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OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ACTION AGENDA FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE

Policy Brief

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Opportunities for the Action Agenda for Nature and People

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Opportunities for the Action Agenda for Nature and People

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Main findings

The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework presents a window of opportunity to increase its ambition level and for improving the effectiveness of global biodiversity governance via the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Improving the performance of the CBD is much needed as countries have largely failed to achieve the goals they have agreed within the CBD. Stronger involvement of non-state and sub-national actors (e.g. cities, regions, indigenous peoples and local communities, companies, and civil society organisations) to commit and contribute to biodiversity conservation could be a feasible and impactful way forward.

At CBD COP-14 in Egypt in 2018, Parties decided to encourage non-state and sub-national actors to make voluntary commitments that contribute to the CBD objectives and the post-2020 biodiversity framework. In addition, the 'Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People' was launched to catalyse non-state and sub-national initiatives that could 'bend the curve of biodiversity loss'.

The 'Action Agenda for Nature and People' is potentially a powerful vehicle for increasing the ambition level of global biodiversity policy and move towards rapid and scalable implementation.

Including non-state and sub-national actors in the post-2020 biodiversity framework has at least seven possible benefits. These include:

1. engaging more and more diverse actors in halting biodiversity loss;
2. provide a platform to showcase ongoing non-state and sub-national biodiversity action;
3. mainstreaming biodiversity into relevant economic sectors and across society;
4. building a positive momentum around global biodiversity conservation in the run up to COP-15 in China in 2020;
5. building confidence for governments to adopt more ambitious biodiversity goals at COP-15, knowing that non-state and sub-national actors support stronger action;
6. fostering innovative and experimental partnerships and initiatives breaking gridlocks;
7. providing governance functions that complement public policies, such as new standards and commitments, funding, creating and disseminating information, and executing projects on the ground.

This report finds that **public, private and civil society actors already engage in a plethora of international cooperative initiatives.** It identifies 331 international cooperative initiatives forming a crowded and diverse governance landscape, with increasing participation of private and civil society actors, and including public, hybrid and private

organisational forms of collaboration. 33% of the initiatives comprise only public actors such as national governments, regions and cities; 21% of the initiatives are hybrid, meaning that they include public, private and civil society actors and 28% of the initiatives are private, i.e. they involve only companies and/or civil society organisations. A transnational regime complex for global biodiversity governance is emerging and will likely continue to develop ‘beyond the CBD’, involving thousands of non-state and sub-national actors in the quest for halting biodiversity loss, but retaining a strong role for governments and other public actors.

Existing international cooperative initiatives align well with the current goals of the CBD and the Aichi targets. Initiatives are predominantly focusing on information sharing and networking (60%) followed by operational, on the ground, activities (33%) and third, standards and commitments (26%). The least common function is financing (17%). Initiatives are active in areas with high biodiversity values, managed landscapes and urban areas, focussing both on conservation as well as on sustainable use in relevant production sectors. They also include activities reflecting the multiple values of nature. The sectors with most activities, in terms of number of initiatives, are agriculture and forestry. Mapping the geographical coverage of the initiatives suggests a wide distribution of activities. There is much activity in Europe and most part of the African continent. However, parts of Asia, primarily China and India, as well as Latin America features much less. Referring to a subset of initiatives (n = 99), about 80% have some kind of monitoring in place suggesting awareness and possibility to track progress. Yet less than 50% have annual reporting and only about a fourth of the initiatives have quantitative targets, making evaluation efforts challenging.

How can the CBD fully harness the potential of existing international cooperative initiatives for biodiversity for the ‘Action Agenda for Nature and People’? We suggest that at this stage leadership is key to make the Action Agenda an effective part of the post-2020 framework. Leadership is urgently needed to provide impetus; to structure and coordinate activities; and, build and maintain coalitions and partnerships.

Short-term priorities – prior to COP-15

Taking into account lessons learned from the climate change policy arena and the implementation of the Global Climate Action Agenda, the Oceans agenda and the SDGs, we suggest the following actions prior to COP-15:

- Developing the narrative for the Action Agenda further, including explaining its priorities, functions and purpose, and to communicate this widely. Non-state and sub-national actors have to see that there is much to gain from being part of this societal mobilisation, and much to lose if one is not a part of it.
- Generating as many voluntary commitments by non-state and sub-national actors, and countries as possible and showcasing them at the portal for the Action Agenda.
- Linking the Action Agenda for Nature and People to other action agendas and portals, such as on climate change, oceans, and the SDGs.

- Limiting the administrative burden for making commitments, but with some basic process criteria to ensure credibility. At a minimum, commitments need to indicate ambition levels (what to achieve), how to achieve them (measures) and how monitoring and reporting will be done. These commitments need to be publicly available and transparent to facilitate learning.

Challenges for successfully implementing the Action Agenda

We also identified some challenges for the CBD to develop and implement the Action Agenda successfully.

- **Coordination:** who should coordinate non-state and sub-national biodiversity action and how? The CBD Secretariat, for instance, is unlikely to have the willingness or capacity to take on such a potentially immense task of guiding a vast and heterogeneous group of actors. Instead, the Secretariat – in collaboration with other key organisations such as the IUCN, ICLEI or the Natural Capital Coalition – could provide a focal point for facilitating dialogue between partners during and between COPs. Such a ‘soft touch’ approach could have the purpose to build coalitions of the willing among governments, cities, companies and civil society organisations that could spearhead the Action Agenda.
- **Shirking:** how to avoid that national governments shirk established norms and responsibilities under the CBD, referring to action being carried out outside the formal negotiations? This will require the development of accountability systems that include combined analysis of both national commitments as well as non-state and sub-national commitments. Periodic assessments of the progress made by non-state and sub-national actors could be carried out by a broader analytical community consisting of international organisations, think tanks, academia and other research organisations. One format possible could be the annual Gap Reports produced by UNEP within the climate change policy domain.
- **Transparency:** how to know if international cooperative initiatives contribute to achieving biodiversity goals? Learnings for success of international cooperative initiatives include improved MRV procedures, enhanced involvement of relevant actors and disclosure to enhance transparency. Science-based targets and methodologies that could be used at a national or sectoral level would allow non-state and sub-national actors to set their own targets aligned with international goals to identify appropriate strategies and actions.
- **Credibility:** How avoid greenwashing and ‘bluewashing’? If companies use the CBD for public relation purposes without having demonstrated actual improvements to biodiversity it would harm the credibility and effectiveness of the Action Agenda. It is therefore key to carry out analysis and transparency, providing decision-makers in both private and public organisations with the proper basis for deciding whether to engage in or support an initiative.

Further involvement of non-state and sub-national actors in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework possibly will make a positive contribution to achieving new globally agreed targets. A first step would be to harness the potential power of those thousands of cities, civil society organisations, companies, indigenous peoples and regions already taking action for biodiversity in international cooperative initiatives. Showcasing their concrete actions could help to increase state ambitions, by showing the willingness of non-state and sub-national actors to take action within their respective sectors and realms. However, to create a strong Action Agenda in the coming 18 months, leadership from the CBD and its parties is needed.

