

Nature: Humanity at a crossroads, UN warns

- UN's Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 report outlines eight major transitions needed to slow, then halt nature's accelerating decline
- Final report card on Aichi Biodiversity Targets, set in 2010: 6 of world's 20 goals "partially achieved" by 2020 deadline
- Towards a landmark new global post-2020 biodiversity framework: GBO-5 synthesizes scientific basis for urgent action
- Bright spots include: extinctions prevented by conservation, more land and oceans protected, fish stocks bounce back in well-managed fisheries

Montreal, 15 September 2020 – Despite encouraging progress in several areas, the natural world is suffering badly and getting worse. Eight transformative changes are, therefore, urgently needed to ensure human wellbeing and save the planet, the UN warns in a major report.

The report comes as the COVID-19 pandemic challenges people to rethink their relationship with nature, and to consider the profound consequences to their own wellbeing and survival that can result from continued biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystems.

The [Global Biodiversity Outlook 5](#) (GBO-5), published by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), offers an authoritative overview of the state of nature. It is a final report card on progress against the 20 global biodiversity targets agreed in 2010 with a 2020 deadline, and offers lessons learned and best practices for getting on track.

"This flagship report underlines that 'humanity stands at a crossroads with regard to the legacy we wish to leave to future generations,'" said CBD Executive Secretary, Elizabeth Maruma Mrema.

"Many good things are happening around the world and these should be celebrated and encouraged. Nevertheless, the rate of biodiversity loss is unprecedented in human history and pressures are intensifying. Earth's living systems as a whole are being

compromised. And the more humanity exploits nature in unsustainable ways and undermines its contributions to people, the more we undermine our own well-being, security and prosperity.”

“As nature degrades,” Ms. Mrema continued, “new opportunities emerge for the spread to humans and animals of devastating diseases like this year’s coronavirus. The window of time available is short, but the pandemic has also demonstrated that transformative changes are possible when they must be made.”

“The decisions and level of action we take now will have profound consequences -- for good or ill -- for all species, including ours.”

With respect to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, set in 2010, the analysis based on the 6th set of national reports to the CBD and the latest scientific findings shows that seven of 60 “elements” — success criteria — within the 20 targets have been achieved and 38 show progress. In the case of 13 elements, no progress was made, or a move away from the target was indicated, and for two elements the level of progress is unknown. The report concludes that, overall, of the 20 targets, six of them (9, 11, 16, 17, 19 and 20) were partially achieved by the 2020 deadline.

“Now, we must accelerate and scale-up collaboration for nature-positive outcomes – conserving, restoring and using biodiversity fairly and sustainably. If we do not, biodiversity will continue to buckle under the weight of land- and sea-use change, overexploitation, climate change, pollution and invasive alien species. This will further damage human health, economies and societies – with particularly detrimental effects on indigenous peoples and local communities” said Inger Andersen Executive Director, UNEP.

“We know what needs to be done, what works and how we can achieve good results. If we build on what has already been achieved, and place biodiversity at the heart of all our policies and decisions – including in COVID-19 recovery packages – we can ensure a better future for our societies and the planet” she added.

By partially met, GBO5 refers to targets where at least one distinct element has been met. For example, the elements of Target 11 regarding the proportions of lands and seas protected was met, but the elements related to the quality of protected areas were not.

Similarly, for Target 19, biodiversity knowledge has improved but it has not been widely shared or applied. For Target 20, official development assistance doubled but resources did not increase from all sources.

The [national reports to the CBD](#) offer evidence that the types of transitions needed moving forward are beginning; that virtually all countries are taking steps to protect biodiversity.

GBO5 cites several exemplary national actions and programmes, in the absence of which conditions would certainly be worse (extinctions would be higher for example).

In addition, for example, deforestation rates continue to fall, eradication of invasive alien species from islands is increasing, awareness of biodiversity appears to be increasing.

“The actions that have been taken need to be significantly scaled up, move from being project driven and become more systemic and broadened,” says Ms. Mrema. “Also, the gaps in national ambition and action need to be filled. The information in part III of GBO-5 is about doing this and provides examples of the types of actions that needed going forward.”

The report calls for a shift away from “business as usual” across a range of human activities. It outlines eight transitions that recognize the value of biodiversity, the need to restore the ecosystems on which all human activity depends, and the urgency of reducing the negative impacts of such activity:

- The **land and forests** transition: conserving intact ecosystems, restoring ecosystems, combatting and reversing degradation, and employing landscape level spatial planning to avoid, reduce and mitigate land-use change
- The **sustainable agriculture** transition: redesigning agricultural systems through agroecological and other innovative approaches to enhance productivity while minimizing negative impacts on biodiversity
- The sustainable **food systems** transition: enabling sustainable and healthy diets with a greater emphasis on a diversity of foods, mostly plant-based,

and more moderate consumption of meat and fish, as well as dramatic cuts in the waste involved in food supply and consumption

- The sustainable **fisheries and oceans** transition: protecting and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems, rebuilding fisheries and managing aquaculture and other uses of the oceans to ensure sustainability, and to enhance food security and livelihoods
- The **cities and infrastructure** transition: deploying “green infrastructure” and making space for nature within built landscapes to improve the health and quality of life for citizens and to reduce the environmental footprint of cities and infrastructure
- The sustainable **freshwater** transition: an integrated approach guaranteeing the water flows required by nature and people, improving water quality, protecting critical habitats, controlling invasive species and safeguarding connectivity to allow the recovery of freshwater systems from mountains to coasts
- The sustainable **climate action** transition: employing nature-based solutions, alongside a rapid phase-out of fossil fuel use, to reduce the scale and impacts of climate change, while providing positive benefits for biodiversity and other sustainable development goals
- The biodiversity-inclusive **One Health** transition: managing ecosystems, including agricultural and urban ecosystems, as well as the use of wildlife, through an integrated approach, to promote healthy ecosystems and healthy people.