

BIODIVERSITY SUMMIT FACES ITS DEFINING TEST

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The UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP17) concluded in Armenia with nearly 50 decisions and a new Yerevan Pathway intended to accelerate implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Yet the outcome also exposed a central challenge: countries have agreed on a global plan to protect nature, but collective action remains insufficient to achieve its 23 targets by 2030.

Held from October 19 to 30, the conference brought together parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing. The first global review of progress under the KMGBF, informed by the State of Biodiversity Action report, found that the world remains off track on most targets.

The Yerevan Pathway is the conference's negotiated response to that assessment. It identifies priorities for the remaining years to 2030, including reforming incentives harmful to nature, increasing financial and technical support for developing countries, integrating biodiversity into national budgets and economic decisions, and strengthening implementation, monitoring and accountability.

COP17 President Hambardzum Matevosyan said the pathway demonstrated that "differences can be bridged, commitments can become decisions and cooperation can deliver." He described it as a framework for collective action, from implementing national plans and mobilizing finance to strengthening science and participation across society.

CBD Executive Secretary Astrid Schomaker, however, emphasized that the real test would come after delegates returned home. "We cannot protect nature while continuing to finance its destruction," she said, calling for resources to reach countries and communities in need and for biodiversity to become part of everyday economic decisions.

Finance and implementation at the center of negotiations

Biodiversity finance remained one of the most politically sensitive issues throughout the two-week negotiations. Developing countries stressed that ambitious targets cannot be achieved without predictable, accessible and adequate funding, alongside technology transfer, scientific cooperation and capacity-building.

The conference announced nearly US$2 billion in new biodiversity-related funding and initiatives, including US$560 million through the Global Environment Facility's ninth replenishment and its Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, US$500 million through the Species Recovery Alliance, and more than US$330 million through the Value Nature Fund.

Other initiatives included a biodiversity bond and investment incubator launched by the Asian Development Bank, a Presidency-led effort to reform



harmful incentives, a proposed model framework law on forests, and new indicators and metrics to improve biodiversity monitoring.

But the announcements did not resolve broader questions over the scale, sources and distribution of finance. Civil society organizations argued that the financing gap is not only about how much money is mobilized, but also who controls it, who can access it and whether it reaches communities protecting biodiversity on the ground.

The ICCA Consortium said the finance challenge was "equally a question of where the finance goes, who can access it and how, who decides how it is used," highlighting the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities as biodiversity custodians.

Rights, participation and the risks of biodiversity markets

The role of Indigenous peoples and local communities emerged as another major focus. After intensive negotiations, parties agreed on the operating rules for the new permanent subsidiary body on Article 8(j), officially named the Sevan Guidelines. The outcome marks a step towards strengthening the participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities in biodiversity policy and action.

However, Indigenous, Afro-descendant and civil society representatives urged governments not to weaken existing rights-based safeguards. Their concerns included recognition of customary territories, free, prior and informed consent, women's rights, direct access to conservation finance and meaningful participation in decision-making.

At a press conference on October 21, organizations called on parties to preserve safeguards and ensure that communities are recognized as rights-holders and decision-makers, rather than merely beneficiaries of conservation projects.

Debate also intensified over biodiversity credits, offsets and other market-based mechanisms proposed as ways to mobilize private finance. Indigenous representatives and environmental organizations warned that such schemes could commodify nature, undermine community rights or allow companies to offset environmental damage without addressing its causes.

The Global Forest Coalition called for public finance and community-led conservation, while rejecting biodiversity markets, offsets and credits that it said risked turning nature into a commodity and distracting from structural drivers of biodiversity loss.

Civil society: progress, but insufficient ambition

Civil society reactions to the final outcome were mixed. Some welcomed the new funding announcements, stronger recognition of community participation and movement towards reforming harmful subsidies. Others said the decisions did not match the urgency of the biodiversity crisis.

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) welcomed progress on finance and harmful incentives but warned that action remained too slow. IIED researcher Nicola Sorsby said only around 2% of biodiversity-finance project descriptions mentioned Indigenous peoples, arguing that funding must reach communities whose knowledge and stewardship are essential to conservation.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) was more critical of the overall level of ambition. Its Vice President for International Policy, Dr Susan Lieberman, said the conference had provided a clearer picture of the crisis but had not delivered the ambition needed to reverse nature loss.

"Timidity will not save nature—we need strong outcomes for wildlife and wild places, not only outputs and great speeches," she said, calling for political will and financing to protect ecological integrity, respect Indigenous and community leadership, and reduce the drivers of biodiversity decline.

From Yerevan to national action

Alongside the pathway, COP17 adopted decisions on protected areas and forest biodiversity, sustainable wildlife management, invasive alien species, marine and coastal biodiversity, synthetic biology, biodiversity mainstreaming and biosafety.

UN Environment Programme Executive Director Inger Andersen said the conference had helped turn global commitments into decisions. "In Yerevan, we saw environmental multilateralism prevail once again," she said, adding that the agreements could support progress for people and the planet.

The conference's significance will ultimately depend on whether governments reform harmful subsidies, align economic policies with biodiversity goals, deliver promised resources and strengthen national implementation. Civil society groups have also called for transparent monitoring and accountability, with communities involved in shaping and evaluating conservation programs.

With four years remaining to meet the 2030 targets, the Yerevan Pathway offers a shared direction—but not a guarantee of success. The next CBD Conference of the Parties, COP18, is scheduled for 2028 in Ecuador, leaving governments with a narrowing window to demonstrate that global biodiversity commitments can produce measurable results for nature and people. EP