1 Introduction

New directions need to be considered for the post-2020 framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to increase its ambition level and for improving the effectiveness of global biodiversity governance. One possible way forward is to further involve cities, regions, indigenous peoples and local communities, companies, and civil society organisations (from here on: *non-state and sub-national actors*) in governing biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use.

At COP-14 of the CBD in Egypt in 2018, Parties agreed to encourage non-state and sub-national actors to make voluntary commitments that contribute to the achievement of CBD objectives and the development of the post-2020 biodiversity framework (CBD, 2018a). Egypt, China and the secretariat of the CBD also launched, what is now called, the ‘Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People’ (CBD, 2018b). The Action Agenda aims to catalyse actions from all sectors and stakeholders in support of biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use. More specifically, its objectives are: (1) *to raise public awareness about the urgent need to halt biodiversity loss and to restore biodiversity health*; (2) *to inspire and help implement nature-based solutions to meet key global challenges*; and (3) *to catalyse cooperative initiatives across sectors and stakeholders in support of the global biodiversity goals*.

As one of the first steps towards the development of the Action Agenda, at the ‘Nature Champions Summit’, organised by Canada in April 2019, the coalition of Nature Champions – including international leaders from philanthropy, industry, non-governmental organisations, United Nations agencies, Indigenous peoples and governments – called for a ‘*widening the participation in the Convention on Biological Diversity beyond governments to include commitments and actions by a wide range of actors*’. The Nature Champions Coalition aims at a global mobilisation with its call to action. This was also confirmed by the G7 Environment meeting in Metz, May 2019.

Such global mobilisation is indeed starting to take place through initiatives taken by, for example, city networks, business-for-nature coalitions, concerned citizens and ocean initiatives. An online platform hosted on the CBD website has been set up to start mapping current global efforts (see www.cbd.int/climate-action/). Work on operationalising the ‘Action Agenda for Nature and People’ is still under development with a view to build momentum in the run-up to COP-15 and as part of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

This policy brief aims to inform policymakers and stakeholders about: (1) the emerging international biodiversity governance landscape, in particular international cooperative initiatives; (2) the potential of greater non-state and sub-national actor involvement in the development and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework; and (3) possible ways forward to harness the potential of non-state and sub-national action through the Action Agenda.

The policy brief has three chapters. First, it discusses the new dynamics in global biodiversity governance and the potential benefits from deliberately engaging non-state and sub-national actors. Second, it maps and analyses the international governance landscape providing an overview of international cooperative initiatives currently in place and eventually also how they perform with regards to conserving biodiversity and its sustainable use. The analysis addresses the following questions: how many biodiversity-related cooperative initiatives exist? What functions do they perform and what form do they take (public, hybrid, private)? In how far do they align with the CBD goals and Aichi targets, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Where are they operating? And do they have Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) mechanisms in place? Third, the policy brief discusses possible ways forward, based on mapping, investigating if and how these actors could be further integrated into the process and what the post-2020 framework could provide to enable further contributions by non-state actors to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity?

This policy brief is based on different sources including earlier analysis drawing lessons from the Paris Climate Agreement for the CBD post-2020 framework (Kok et al., 2018), a recent academic paper on the Action Agenda for Nature and People (Pattberg et al., 2019), database analysis of the existing landscape of cooperative initiatives (e.g. Pattberg et al., 2017) and insights derived from a multi-stakeholder workshop on operationalising the action agenda (Kok et al., 2019).

2 How the Action Agenda for Nature and People could enhance global biodiversity governance

Global biodiversity governance is facing a major challenge. As scientists are tallying the results of the efforts during the last 30 years to halt biodiversity, it is becoming abundantly clear that countries largely have failed to achieve the goals they have agreed within the CBD to conserve and sustainably use nature; most recently the ambitions of the 2020 Aichi Targets (Brondizio et al., 2019; Tittensor et al., 2014). Halting biodiversity loss and restoring nature requires much broader action by states, non-state and sub-national actors (Hajer et al., 2015). Innovative institutional arrangements are needed for the global community to ‘bend the curve’ of biodiversity loss (Biermann et al., 2012; Mace et al., 2018).

2.1 Rethinking biodiversity governance

Multilateral responses to multiple global challenges are failing on several fronts. Observers note that multilateral institutions have become ‘gridlocked’ and ‘pathological’ negotiation processes based on rules and customs developed during the previous century are unfit for 21st century global problems (Hale et al., 2013). The CBD is a case in point where little progress have been made by the global international community to significantly halt biodiversity loss (Brondizio et al., 2019).

It is necessary to rethink global biodiversity governance to break the gridlock and bend the curve of biodiversity loss. The Action Agenda for Nature and People offers a possibility to engage a broader coalition of non-state and sub-national actors, and change biodiversity governance. It could contribute to breaking institutional gridlocks by

inspiring government to increase their ambition levels; building new multi-stakeholder coalitions to take up implementation; and finding innovative solutions to existing problems such as the lack of involvement of key economic sectors or lack of finance. The Action Agenda reflects a broader trend from *government* to *governance* in which global governance is no longer carried out solely through intergovernmental cooperation and multilateral organisations, but also through an international community including public and private actors such as cities, companies and civil society organisations. The Action Agenda also reflects a world which is moving from single-issue environmental governance dominated by governments to a wider network of intertwined governance institutions and actors connecting various issue areas (Biermann et al., 2009). Issues such as climate change, biodiversity and health are not compartmentalised to single institutions but, instead, are ruled by networks of institutions and actors trying to realise their objectives through different forms of governance (also referred to as ‘modes of governance’), including hierarchical governance, markets, networks and self-organisation.

Elinor Ostrom, the 2009 Nobel laureate in economics, made a pertinent claim arguing that ‘*instead of focusing only on global efforts (which are indeed a necessary part of the long-term solution), it is better to encourage polycentric efforts*’ suggesting that we should move away from thinking in terms of ‘global solutions’ and instead think of a multitude of smaller efforts that jointly create a more effective solution to common problems (2010, p. 550). For decision-makers, polycentricity presents a formidable governance challenge in terms of navigating and intervening in a complex landscape of institutions and initiatives, state, non-state, sub-national or hybrid, trying to assess where and how to get the best ‘bang for your buck’. When global issues move from being negotiated in single institutions to a network of initiatives and institutions, it changes the required skill set, capacities and toolbox for pursuing ones interest internationally (Slaughter, 2017).

The discussion on a post-2020 framework for the CBD is thus a window of opportunity for inserting new dynamics into global biodiversity governance based on principles of polycentricity, networked institutions and international cooperative initiatives.

2.2 Learning from other policy domains

Important lessons for the post-2020 biodiversity framework about the potential of involving non-state and sub-national actors can be drawn from other policy domains, in particular climate change, the 2030 development agenda and ocean governance.

