

A window of opportunity for climate and biodiversity

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There have been calls for a joint approach to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss for years, but to date, co-ordinated global policy is still lacking. Credit: Pixabay/Pat Josse

The world is facing unparalleled changes in climatic conditions and drastic loss of biological diversity, putting humanity at risk. The breakdown of the Earth's climate and the rapid loss of wildlife [are intertwined](#), yet response by governments to these crises currently fails to recognize the deep connections between them.

There have been [calls for a joint approach](#) to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss for years, but to date, co-ordinated global policy is still lacking.

In [our recent paper](#) published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, we argue that a joint work program between the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the best approach.

Our paper also provides a concept of how this joint program could be set up, ideas on the type of issues it should tackle, and recommendations for successful implementation.

Nature-based solutions

[Nature-based solutions](#) (NbS) are defined as "actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits." They have been hailed as a pathway for promoting synergies between the climate change and biodiversity agendas.

NbS have been gaining significant attention, with many governments [integrating them into their climate plans](#). For instance, the [Canadian government has implemented a Nature-based Climate Solutions program](#), showcasing its commitment to these strategies.

However, the deployment of NbS is [not without risks](#): there are uncertainties and difficulties associated with the implementation of NbS, while the evidence regarding their benefits for biodiversity and people [remains limited](#).

For example, rapid afforestation and reforestation practices, a type of

NbS, can enhance carbon sequestration but can also harm wildlife and ecosystem resilience. It can also fail to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and [local communities](#). Despite this, neither the CBD nor the UNFCCC have so far adequately addressed the critical risks NbS may pose to nature and people.

The need for a co-ordinated global policy

The UNFCCC and CBD are pivotal platforms for providing evidence and guiding necessary changes. But they cannot continue to work separately. Higher levels of integration between biodiversity and climate change agendas are essential to close current implementation gaps, identify and address the risks associated with various actions, and co-ordinate policies around the world that benefit climate, nature and people.

For the moment, there is indeed no platform dedicated to advancing an environmental agenda that equally supports biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation. There is also no nominated scientific platform dedicated to assessing the evidence and issues around approaches such as NbS and their implementation. This disjointed approach is unlikely to deliver on biodiversity or provide cost-effective solutions to the climate change crisis.

Both Conventions recognize that their agreements are interdependent and have begun collaborating. At COP28 in Dubai in November 2023, a [statement of co-operation](#) was issued. However, a concrete policy framework is needed to move from merely voluntary actions to co-ordinated implementation.

Bridging the implementation gap

A joint program between the UNFCCC and the CBD should cover key topics of interest to the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) and the [Paris Agreement](#), and serve multiple functions for aligning global climate and biodiversity goals. Specifically, it should:

1. Oversee the alignment of [National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans](#) and [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) to achieve shared objectives
2. Organize technical expert dialogues
3. Identify climate actions that are harmful to biodiversity and put in place coherent safeguards that can operate between the two conventions
4. Form a platform for visibility and recognition of efforts undertaken by countries, local governments, non-state actors, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to advance the program priorities
5. Be a hub for developing methods to monitor progress on the shared objectives of the GBF and Paris Agreement

To be effective, such a joint work program will need to develop a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) plan for addressing the financial, technical and capacity needs associated with the delivery of its work. Its outcome could, among other things, inform the critical and fast-developing realm of voluntary actions on biodiversity and climate, by, for example, facilitating harmonization of the UNFCCC and CBD [action agendas](#). Additionally, it could provide guidance to global funding entities to help countries meet their objectives under the two conventions.

A policy window not to be missed

Later this year, world leaders will convene for two global conventions to tackle [climate change](#) and [biodiversity loss](#) separately. In October, the

[CBD will meet in Cali, Colombia, for COP16](#). A week later, in November, the [UNFCCC will meet in Baku, Azerbaijan, for COP29](#).

These upcoming conferences of the parties present an opportunity to establish a joint work program to fill the current governance gap, address implementation issues, and foster innovation and synergies in climate and biodiversity actions. The window for action on climate and biodiversity is closing fast. This opportunity must not be missed.

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