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COP15: The Global Biodiversity Framework

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The United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) ended in Montreal, Canada, on December 19, 2022 with a landmark agreement to protect at least 30% the planet’s lands, inland waters, coastal areas and oceans by 2030 (known as the “30x30” target). The [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(GBF\)](#) was adopted by almost 200 countries after intense final negotiations. European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the agreement was a “Road map to protect and restore nature” that complemented the climate change mitigation-focused Paris Agreement. Unlike the Paris Agreement, however, the GBF is not legally binding. Controversy emerged during the negotiations as several African nations complained that the final version of the framework was pushed through without debate. The Democratic Republic of Congo, although it did not object formally, expressed unhappiness over the deal, while Uganda described the approval process as a “fraud” and a “coup d’état.” Responding to criticisms, China’s environment minister and COP15 president, Huang Runqiu, stated during the final UN session that he had tried his “best to bring . . . a balanced package” and that “after so many years of difficult negotiations . . . there’s no magic formula that allows all of us to be completely happy.”

The main area of contention involved how to pay the costs that will be incurred to realize the GBF’s goals. The parties ultimately agreed to establish a global biodiversity fund with contributions of \$20 billion/year by 2025 and \$30 billion/year by 2030 from the existing United Nations Global Environmental Facility (GEF). China, Brazil, Indonesia, India and Mexico currently receive the largest amounts from the GEF. While some COP15 attendees expressed disappointment at the amount of these planned distributions, Japan, the EU and certain other countries objected to creating a new separate biodiversity fund, arguing that existing

environmental funding mechanisms are sufficient. The EU has already pledged €7 billion towards biodiversity conservation between 2021 and 2027. The GBF adds to this effort by including pledges to cease at least \$500 billion a year of subsidies for activities deemed harmful to nature such as agriculture and fishing.

The GBF sets forth four goals in furtherance of a 2050 Vision for Biodiversity as well as 23 targets for 2030. These four long-term goals aim to (A) preserve, restore, and increase the area of natural ecosystems, halt human induced extinction of known threatened species and reduce extinction risk of all species; (B) sustainably use, maintain and restore biodiversity; (C) share “the monetary and non-monetary benefits from the utilization of genetic resources, and digital sequence information on genetic resources, and of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources,” and preserve and increase access to knowledge of genetic resources; and (D) develop, secure and support the technology needed to implement the GBF and ensure access for all parties, particularly developing countries. The 23 shorter-term targets call for urgent action to reduce threats to biodiversity, improve sustainable use of natural resources, and develop and distribute solutions and tools to enable all people to promote sustainable consumption.

The agreed framework has received mixed reactions. The World Wildlife Fund stated that it is “particularly concerned by the weak language on species which would commit countries to halting extinctions at some point before 2050, instead of 2030,” while the Nature Conservancy’s Director of Global Policy, Institutions and Conservation Finance, Andrew Deutz, stated that “if more people grasped the pace, severity and long-term implications of biodiversity loss, the eyes of the world might have been focused on Montreal rather than [the World Cup in] Qatar over these two weeks. Against a backdrop of dramatic ecological declines in the face of human-driven pressures, the world badly needed CBD-COP15 to deliver – and, right at the death, it did just that, scoring a win for people and nature ... Make no mistake: this is an historic result for nature. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework provides a long-needed international blueprint to guide our collective turnaround of nature’s fortunes within this crucial decade.” Katie Leach, head of biodiversity at responsible investment NGO ShareAction, complained that the agreement was vague in certain areas and “non-specific targets in parts of the agreement could undermine the urgent action that’s needed to protect threatened wildlife and ecosystems.” Leach also stated that the success of the GBF would be measured by its “implementation and how the goals and targets are interpreted at a national level.”

Taking The Temperature: COP15 went a long way toward cementing nature and biodiversity concerns as a permanent feature of the sustainability discussion. While much of the general interest in sustainability focus historically has been on climate change mitigation and adaptation—the heart of the Paris Agreement and the recently concluded COP27 in Egypt where the parties established a historic loss and damage fund to compensate developing nations for climate-related harms—biodiversity has received relatively less attention. Regulators, standard-setting organizations, NGOs and industry, however, increasingly are focusing on biodiversity disclosure, risk and opportunity governance and impact assessment, as we have [reported](#) in describing reports on financial institutions’ biodiversity policies, [EU deforestation legislation](#), the Task Force on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures’ [latest recommendations](#), and [regulatory guidance](#) suggesting the need for banks to consider biodiversity risk and impact in decision making. In our view, from the perspective of issuers and their

boards, it is difficult to conceive how to separate material biodiversity and nature-related risks, opportunities and impacts from any other sustainability concern or other material development. Companies that pay insufficient attention not only to the potential impacts of climate-related nature developments on their business, but also their own impacts on nature (and, with them, possible boomerang effects on the companies themselves) risk missed opportunities to mitigate future harm and reap potential benefits associated with climate transition.