From the UNFCCC process and the Global Climate Action Agenda which emerged in the years leading up to the Paris Agreement, important lessons for CBD can be drawn regarding the strategic role of the secretariat of the UNFCCC in building momentum towards the Paris Agreement. To mobilise non-state action, it was important to align the ‘imaginaries’ of all actors involved; sending the message that, by not committing to climate action, Parties would risk being ‘left out’ of history (Kok et al., 2018). This mindset has major

economic implications, among them the risks posed by stranded assets and the need for rapid divestment from fossils. Moreover, as non-state discussions are less constrained than formal, multilateral negotiations, they have facilitated the emergence of rather difficult topics, such as those on some key sectoral drivers of climate change. Lastly, the Global Climate Action Agenda has also been a way to increase and channel the energy of a multitude of international cooperative initiatives, because it helps to link these initiatives to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, creating a common focus in attention and energy (Chan et al., 2015; Kok et al., 2018, 2019; Rankovic et al., 2019; Widerberg, 2017).

In the context of 2030 sustainable development agenda and the SDGs, cooperative initiatives have featured prominently. SDG 17 on revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development explicitly acknowledges the contribution by multi-stakeholder partnerships, a specific form of cooperative initiatives, to achieving the SDGs. The UN has created a partnerships platform (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships.html>) for cooperative initiatives to register their actions. To date, the SD in Action Registry counts over 2,000 voluntary commitments and partnerships dealing with various aspects of sustainability, including on SDG 14 and 15 on Life below water and Life on land.

In ocean governance, voluntary commitments could become a game changer, enabled by 'Our Ocean conference series' initiated in 2014, and the United Nations (UN) Ocean Conference held for the first time in 2017 (Neumann and Unger, 2019). Both conferences resulted in large numbers of voluntary commitments. Neumann and Unger (2019) stress the importance of developing consistent pledge and review systems for these commitments as a next step as well as an overarching registry. They furthermore note that the voluntary commitments oceans processes ideally should be harmonised with the post-2020 biodiversity framework. A key building blocks for such a strategy could be a unified and comprehensive global registry for voluntary commitments. The existing pledging schemes and registries of voluntary commitments under the UN Ocean and the Our Ocean conferences would lend themselves as strong starting points to developing such a global registry and reporting mechanism (Neumann and Unger, 2019).

Learning from past experience, observers have identified four promises and pitfalls regarding non-state and sub-national actions across issue areas (Chan et al., 2019). First, while non-state and sub-national actors could fill 'governance gaps' left by governments in the implementation of international agreements, it will be important to develop adequate monitoring and reporting systems. A lack of clear accounting procedures could lead to overestimations and double-counting of efforts in analysing the adequacy of commitments in view of realising agreed international goals and targets (see Widerberg and Pattberg, 2015). Second, non-state and sub-national action could improve policy-making by providing information and knowledge and other governance functions as mentioned above, increase inclusivity, and stimulate co-benefits such as employment and innovation (Pattberg et al., 2019). However, geographical imbalances in implementation may benefit certain regions, primarily the global north and also may lead public authorities to delegate responsibility to private actors, including shirking of previous

agreements (Zelli and van Asselt, 2013). Third, non-state and sub-national action could provide solutions that are scalable and replicable, however, many have yet to demonstrate their effectiveness (see also van der Ven et al., 2016). Fourth, non-state and sub-national actors could have a catalytic effect, crowding in more actions and leveraging new resources by coalition-building and norm diffusion (see Chan et al., 2015). However, such effects depend on their local context and level of political support (Pattberg et al., 2019).

In sum, including non-state and sub-national actions in the post-2020 biodiversity framework has a number of possible benefits. These include:

- engaging more and new actors in halting biodiversity loss and helping to mainstream biodiversity into relevant economic sectors and across society;
- helping to build a positive momentum around global biodiversity conservation which is especially important in the run up to COP-15 in China in 2020;
- building confidence for governments to adopt more ambitious biodiversity goals, knowing that non-state and sub-national actors support stronger action;
- fostering innovative and experimental partnerships and governance arrangements breaking gridlocks, for example between conservation community and productive sectors such as agriculture and fisheries;
- providing a variety of governance functions, some of which receive less attention in public policies, including setting up standards and commitments, providing funding, creating and disseminating information, and executing projects on the ground.

The Action Agenda for Nature and People provides a platform and opportunity for harnessing these abovementioned potentials. Having outlined the new dynamics and potential of the Action Agenda, the next chapter provides an overview of current international cooperative initiatives for biodiversity, sketching the contours of an emerging global biodiversity governance landscape 'beyond' the CBD.

3 The landscape of international cooperative initiatives for biodiversity

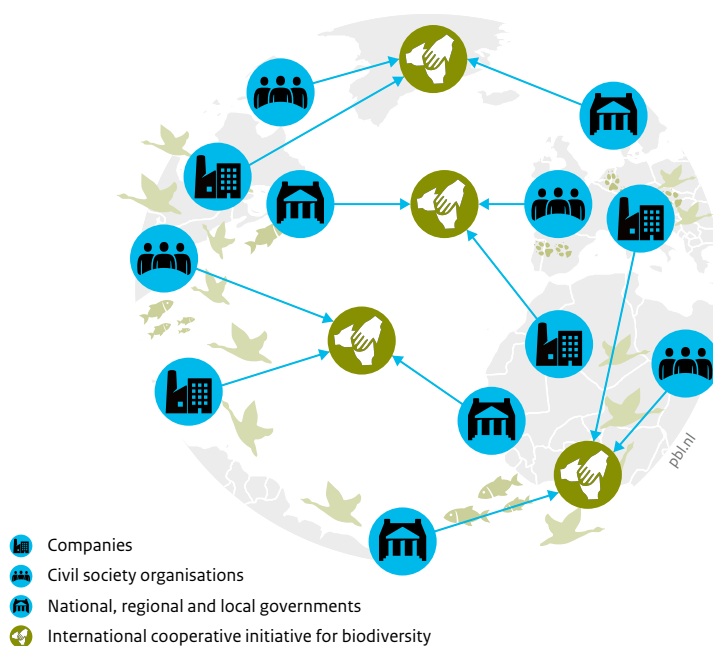
The landscape of international biodiversity governance is becoming increasingly crowded and diverse. The mapping of international cooperative initiatives in this chapter provides a first insight into which actors take what action and where. The chapter first describes the mapping approach and then presents the results.

3.1 Mapping approach

The mapping focuses on international cooperative initiatives for biodiversity, covering land, fresh water and oceans. These are initiatives that are: '(i) international and transnational institutions, which not only have the (ii) intention to guide policy and the behaviour of their members or a broader community, but also explicitly mention the (iii) common governance goal, accomplishable by (iv) significant governance functions' (Widerberg et al., 2016). International cooperative initiatives consist of companies, civil society organisations, and national, regional or local governments working together in various constellations that are either public, private or hybrid (see Figure 1). Initiatives have different roles in the biodiversity governance landscape that we call governance functions: standards and commitments; information and networking; financing; and operational (Abbott, 2012; Pattberg et al., 2017). The mapping also includes biodiversity related multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). National, local or individual initiatives are excluded.

