

A ROCHA
INTERNATIONAL



Tackling the Three Global Crises with Faith

Policy Statement from A Rocha to the 15th Meeting of the
Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological
Diversity (CBD COP15)

The Challenge

i) Drivers and causes of the crisis

The world is facing a three-fold crisis like no other previously experienced in the history of humanity. These issues are driven by unsustainable over-consumption and over-population. These are leading to: a) the rapid loss of our planet's biodiversity; b) climate change and a rapid increase in the global average temperature; and c) increasing inequality and poverty. Each of these three crises then impacts negatively on the other two: biodiversity loss drives climate change and poverty and inequality; climate change drives biodiversity loss and poverty and inequality; and poverty and inequality can have negative impacts on biodiversity loss and climate change, given the poorest are forced to prioritise short-term survival over longer-term sustainability.

There are five clear drivers feeding these crises, which are our over-demand for i) food, ii) water, iii) energy; iv) rapidly increasing built infrastructure, and the consequent v) waste and pollution. If we are to tackle all three of these crises, the five drivers must be addressed. In recent times biodiversity has often been considered to be of lesser importance – or even a luxury – when compared to other challenges we are facing. However, we believe that if we are to tackle all three crises effectively, biodiversity must be seen as of equal importance.

ii) The problem of human nature

Experience tells us that governments have set worthy and critical targets for biodiversity before, yet they have still not been achieved. Over the past 20 years, we have seen the world's governments come together to try to agree biodiversity targets (significantly in 2002 at the CBD COP5, in 2010 to develop the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets (CBD COP10), in 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly, but many more besides), but then have not had the political will to implement them. A Rocha understands this through the lens of the biblical understanding of human nature: though humanity might sign up to lofty ideals, for much of the time we then sacrifice these higher ambitions in the interests of short-term and often selfish gains. Therefore, we believe that a radically ambitious Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework needs to be backed up and enforced by legal measures and independent oversight in each country, so that those with power are held accountable for its implementation.

The Christian Basis for our Concern

For Christians, the basis for caring for the Earth runs much deeper than the imminent crisis facing us. Our first motivation is based on God's concern for life on earth in all its variety. This concern is woven into the central themes of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation¹. Biodiversity is also at the heart of God's plan for redemption and renewal²; in Genesis 1, God's delight in trees, other plants, fish, mammals, birds and 'creeping things' is repeated, culminating in God declaring 'all that he had made' to be very good. Psalm 24:1–2 tells us that the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. He created and sustains all life and, although God allows us to make use of nature, the earth and its creatures remain His, and we are answerable to God for our use or abuse of them.

Yet, despite this clear and comprehensive focus on God's love for all that He has made, Christians have historically been quiet on the imperative to care for nature. A Rocha hopes that through articulating a distinctively Christian voice in support of the need for greater ambition in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, greater Christian leadership in

¹ Bookless, D. (2021) *10 reasons why extinction matters to God*. A Rocha Field Notes 64:12–13.

² A Rocha International, World Evangelical Alliance and Lausanne/WEA Creation Care Network (2020) *An Evangelical Call to Action on Biodiversity*.

driving an ambitious biodiversity agenda forwards will be stimulated. In this regard, among other recent developments, we are encouraged by the 2015 Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis, and by recent Christian engagement (for example by Tearfund, World Vision, Christian Aid and CAFOD) in the 2020 Bond Development and Environment Group Report³. Given that Christianity has so many adherents, strong commitment from Christians for the recovery of nature across the world could greatly help in bringing about the enormous changes and improvements that are needed.

The Solutions: Specific Proposals to CBD COP15

We highlight the following key points for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework:

