high-level dialogue, gathering finance ministers and chief executives from the financial sector to discuss ways to achieve global biodiversity targets.

- **Strong interest - and criticism - around biodiversity credits**

The 2022 Kunming-Montreal Agreement – known as the Global Biodiversity Framework or the Biodiversity Plan - called on the private sector to increase its funding and identified several instruments to do so, including green bonds and biodiversity offsets and credits. As new research published during COP16 confirmed only 17% of biodiversity-related financial flows come from private sources<sup>10</sup>, the International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits sought to answer this call: it launched a high-integrity framework<sup>11</sup> to encourage the gradual scaling of biodiversity credits markets, one of the hottest and most debated topics of COP16. By establishing 21 principles around integrity, fairness, justice, and a robust governance for these markets, the framework sets a basis to aim to upscale private finance while avoiding greenwashing.

Although biodiversity credits garnered substantial interest, there was also criticism that the framework remains too ambiguous on controversial aspects like offsetting and secondary market trading.

COP16 also achieved progress on other financial instruments aimed at supporting biodiversity. Several environmental organisations, including WWF, launched a coalition<sup>12</sup> to aid debt-for-nature swaps, facilitating the upscale of private finance contribution to close the biodiversity financing gap. Meanwhile, Banco Davivienda, a Colombian bank, launched a \$50m biodiversity bond to support mangrove restoration, sustainable agriculture projects, and water treatment.

- **Mainstreaming biodiversity across economic sectors**

During the negotiations, parties also agreed to a new non-binding decision text on “mainstreaming biodiversity” reflecting their ambition to integrate biodiversity across multiple sectors and policy areas, in line with a ‘whole of government’ and a ‘whole of society’ approach. They also discussed forming sector-based ‘communities of practice’ to promote biodiversity integration within key sectors such as agriculture, forestry, finance, and infrastructure. Colombia and Mexico spearheaded the initiative, establishing a Mainstreaming Champions Group with 18 countries committed to integrating biodiversity goals into all economic sectors and policies. These decisions are expected to further accelerate the development of sector-specific approaches, enhancing the private sector’s understanding of the Global Biodiversity Framework and facilitating the upscaling of business and finance action for nature.

The Business and Biodiversity Day and the Finance Day, both official segments of the COP16 programme, enabled further dialogue between high-level business and finance representatives, ministers, data providers, non-governmental organisations and standard setters and confirmed that biodiversity is increasingly becoming a strategic priority for investors and other economic actors.

## **COP 16: from an ‘implementation COP’ to a ‘people’s COP’**

Expected to be an ‘implementation COP’, COP16 fell short on finance and monitoring but emerged as a ‘people’s COP’.

- **A People’s COP**

One of the most significant outcomes of COP16 is the creation of a subsidiary body under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) dedicated to the inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities. Parties adopted a new programme of work, Article 8(j), through which the rights, contributions and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples

and local communities are further embedded in the global agenda and UN CBD processes. This body should guarantee that the voices of these populations will be better heard and taken into account during future negotiations. Another decision was taken to recognise the role of people of African descent in implementing the Biodiversity Plan.

- **The Cali fund: a positive achievement for benefit-sharing**

The Cali Fund, named after the city in Colombia where COP16 took place, should see large companies in areas including pharmaceutical, biotechnology, animal and plant breeding that benefit commercially from using genetic data contribute each year to a dedicated fund - based on a percentage of their profits or revenues. The fund plans to allocate 50% of its resources for direct payments to indigenous peoples and local communities, addressing the longstanding call for a more equitable distribution of the benefits generated by the private sector's use and exploitation of genetic resources. It was seen as a decision of global importance marking a precedent for benefit-sharing in biodiversity conservation. However, the fund is voluntary, and with modalities that will need to be clarified in the future, it remains to be seen whether it will effectively mobilise significant amounts.

- **Tough debates around finance**

Yet COP16 left some crucial issues unresolved including the finalisation of a comprehensive Resource Mobilisation Strategy - a plan of crucial importance to achieve the target of mobilising \$200bn annually by 2030 to implement the Biodiversity Plan.

Although parties found a consensus with the creation of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) at COP15, under the aegis of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), developing countries have since reiterated their concerns that accessing the fund remains too difficult. At COP16, they demanded a new fund separate from the GEF to distribute biodiversity finance; others expressed concerns about fragmentation of funds. After a whole night of negotiations, no decision was reached and COP16 was suspended on 2 November due to lack of quorum.

As a consequence of these long and challenging debates, parties also failed to progress on another critical issue - the review of the progress made against the fast-approaching 2025 deadline for identifying subsidies harmful to biodiversity, estimated at \$2.6trn each year<sup>13</sup>. Although discussions are expected to continue ahead of 2026's COP17, the parties' failure to adopt a resource mobilisation strategy is likely to cause delays in financing and slow the pace at which countries achieve the global biodiversity targets.