For selecting initiatives, the mapping started with merging existing scientific databases produced by Pattberg et al. 2017 (updated in 2019); other IVM, PBL and IUCN databases; and, searching the internet and screening online databases (see Figure 2). This returned 621 initiatives. However, several of the initiatives focus on issue areas that are only indirectly related to biodiversity. To identify initiatives that *directly* target biodiversity,

Figure 1
International cooperative initiatives for biodiversity

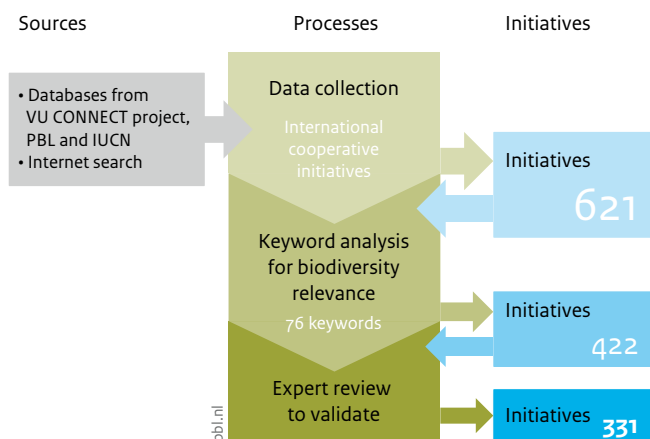


Source: PBL

we selected those that self-identify as biodiversity initiatives. Statements were collected for each of the 621 initiative (e.g. mission statement, vision or strategic goals) describing their core focus. The statements were parsed for keywords identified by experts. The keywords were divided into three groups depending on their relevance (see Appendix). Tier 1 initiatives included the word ‘biodiversity’ (search string: ‘*biodivers**’). Tier 2 initiatives included ‘strong’ keywords associated with biodiversity. Tier 3 initiatives included ‘weak’ keywords. The tiered system helped the study team to create robust identification of relevant initiatives. Subsequently, eight experts reviewed the list of initiatives.

For each initiative, we collected data on starting year and on their members (public, private or civil society organisations). To be counted as a member, an organisation should thus have the potential to influence the rules and direction of the initiative, i.e. not merely adhering to their rules. For instance, in the Forest Stewardship Council, members are part of the governing council of the FSC. Those actors that use the FSC to label their products are not considered members. We also excluded individual people.

Figure 2
Research process



Source: PBL

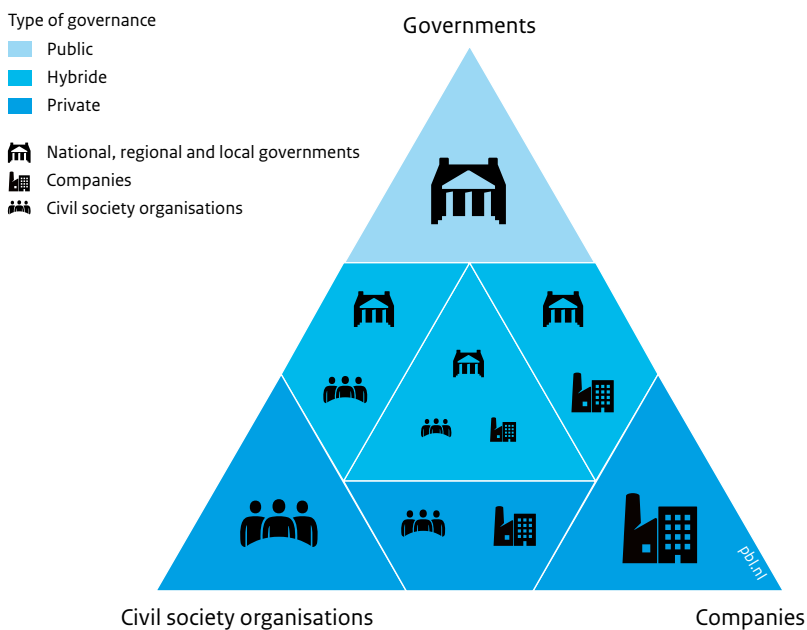
The distribution of members also reflect their position in the ‘governance triangle’, which is a heuristic tool to organise transnational initiatives according to their composition (Abbott, 2012; Abbott and Snidal, 2009) (see Figure 3). The triangle helps the reader to understand what type of membership constellations that are most common and to what extent public actors, private actors and CSOs collaborate. The triangle consists of seven zones representing various constellations of members. Zone 1 contains only public initiatives, zone 2 only private initiatives by companies and zone 3 only civil society organisations. Zones 4, 5 and 6 contain various combinations between two types of the three actors and, zone 7 contains multi-stakeholder initiatives between public, private and civil society organisations.

Data on functions, themes, sectors, and geographical coverage were collected to determine what types of initiatives do what and where. As mentioned above, we distinguish between four different functions: standards and commitments, information and networking, financing and operational (Abbott, 2012; Pattberg et al., 2017), depicted in Figure 4.

Thematic focus was divided into four variables. First, what of the CBD’s main themes that the initiative addresses (conservation, sustainable use or access and benefit sharing), second, which sustainable development goal(s) the initiative addresses, third, what Aichi Target the initiative addresses, and finally, what of the CBD’s seven thematic programmes and additional themes the initiative addresses.

Figure 3

Distribution of international cooperative initiatives in the governance landscape



Source: based on Abbott and Snidal, 2009; Abbott, 2012; Pattberg et al., 2007

We also collected data on the initiative's year of initiation, geographical target area, budget, and headquarter location. Finally, for a subset of 99 initiatives that had the strongest match in terms of key words, we gathered data on their monitoring, reporting and verification procedures, to gain insight to whether they are following up on their commitments internally.

The next section describes and analyses the outcomes of the data-gathering effort.

Figure 4

Functions of international cooperative initiatives for biodiversity



Source: PBL

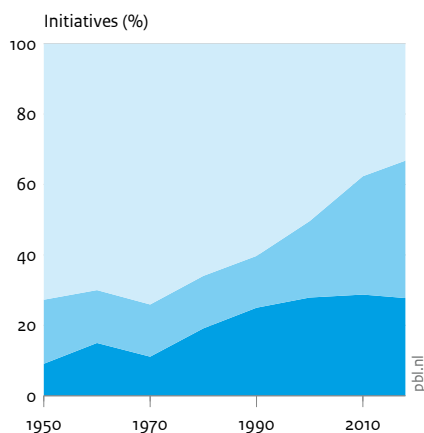
3.2 Depicting the landscape of international cooperative initiatives for biodiversity

A crowded and diverse landscape, with increasing participation of private and civil society actors...

