



TOWARDS SBSTTA-27 : POLICY BRIEF

HOW (WELL) DOES THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES RESPOND TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER SAFEGUARDS

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Summary

- UNEA Resolution 5/5 (2022) insists that Nature-based Solutions (NbS) respect social and environmental safeguards, be evidence-based and adaptive, include inclusive governance, and ensure equitable financing.
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework incorporated NbS but paired it with the CBD's long-standing ecosystem approach (e.g. "nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches").
- COP-16 decisions on biodiversity & climate explicitly recall UNEA 5/5's caution about long-term effects and the need that NbS not replace deep emissions reductions.
- COP-16 also requested a supplement to the Voluntary Guidelines (ecosystem-based approaches) to provide voluntary guidance and updated fit-for-purpose social and environmental safeguards for NbS implementation to be considered by SBSTTA-27.
- Early SBSTTA/27 working draft shows progress (calls for criteria, references to UNEA results, inclusion of adaptive management and safeguards), but important gaps remain in operational details: definitions of acceptable/social safeguards, monitoring indicators, grievance mechanisms, and finance modalities for equitable access.

What is the issue?

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has adopted the 'ecosystem approach' as a primary framework for actions to safeguard biodiversity. Decision [V/6](#) adopted the 'ecosystem approach' and laid out its principles. Related terms like "ecosystem-based approaches" have also been used within the CBD in decision texts about adaptation, disaster risk reduction and mainstreaming biodiversity into sectors. Within CBD negotiations for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), drafts show that NbS¹ began to be introduced as an option alongside ecosystem-based approaches, with [debates](#) on whether to use ecosystem-based approaches or nature-based solutions since NbS was not established in CBD decision language. At COP-14 (2018), [Decision 14/5](#) on Biodiversity and climate change adopted voluntary guidelines for ecosystem-based approaches to climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. NbS as a term was not included in that decision. In the draft GBF texts leading up to COP-15, the term NbS was introduced in proposals particularly relating to the framing of Targets 8 and 11, but [frequently bracketed](#) since developing countries in particular raised concerns about the ambiguity of the term, potential misuse (offsets, greenwashing), or risk of sidelining ecosystem-based approaches which had long and set precedent within the CBD.

1. IUCN (2016) defined NbS as 'actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural and modified ecosystems in ways that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, to provide both human well-being and biodiversity benefits.' UNEA Resolution 5/5 defines NbS as "actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits"

At COP-15 in Dec 2022, the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(KM-GBF\)](#) adopted the term 'nature-based solutions' but in a compromise formulation of 'nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches' in two of its targets (Target 8 and Target 11). Also, in GBF Section C (Considerations for implementation), the framework reiterates that it is to be implemented based on the ecosystem approach of the Convention, referencing Decision V/6. The term 'nature-based solutions' originated in other fora, specifically the IUCN around 2009. It was formally adopted in the IUCN programme in 2026 and launched at the [IUCN Global Standard](#) for NbS in 2020. IUCN began using the term in side-events during UNEA 3 but UNEA only adopted Resolution 5/5 on NbS in March, 2022. However, the resolution also raises several cautions, risks, and caveats regarding the use and implementation of Nature-based Solutions including:



- **Need for Safeguards:** The requirement to respect social and environmental safeguards means that NbS projects should not violate rights, degrade environments, displace communities, or marginalise vulnerable groups (e.g. Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth).
- **Scientific Grounding:** Encouraging use of ‘best available science’ means NbS interventions should be evidence-based, with monitoring, evaluation, and credible demonstration of outcomes.
- **Avoiding Vagueness and Divergence:** The push to develop shared criteria, standards, guidelines demonstrates recognition that NbS may be used inconsistently and that standardisation is needed to avoid misuse or divergent interpretations.
- **Adaptive and Contextual Implementation:** The conditional clause that NbS must be implemented “in accordance with local, national and regional circumstances” and “managed adaptively” cautions against rigid approaches, which may fail under local ecological or social conditions.
- **Attention to Equitable Finance:** Recognising that sustainable investment must be part of NbS, and asking for sharing of finance sources and access especially for developing countries, signals caution that implementation must be resourced equitably.
- **Governance and Participation:** The procedural requirement for transparent, inclusive, gender-balanced, regionally balanced consultations reflects caution about governance risks.