- 1. Not one, but three global crises.** It is critical that the measures needed to address the three overriding global crises (biodiversity loss, climate change, poverty and inequality) are implemented synergistically through cross-sectoral approaches. It is essential that biodiversity loss is treated with equal importance and priority.
- 2. Legal measures to enforce targets.** Experience tells us that the implementation of the Framework is unlikely to be sufficient if it is left merely to voluntary commitments. The agreed targets need to be legally enforceable in each country, and subject to independent oversight. Previous voluntary commitments have failed to bring about change and compete with shorter-term interests.
- 3. Smarter funding for biodiversity conservation.** For the most part, the problem with conservation is not that it doesn't work, but rather that we don't do anything like enough of it.⁴ Not only should the level of funding be greatly increased – ten-fold across the next decade would be a good starting point – but funding mechanisms should be improved, ensuring that money is spent in the right places and targeting effective interventions. There must be a move away from time-limited projects towards longer-term, more flexible funding, with a particular focus on growing local-level, community-oriented conservation groups.
- 4. Prioritising Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).** As protected areas are expanded, it is important that the uneven distribution of biodiversity is taken into account. Special attention should be given to conserving KBAs and other critical places for biodiversity conservation.
- 5. Prioritising Threatened Species.** An 'Emergency Measures Agenda' should be agreed and implemented, focused on those species that need intensive recovery actions in order to be saved, and to address those threats for which we have no solutions in the wild. For some of these threats – such as novel infectious diseases and coral bleaching – research to develop new management options is a top priority. Without a focused 'Emergency Measures Agenda', we are very unlikely to see any reduction in the extinction rate by 2030.
- 6. Halting projects in conflict with the goal of ending biodiversity loss.** Major development projects (such as mining, roads, dams) should not be permitted by governments where these irretrievably compromise the goal of ending biodiversity loss, and bringing about its recovery.
- 7. Increasing research into understanding of the consequences of biodiversity loss on human livelihoods** at a global, continental, regional and national level; including finding innovative ways of sustaining biodiversity in the midst of ever-increasing demands for food, water, energy and infrastructure.

³ [Bond Development and Environment \(DEG\) Report \(2020\) Addressing the Triple Emergency: Poverty, Climate Change, and environmental Degradation.](#)

⁴ [Hoffmann, Michael & Duckworth, J.W. & Holmes, Katharine & Mallon, David & Rodrigues, Ana & Stuart, Simon. \(2015\). The difference conservation makes to extinction risk of the world's ungulates: Ungulate conservation. Conservation Biology. 29. 10.1111/cobi.12519.](#)

- 8. Engaging churches and Christians.** Faith-based communities are critical in helping to achieve success in implementing the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. In addition to implementing conservation actions (as A Rocha already does), Christians should be actively holding their governments and the private sector to account to help ensure that the implementation of the Framework is sufficient and effective. Additionally, Churches should promote environmentally sensitive behaviour change.
- 9. Engaging civil society** – Local communities and Indigenous Peoples should be seen as key stakeholders for delivering conservation on the ground, acknowledging that this has not always been the case. This will require approaches that empower these people and seek to secure their livelihoods and rights.
- 10. Achievable targets which 'add up' to halting biodiversity loss** – as IUCN notes, a significant concern with earlier drafts is that it combines the outcome goals for species, ecosystems, and genetic diversity into a single, amorphous "biodiversity" target which is very hard to interpret and "slice up" into clear actions. Those sectors and actors (for example a city, or a corporation, or a community) responsible for halting biodiversity loss and bringing about its recovery will need more specific, measurable and attainable targets if they are to succeed. We support IUCN's emphasis on the importance of ensuring the collective implementation of the Action Targets really does add up to achieving the vision of halting biodiversity loss; otherwise we will never succeed to bring about nature's recovery.

A Rocha is pleased to note that many of the types of actions and results that we call for below are already included in the First Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. However, we emphasize that the content of the finally agreed Framework will only be of value if the level of political commitment, the clarity of the targets, and the degree of enforceability of what is agreed, is much greater than when the CBD agreed previous biodiversity targets in 2002 and 2010.

A Rocha is a member of IUCN – the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which is the global umbrella body of the conservation movement. As regards specific proposals for amendments to the draft Framework, we align ourselves with the detailed comments made by IUCN⁵.

About A Rocha

A Rocha was founded in 1983 as a Christian conservation organisation to give practical expression to the conviction that caring for creation is fundamental to the Christian life. Today, A Rocha is responding to the global crisis of biodiversity loss by carrying out community-based conservation activities, through our worldwide family of over 20 organizations. Through field study centres, project sites and wider advocacy, A Rocha undertakes scientific research, environmental education, community outreach and theological training. Find out more about our work: www.arocha.org

Why release a statement?

A Rocha notes that there has been no significant Christian input to previous COPs of the CBD, despite the explicit mention in CBD documents of the importance of faith-based organisations as essential in the successful achievement of biodiversity targets. For this reason, A Rocha has decided to articulate a distinctively Christian voice in support of the need for much greater ambition in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework which is being negotiated at COP15.

⁵ [IUCN \(2022\) IUCN's Position – Convention on Biological Diversity Third meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework \(OEWG3\).](#)

⁶ [Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity \(2020\) First Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.](#)