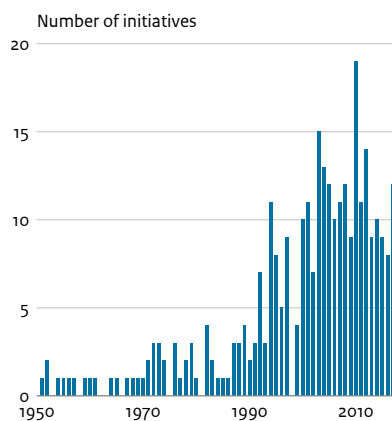
We identified 331 initiatives that work internationally or transnationally on biodiversity. Even though there are initiatives that date back to the 1940's and 50's, primarily FAO related initiatives, the vast majority have started after the adoption of the CBD in 1992. Peaks of new initiatives being started can be seen around major biodiversity or environment related international events such as the Rio Conventions in 1992, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, and the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. The general trend is an increase in multi-stakeholder partnerships between public, private and civil society actors engaging in biodiversity through various initiatives suggesting that the landscape is becoming not only more crowded but also more diverse in terms of actors. In 1950, 73% of all initiatives were public compared to 34% in 2018. Respectively, in 1950, 9% of all initiatives were private and 18% hybrid, compared to 28% and 39% in 2018 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
International cooperative initiatives, by type of governance and year of initiation

Initiatives, by type of governance



Total of initiatives by year of initiation



Type of governance (n = 331)



Source: PBL

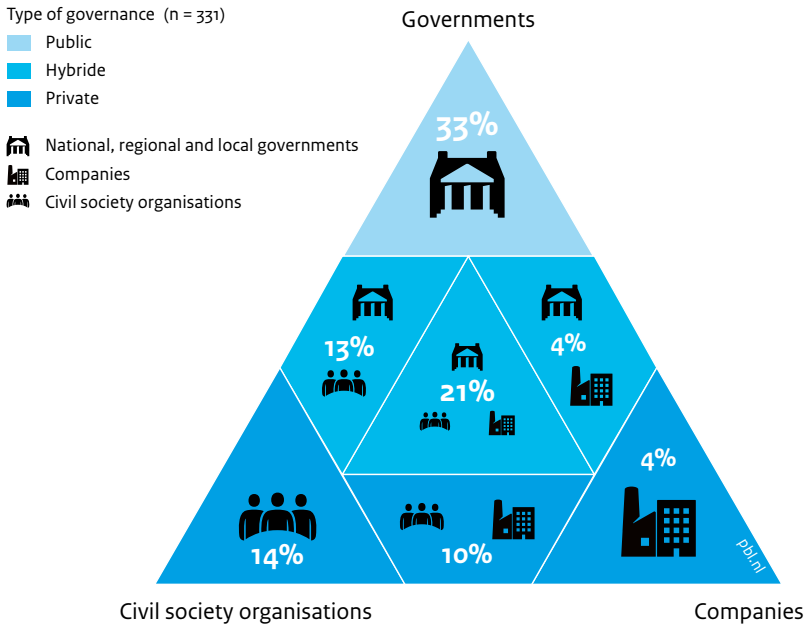
...consisting of relatively small initiatives...

Most initiatives are fairly small with less than 50 members; the average initiative has 415 members, the median a mere 17 members. There are large differences in size of initiatives in terms of membership. The smallest initiatives have only a few members, whereas the largest ones incorporate thousands. The larger initiatives often focus on biodiversity-related issues in supply chains, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil or the Better Cotton Initiative, or they are city networks such as ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, with 1750 members. These large initiatives are set up as network structures, with horizontal decision-making procedures and governing councils being populated by members on a rotating and voluntary basis.

...involving primarily public and hybrid constellations...

The distribution of initiatives in the governance triangle shows that public and multi-stakeholder (or ‘hybrid’) initiatives are most frequently represented in the data (see Figure 6). One hundred and ten initiatives, equalling a third of all observations, are positioned in the upper zone, meaning that they comprise only public actors such as national governments, regions and cities. In second place, with 21%, we found hybrid initiatives, meaning that they include public, private and civil society actors. Hence, while businesses and CSOs are

Figure 6
Percentage of international cooperative initiatives in each zone



Total percentage does not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: based on Abbott and Snidal, 2009; Abbott, 2012; Pattberg et al., 2007

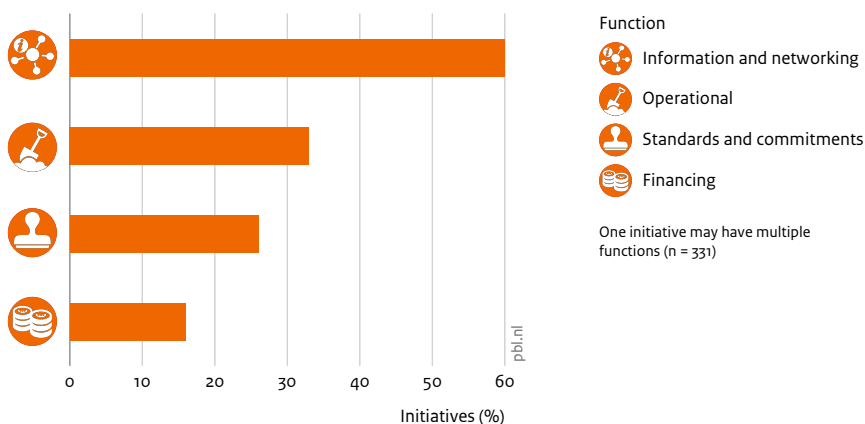
increasingly engaged in biodiversity, public actors are part of over 70% of all initiatives. The governance triangle also reveals that some actors are more prone to collaborate than others. There are three times more initiatives in which public actors and CSOs collaborate than public actors and businesses. Companies, thus, seem more likely to collaborate directly with CSOs or with public actors and CSOs in multi-stakeholder partnerships than with the public sector only. Also, when compared to the climate domain, the business sector seems not to operate very effectively on its own, suggesting it needs collaboration with partners from other sectors to be seen as credible in the biodiversity domain.

...engaging in networking and knowledge sharing activities...

Initiatives perform various governance functions (see Figure 7). The majority, about 60%, focus on information sharing and networking alone or in combination with other functions. Information sharing and networking could be multifaceted however. IFOAM – Organics International for instance, engages in awareness raising activities for consumers to buy organic foods through campaigning and providing a ‘resource centre’ for organic foods and agriculture. It also displays capacity building activities such as training farmers in organic methods as well as advocacy activities towards policy communities and decision-

Figure 7

International cooperative initiative for biodiversity that fulfil specific function

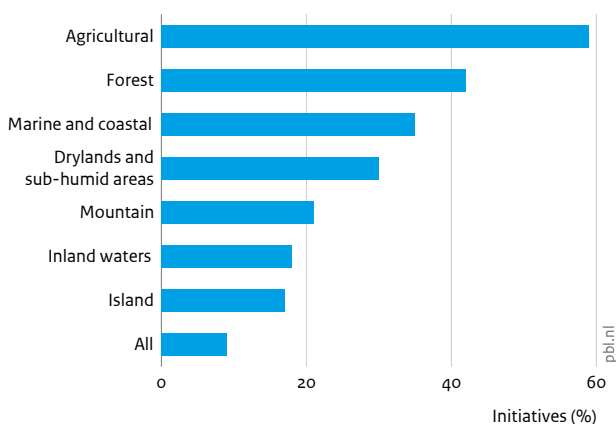


Source: PBL

makers regarding the perceived benefits of organic farming (<https://www.ifoam.bio/>). The second most popular (33%) governance function is 'operational' alone or in combination with other functions. Initiatives with operational functions implement projects on the ground such as the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, which provides a platform for projects all over the world that remove 'ghost gear' from the fishing industry referring to 'any fishing gear that has been abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded, and is the most harmful form of marine debris' (<https://www.ghostgear.org/>). The third most popular governance function is 'standards and commitments' (26%) where initiatives develop and implement voluntary rules for their members and other target actors. For instance, the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP) is a multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to produce biodiversity indicators for 'the CBD and other biodiversity-related Conventions, for IPBES, for reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals, and for use by national and regional governments' (<https://www.bipindicators.net/>). The BIP thus is active in collecting and creating new standards for how to measure progress in biodiversity conservation using a collaborative approach. Many standard and commitment initiatives focus on specific sectors or supply chains. The Better Cotton Initiative (<https://bettercotton.org/>) for example, focuses on the cotton production chain and has created the Better Cotton Standard System which measures economic, social and environmental aspects of cotton as a commodity. Finally, the least popular type of governance function is 'financing', which deals with various types of providing or facilitating biodiversity finance. The Biodiversity Finance Initiative for example helps countries with assessing current financial flows towards biodiversity, estimates gaps in biodiversity finance, identifies instruments for closing those gaps, and provides guidance on how to implement those instruments (<https://www.biodiversityfinance.net/index.php/about-biofin/biofin-approach>).