Along with this, COP 16 reiterated certain cautions including:

- The need for analysis of the effects of the implementation of NbS
- The need for rapid, deep and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions which cannot be replaced by the implementation of NbS

At COP 16, Parties have requested SBSTTA to develop a supplement to the Voluntary Guidelines for the Design and Effective Implementation of Ecosystem-Based Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction, which can provide guidance and tools based on good practices for the design, effective implementation and scaling up, as appropriate, of nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation to support the implementation of Targets 8 and 11, as well as other related targets, of the Framework.

Why is it important?

NbS are increasingly proposed as solutions for climate adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction. While IUCN has framed NbS to be evidence-based and rights-respecting, risks remain including potential misuse, in particular, the promotion of greenwashing, offsets, monoculture plantations and land grabs due to its all encompassing definition; and insufficient safeguards and monitoring precedents and methodology.

With NbS now included in the Kunming–Montreal GBF and referenced in COP-16 decisions, uptake will accelerate in NBSAPs and national climate/biodiversity plans. If safeguards are not operationalised early, harmful practices could lock in, undermining both biodiversity and human rights.

It is crucial to understand that NbS interventions are and will often be deployed in lands and waters managed or used by Indigenous Peoples, women, and local communities. Women, especially Indigenous and rural women, are often most dependent on land, water, and forests for subsistence and livelihoods. Poorly designed NbS (e.g., afforestation, offset projects) can restrict access and increase women's workloads. Indigenous and local women are custodians of biodiversity knowledge and play leadership roles in community conservation. If NbS design excludes women, these contributions are ignored. At the same time, NbS can attract large-scale finance (carbon credits, climate funds) and without explicit safeguards, women's organisations and women rights-holders may have limited access to these funds or decision-making. A human rights-based approach to NbS is incomplete unless it addresses gender equality and women's rights (participation, leadership, benefit-sharing, protection from displacement and violence).

What should be done?

The current text takes UNEA cautions on board at the principle level and the COP-16 request institutionalises the need for a supplement; however, they guidelines do not yet fully operationalise UNEA's safeguards in the form of precise eligibility criteria, measurable indicators, standardised monitoring methods, finance safeguards, and redress mechanisms. While UNEA calls for 'best available science' and rigorous evaluation, the draft call for monitoring but lacks standardised indicator sets or linkages to existing CBD headline indicators. It recognises financing needs but does not specify mechanisms to ensure equitable access or to safeguard against finance driving harmful interventions



(e.g., perverse incentives for monocultures etc.). UNEA resolution 5/5 insists on inclusive governance, which implies clear accessible redress. The guideline draft mentions participation but lacks concrete guidance on grievance design and resourcing. At the same time, the current guidelines also lack specific environmental and social safeguards that address the issues that women will face if NbS is not implemented with these safeguards. CBD must decide how to translate the high-level UNEA guidance into operational, biodiversity-consistent guidance that avoids harm and ensures rights and equity.

Women4Biodiversity has drafted specific textual recommendations which can be accessed [here](#).

About this brief

This publication by Women4Biodiversity responds to the document [CBD/SBSTTA/27/4*](#). It is part of a series of briefs aimed at informing and supporting negotiations at SBSTTA 27 and SB 8(j), with a focus on gender-responsive approaches, Indigenous and local community participation, and rights-based biodiversity governance.

References

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- IUCN, Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions (First edition, 2020). [IUCN Portals](#)
- CBD COP-16 decision on Biodiversity and climate change [Convention on Biological Diversity](#)
- SBSTTA-27 draft CBD/SBSTTA/27/4*: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/24b5/885c/527f798239c3a4120dc7d4b7/sbstta-27-04-en.pdf>
- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2004) The Ecosystem Approach, (CBD Guidelines) Montreal: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 50 p.: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/ea-text-en.pdf>

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