

Assessing the implementation of biodiversity governance: Methods, structures and synergies

Governance Proposal for the Together First Initiative
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Background

Countries around the world have taken on international commitments to protect and preserve biodiversity. To safeguard species, ecosystems, and human health, and to promote resilience governments have created international agreements that guide their national behavior to manage conservation. Implementing the obligations under the conventions reflects the extent to which countries are committed to environmental protection and shows good governance. Yet, the level of implementation has not been empirically measured and is largely unknown.

As a result, there is no baseline against which to assess performance, actions, or even expectations; and without empirical evidence, we risk erroneous conclusions and inappropriate regulatory interventions based on assumptions rather than evidence. Importantly, in the absence of measurement of implementation, it is impossible to determine whether the conventions help solve the problems they were created to address. Furthermore, new governance instruments—specifically the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework—are currently under negotiation and call for additional measures that guarantee their implementation and effectiveness. Synergies need to be developed among the different governance mechanisms to guarantee that

This proposal aims at bridging this gap. The project will address the implementation of five of the existing governance mechanisms that address biodiversity loss and ecosystems management: the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The goal of this proposal is threefold: One, to expand the analysis of the implementation of governance mechanisms to all the MEAs included in this proposal. Two, to evaluate how these governance mechanisms can develop additional synergies not only in terms of their contribution to halt biodiversity loss, but also regarding their organizational structures, their operations at the national level, and their contribution to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically SDG15 Life on Land. And three, to connect the role of the different MEAs with the definitions that will be established by the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that is currently being negotiated in the context of the United Nations.

The core of the proposal is the analysis of the implementation of the global biodiversity conventions, assessing the actions signatory countries have taken to fulfill their commitments, the national and global synergies among the different instruments and the process of implementing the Post-2020 Framework. The analysis will illustrate trends across countries, within countries and across conventions. It also creates a knowledge repository that creates a baseline to measure progress on sustainable development and that analyzes the factors that enable or prevent countries from implementing their obligations. This is especially important to developing countries as they seek to solve environmental problems more efficiently and effectively.

Premises, goals and objectives

Our work to-date, in consultation with several governments, has shown that there is demand for improved reporting, relevant analysis, and capacity building to facilitate the implementation of MEAs in general and of global biodiversity conventions in particular. Two premises, therefore, inform the initiative:

- Countries have little systematic, comparative information about their performance on global environmental goals and obligations. As a result, policymakers cannot articulate clear goals, strategies, and actions and mobilize necessary financial, human and institutional resources.
- If relevant and reliable information were available, countries would be inclined to improve performance.

The goal is to measure the efficacy of conventions and help build capacity in countries to design and promote working solutions that are coherent with the existing governance mechanisms, and with their synergies with other global agendas. Standardizing the assessment of the process of implementation would enable measurement and comparison, facilitate learning and improvement, and enable the long-term resolution of environmental problems. To this end, the objectives are to create a vibrant learning space, enable effective decision making, and mobilize successful capacity building through the creation of a dynamic global network.

Visibility and communication

This proposal has the potential to become a publicly available standard for use by all stakeholders: conventions, countries, academia, NGOs, businesses, and international organizations. A high-quality web presence is being developed for the existing research on the method to assess implementation, and it can be expanded to create an online platform that includes rankings, subsidiary information, best practices, challenges, and a learning space that supports policy-making at the national level and capacity-building. The research teams behind this proposal may act as consultants in providing and assessing tailored analyses and presentations, workshops and training. Collaboration, technical assistance, and south-south cooperation tools will be employed to promote the improvement of national and global governance systems. Furthermore, this platform could engage biodiversity-related epistemic communities and activists in assessing implementation and sharing information about their respective countries. It can therefore be a collective intelligence platform for global biodiversity governance.

Vision

Our vision is to move this project from a research initiative to a public global governance benchmark. The combination of rankings, monitoring, the evaluation of governance structures, and the definition of synergies among governance mechanisms will allow us to understand what makes some states able to implement the conventions and why others lag behind, why some governance instruments are more influential than others. We are able to answer these questions through deep-dive reviews of countries and their policies and actions. We also seek to provide the assistance needed for improvement through learning, decision making, and capacity enhancement, to both countries and governance mechanisms. Ultimately, we would like to know what happens to the state of biodiversity when the conventions are being implemented. This is the next stage that we seek to explore through partnership with organizations that can assemble the necessary geospatial data to trace environmental change. With 15+ years of data on implementation through our current work, we can begin answering the question of whether international environmental law for biodiversity helps to resolve its loss and enhances its conservation.

Previous Partnerships

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