Figure 8

International cooperative initiatives addressing CBD programmes



One initiative may address multiple CBD programmes (n = 331)

Source: PBL

...focusing on forests and agriculture...

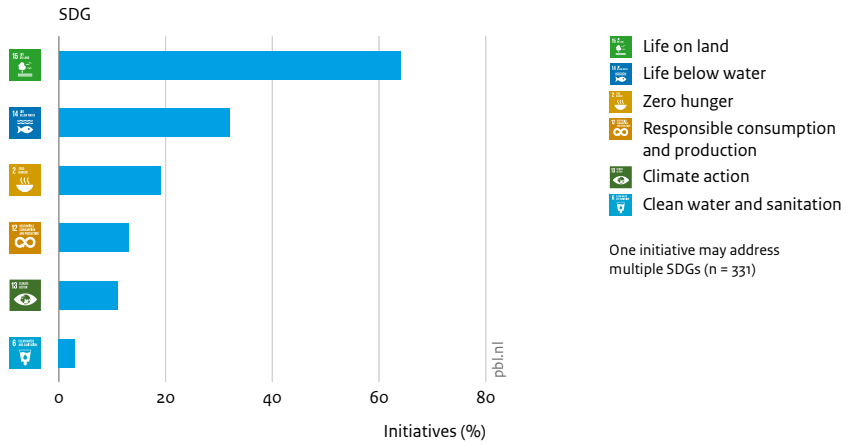
Beyond functions we also analysed in how far existing cooperative initiatives address governance goals incorporated in the CBD and SDGs. The by far most popular CBD programme-related theme is agriculture with 59% of all initiatives, followed by forests which engages 42% of the initiatives. Inland waters, Islands and Mountains are far less popular with about 18% each (see Figure 8).

In terms of global goals set in multilateral processes (the SDGs and the Aichi targets) the distribution of thematic focus is perhaps not very surprising. 64% of the initiatives relate to SDG 15 – *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*, and 32% to SDG 14 – *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development* (see Figure 9). Concerning the Aichi targets, 40% of the initiatives are in line with target 4 – *By 2020, at the latest, Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits*, and 46% in line with target 7 – *By 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity* (see Figure 10).

The distributions are also reflected in terms of sector focus where over 35% of the initiatives focus on forest exploration, 30% on oceans, 29% on smallholders, and 27% on agro-industry farming (note that one initiative can be part of several sector). Less popular

Figure 9

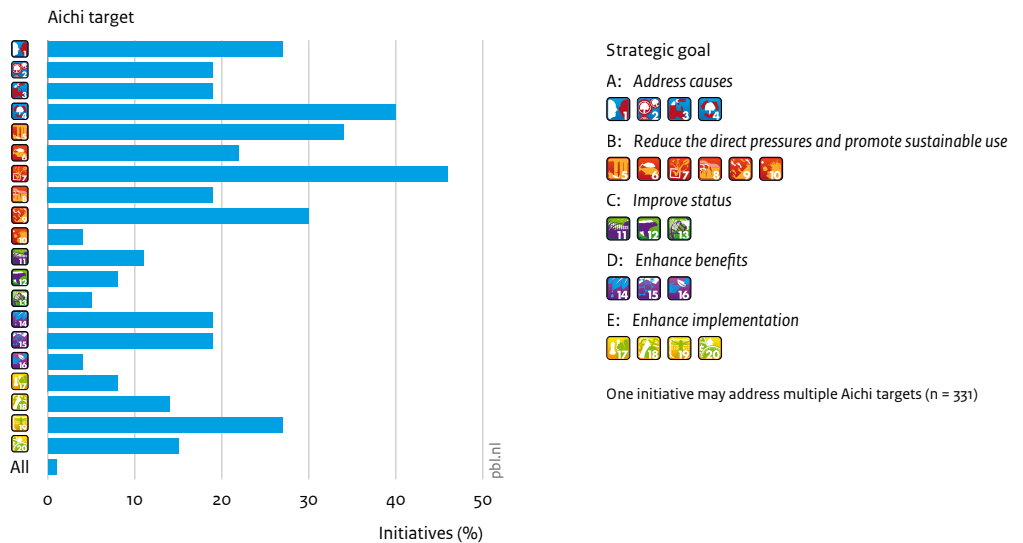
International cooperative initiatives addressing selected Sustainable Development Goals



Source: PBL

Figure 10

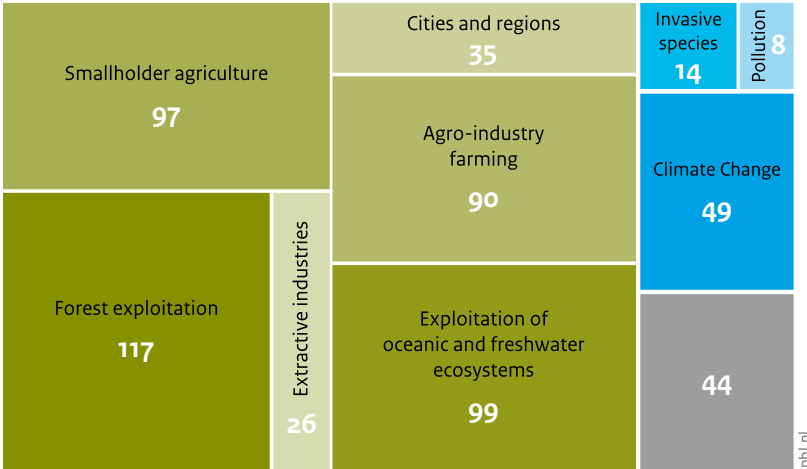
International cooperative initiatives addressing the Aichi targets



Source: PBL

Figure 11

International cooperative initiatives, per sector and cross-sectoral threats



- Sector
- Cross-sectoral threat
- Not addressing a specific sector or threat

One initiative may address multiple sectors or cross-sectoral threats (n=331)

Source: PBL

sectors and cross-sectoral threats are extractive industries and invasive species with a respective 8% and 4% of the initiatives (see Figure 11).