Despite this, some progress was still made on the finance front. For example, eight countries announced their intention to contribute to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, bringing the total to approximately \$400m<sup>14</sup>, but this remains far from what is needed globally.

- **No time left to review implementation and adopt a monitoring framework.**

Parties were also expected to submit their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans aligned with the GBF ahead of the meeting. However, only 44 out of 196 countries had done so.<sup>15</sup> COP16 acknowledged both significant progress but also a need to accelerate action, with several observers reporting a colossal task ahead<sup>16</sup>.

Contrary to expectations, parties did not adopt a framework for monitoring progress against the Biodiversity Plan. This was considered critical as the lack of a monitoring system was a key factor leading to the failure of the previous strategic plan for biodiversity. Although the draft document prepared before COP16 was reported to be quite consensual, dissent emerged during COP16 around some indicators to monitor implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, for example those on monitoring pesticide use. In the end, countries seemed to have run out of time while discussing other controversial issues.

### **Forging links between biodiversity, health and climate**

However, COP16 enabled closer links to be forged between action on climate change, biodiversity loss and health.

- **'One Health': linking biodiversity to human health**

Countries adopted a new action plan highlighting the links between biodiversity and health, embracing a holistic 'One Health' approach that recognises the interconnections between the health of ecosystems and that of animals and humans. Although non-binding, the plan describes how a series of voluntary actions in several sectors, such as agriculture or chemistry, could benefit both health and biodiversity. It highlights how biodiversity loss can negatively impact public health, contributing to issues like the rise of infectious diseases that may lead to pandemics. Conversely, the plan emphasises the protection and restoration of biodiversity as a powerful means to enhance human health and well-being globally.

- **Addressing the climate-biodiversity nexus**

Partie A decision on “Biodiversity and climate Change”<sup>17</sup> was adopted with an important reference to the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus. In this text, countries agreed on a range of actions to foster synergies between climate and biodiversity at the national level, including aligning their biodiversity and climate policies, minimising potential adverse impacts of climate solutions (such as bioenergy or renewables) on biodiversity, or integrating nature-based solutions. The text also calls upon the Presidents of COP16 and the UN climate change conferences COP29 and COP30 to strengthen multilateral coordination.

COP16 was particularly fertile around the ocean theme. It produced a framework on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas enabling a clearer pathway for establishing Marine Protected Areas in international waters, complementing the recent High Seas Treaty under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In addition, a full day dedicated to the oceans emphasised their crucial role in biodiversity and climate action, setting the stage for the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in France in 2025.

Affirming that “biodiversity-climate synergies powered by science and a whole-of-society endeavor will bring the world closer to peace with nature”, Cali’s final message to COP29 in Baku<sup>18</sup> can be seen as a call to action, urging the integration of climate, biodiversity, and social challenges into unified and holistic transition strategies.

- <sup>1</sup> [Policy Watch: Business turned up at COP16, but policymakers failed to unlock finance for nature | Reuters](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Over 500 organisations and \\$17.7 trillion AUM now committed to TNFD-aligned risk management and corporate reporting](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [State of Nature Metrics. Nature Positive Initiative.](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Harmonizing the use of nature metrics by corporations. WBCSD, 2024.](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [SBTN announces first companies publicly adopting science-based targets for nature. 2024.](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Banking on Nature Positive. How public development banks and commercial banks can collectively contribute towards a Nature-Positive agenda. WWF. 2024.](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [Nature Positive: Transforming Theory to Action white paper. Arcadis. 2024.](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Finance for Nature Positive: Building a Working Model. Finance for Biodiversity Foundation, 2024.](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Business statement “renewed policy ambition on nature” — Business for Nature](#)
- <sup>10</sup> [Biodiversity Finance Factbook. Biodiversity COP16 Edition. BloombergNEF. 2024.](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [The IAPB Framework for high integrity biodiversity credit markets](#)
- <sup>12</sup> [Six global environmental organizations unite to scale climate and conservation outcomes through sovereign debt conversions. The Nature Conservancy. 2024.](#)
- <sup>13</sup> [Protecting Nature by Reforming Environmentally Harmful Subsidies: An Update. Earth Track. 2024.](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [Biodiversity COP 16: Important Agreement Reached Towards Goal of “Making Peace with Nature” – Convention on Biological Diversity](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [Online Reporting Tool NBSAPs and National Reports, Convention on Biological Diversity. Consulted on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.](#)
- <sup>16</sup> [COP16: An important milestone for equity despite major disagreements. IDDRI, 2024.](#)
- <sup>17</sup> [COP16 decision on Biodiversity and Climate Change. Convention on Biological Diversity, 2024.](#)
- <sup>18</sup> [Cali’s message to Baku: Biodiversity and climate action must be delivered in tandem.](#)

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