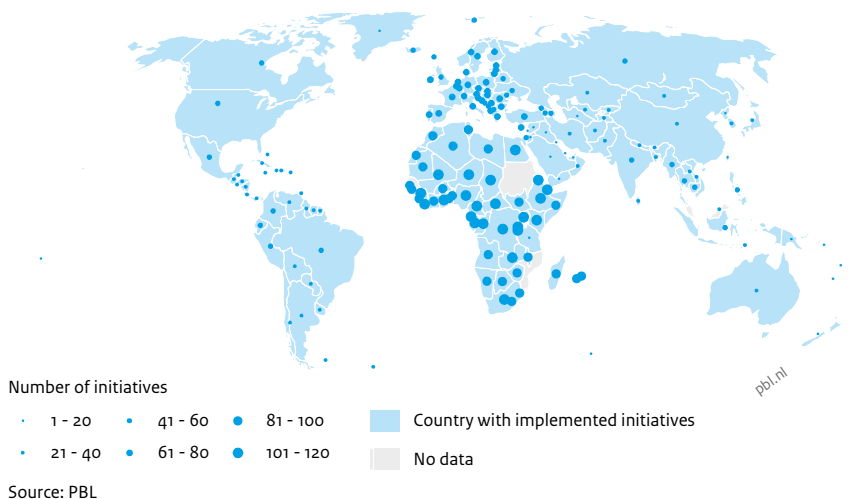
...having headquarters in large cities in developed countries, targeting biodiversity issues in Africa and Europe...

Looking at the geographical spread of initiatives, there is a concentration of headquarters of initiatives in cities located in Europe and the United States, including London, Washington, Bonn and Rome. This distribution likely reflects the tendency of large international organisations, such as the World Bank or the FAO, to be hosting secretariats for the initiatives. It could also mean that initiatives strategically locate their headquarters in places where they are close to decision-making processes, such as the UNFCCC negotiations that have their secretariat as well as all intersessional meetings in Bonn.

The geographical target areas of the initiatives are better distributed than their headquarters. The best represented region in terms of target area is Africa followed by Europe. Large regions and countries including Latin America, China, and India are not as well represented in terms of number of initiatives.

Figure 12

Countries where international cooperative initiatives are implemented



...with monitoring mechanisms in place but weak targets and few sanctioning opportunities.

Starting new voluntary commitments and initiatives are good for attracting publicity and creating goodwill. At some point, monitoring, reporting, verification (MRV) and, if needed, sanctioning becomes important building blocks for an Action Agenda. From a subset of 99 initiatives in our database, we therefore collected data on goals, MRV and sanctions. Nearly 80% of the initiatives have some kind of monitoring framework in place, and a little bit less than 50% of those even have annual reporting. In terms of setting targets, only 23% of the initiatives have quantitative targets. Such quantitative targets have been associated with more effective initiatives (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2016). The Bonn Challenge for instance has a goal to 'bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030', making it both quantitative and time-bound (<http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/challenge>). Such goals facilitate learning and understanding of what international cooperative initiatives contribute to global biodiversity goals. Finally, in cases of non-compliance, there seems to be few mechanisms in place for 'punishing' members. Only 12% of the initiatives report on any type of sanctioning mechanism.

4 The way forward

The 'Action Agenda for Nature and People' is potentially a powerful vehicle for increasing the ambition level of global biodiversity policy and to move towards rapid and scalable implementation. To make the Action Agenda an effective part of the post-2020 framework, it will be important for parties and stakeholders to show leadership. Leadership is urgently needed to provide impetus; to structure and coordinate activities; and, build and maintain coalitions and partnerships (Kok et al., 2019; Rankovic et al, 2019).

Public, private and civil society actors already engage in a plethora of international cooperative initiatives. This policy brief presents a systematic mapping of already existing initiatives.

A number of findings stand out:

- International cooperative initiatives for biodiversity are pervasive and cover public, hybrid and private organisational forms of collaboration. A transnational regime complex for global biodiversity governance has emerged and will likely continue to develop 'beyond the CBD', involving thousands of non-state and sub-national actors in the quest for halting biodiversity loss, but retaining the strong role of states.
- Business appears more likely to collaborate with CSOs directly or with public actors and CSOs in multi-stakeholder partnerships than with the public sector only. Also, when compared to the climate domain (Widerberg et al., 2016), companies seem not to operate much on their own, suggesting they need collaboration with other partners to be seen as a credible partner in the biodiversity domain.
- Initiatives are predominantly focusing on information sharing and networking (60%) followed by operational, on the ground, activities (33%) and third, standards and commitments (26%). The least common function is financing.
- Initiatives are active in areas with high biodiversity values, managed landscapes and urban areas, focussing both on conservation as well as on sustainable use in relevant production sectors and reflecting activities on the multiple values of nature. The most popular sectors, in terms of number of initiatives, are agriculture and forestry.
- Mapping the geographical coverage of the initiatives suggests quite a broad distribution of activities. There is much activity in Europe and most part of the African continent. However, parts of Asia, primarily China and India, as well as Latin America feature less frequently in the data.
- From a subset of initiatives (n = 99), about 80% have some kind of monitoring in place suggesting awareness and possibility to track progress. Yet less than 50% have annual reporting and only about a fourth of the initiatives have quantitative targets, making evaluation efforts challenging.

The mapping shows some areas where there could be more initiatives, but the overall picture that emerges suggest that there are thousands of public, private and civil society actors collaborating in hundreds of cooperative initiatives on various biodiversity related topics. The question for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework is how to build productive linkages between the CBD and the broader multilateral system and international cooperative initiatives. How can the CBD, through the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, best capture the benefits from non-state biodiversity initiatives already happening, as well as further enable non-state action (Kok et al., 2019; Pattberg et al., 2019; Rankovic et al., 2019)?

Short-term priorities – Building momentum towards COP-15

The Action Agenda will evolve, over time. In the short term, prior to COP-15, the Action Agenda can help to build a positive momentum around global biodiversity governance to arrive at a meaningful post-2020 global framework. Non-state and sub-national actors outside the formal negotiations can exert pressure on international processes and may contribute to a strong post-2020 global biodiversity framework as agreed on by countries in Kunming. It would furthermore sow the seeds for what could become a more ‘Global Action Agenda for Nature and People’ as part of the actual design and implementation of post-2020 framework.

This means, first of all, that the narrative for the Action Agenda needs to be further developed (including an explanation of its priorities, functions and purposes), widely communicated and agreed on. Non-state and sub-national actors have to be convinced that there is much to gain from being part of this societal mobilisation and much to lose from not participating. Given the short time until COP-15, current efforts to develop the Action Agenda for Nature and People, for example by the secretariat of the CBD, would need to be intensified.

For the coming period, it seems therefore to be most important for non-state and sub-national actors and countries to generate as many voluntary non-state commitments as possible and make them visible at the portal for the Action Agenda to show an emerging ‘groundswell’ of action. This means submitting new commitments, but also including and expanding on pledges that have been made, over the last few years in the CBD, by various non-state actors; these initiatives need to be included in the current process and lessons learned must also be taken into account.

Providing non-state and sub-national actors with an equal opportunity to pledge their commitment requires an official platform and registry where these can be aggregated. This can be done on the website that has been launched by the CBD. Such portal to bring all commitments together and showcase them is an important element of the Action Agenda, but should not be seen as the only one.

Furthermore, the Action Agenda for Nature and People needs to be linked with other action agendas and portals (i.e. those for climate, ocean, SDGs, cities and biodiversity), as in these policy domains action agendas are also being developed as part of their international institutional frameworks. The CBD has to relate to, build on and collaborate with these processes, because many of these commitments are highly relevant for biodiversity and vice versa. Building on and collaborating with other policy agendas and already existing non-state and sub-national platforms can align the expectations and actions of different actors towards desired changes (and attract new ones). Leveraging the momentum and data collected in other policy domains could be beneficial since many of the commitments made in other policy domains also have implications for biodiversity and could be made visible in the context of the CBD without necessarily having to be resubmitted to the CBD. Stressing the linkages and interdependence between biodiversity loss and other key societal challenges, such as climate change, oceans and the broader SDG agenda will also raise the political profile of biodiversity conservation.

A high-level Biodiversity Summit as scheduled for the General Assembly in September 2020, for both government officials and non-state actors, will help to raise the profile of biodiversity and improve cooperation and provide an important platform for exchanging knowledge and information. Such an event could be organised on an annual basis, to ensure increased cooperation and ensure that non-state and sub-national biodiversity action stays on the political agenda.

Encouraging actors to engage in the process needs to be done with as little formal burden as possible, but some basic process criteria will be required. To ensure credibility, pledges and voluntary commitments should indicate ambition levels (what to achieve), how to achieve those levels (i.e. the measures) and how monitoring and reporting will be done. These commitments will need to become publicly available and transparent to facilitate learning.

Challenges for the Action Agenda

We also identified some challenges for the CBD to develop and implement the Action Agenda successfully.

First, there is much debate on if, how and who can coordinate non-state and sub-national biodiversity action. The CBD Secretariat, for instance, is unlikely to have the willingness or capacity to take on such a potentially immense task of guiding a vast and heterogeneous group of actors. Instead, the Secretariat, in collaboration with other key organisations, such as IUCN, ICLEI or the Natural Capital Coalition, could provide a focal point for facilitating dialogue between partners during and between COPs. Such a 'soft touch' approach would have the purpose to build coalitions of the willing among governments, cities, companies and civil society organisations that could spearhead the Action Agenda.

Second, by introducing non-state and sub-national actors to the global biodiversity regime, national governments may try to shirk established norms and responsibility for

implementation under the CBD, relying on action being taken outside the formal negotiations. To be able to deal with this, accountability systems need to be developed that include both national and non-state and sub-national commitments. Periodic assessment of the progress made by non-state and sub-national actors could be carried out by a broader analytical community of international organisations, think tanks, academia and other research organisations. A format for doing so could be one that is similar to the annual Emissions Gap Report produced by UNEP aimed at the climate change policy domain.

Third, how to leverage international initiatives and coalitions to achieve biodiversity goals? Lessons learned for success of multi-stakeholder partnerships include improved MRV procedures, enhanced involvement of relevant actors and the fact that disclosure is required to enhance transparency. To further enhance partnerships, science-based targets and methodologies that could be used at a national or sectoral level would allow non-state actors to set their own targets aligned with international goals and targets to identify strategies and actions to achieve these targets.

Fourth, credibility remains a key challenge, proving that non-state and sub-national actor move from word to action. The threats of greenwashing and bluewashing are ever present, with companies getting access to the CBD for public relation purposes without having demonstrated actual improvements to biodiversity. It is therefore important to emphasise the role of analysis and transparency, providing decision-makers in both private and public organisations with the proper basis for deciding whether to engage in or support an initiative.

Medium-term prospects – the Action Agenda as part of the post-2020 biodiversity framework

If a strong Action Agenda emerges in the coming 18 months, further engagement from the CBD and its parties will be expected by non-state and sub-national actors. These actors need to be included in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework in a meaningful way.

Therefore, the longer term challenge is to link the Action Agenda with existing and newly envisioned implementation mechanisms within CBD. Beyond COP-15, the question then becomes if and how the Action Agenda can become part of the post-2020 framework and how the Action Agenda will relate to the existing and new CBD implementation mechanisms (National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), national reporting, accountability mechanisms, ratcheting). Questions have been raised how non-state voluntary commitments would relate to (voluntary) biodiversity commitments by Parties. If the post-2020 Biodiversity framework would indeed decide on a commitment process comparable to those of the National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the ratcheting mechanism towards objectives of the Paris Agreement, national commitments will most likely be based on the NBSAPs of Parties. Non-state commitments will be additional and may to a certain extent overlap with the national commitments of Parties. This would need to be dealt with further as part of a strengthened accountability mechanism in the post-2020 framework.

After COP-15, accountability requirements will need to increase for non-state actors and a monitoring, reporting and verification system needs to be put in place (the Yearbook of Global Climate Action and the UNEP Emissions Gap Report could serve as examples here). Efforts to independently monitor and assess progress by non-state and sub-national actors are necessary to prevent voluntary commitments that are neither monitorable nor measurable, as was the case in Johannesburg 2002 and Rio+20 in 2012 (Ramstein, 2012). The role of this such MRV system would be (as also suggested by Neumann and Unger (2019) in the Oceans domain) to take stock of voluntary commitments; report on progress on implementation; provide transparency and independent verification; facilitate learning amongst initiatives, provide joint quality criteria for voluntary commitments; identify trends and highlight thematic and geographical gaps; and analyse distance and progress to the new goals and targets. An MRV system which encourages experimentation and learning is likely to be more effective, compared to an approach that would focus too strongly on criteria and stringent MRV procedures. The right balance between mandatory registration criteria and accountability processes, and freedom of experimentation, must be found.

Further involvement of non-state and sub-national actors in the post-2020 framework, for example in broader stocktaking and review mechanisms could help them to better display actions with a positive contribution to biodiversity and their contribution to new globally agreed targets. In this way, non-state and sub-national actors would be given a more formal position in the process. In addition, showcasing their actions could help to increase state ambitions, by showing the willingness of non-state actors to take action in their respective sectors and realms.

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Abbreviations

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
MRV	Monitoring Reporting Verification
NBSAPs	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SBI	Subsidiary Body for Implementation
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Appendix

These are the search terms that were used for filling the database:

Direct biodiversity link	biodivers*
Strong keywords	conservation of biodiversity, conservation of biological diversity, biological diversity, convention on biological diversity, cbd, protected area, aichi, benefit-sharing, benefit sharing, sharing of benefits, conserv*, ecosystem, forest*, genetic diversity, genetic resources, habitat, species, natural capital, nature based solutions, nature protection, nature, restoration, rewilding, zero extinction, ipbes, nature-based, biocultural, extinction, wildlife, red list, fish*, marine protection, flora, fauna, invasive
Weak keywords	ecosystem service*, biological resources, earth stewardship, ecological, nagoya protocol, safeguard*, stewardship, sustainable management, sustainable use, use sustainably, integrated landscape management, natural heritage, land degradation, natural assets, redd, ecotourism, sacred natural sites, seed, mangrove, natural resource management, degradation, biomes, genomes, illegal trade, hunting, monoculture, gmo, palm oil, permaculture, biodynamic, esg, agriculture, earth, planet, soy, cocoa, cotton, livestock, desertification, unccd

* to search for mutple forms of this word



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