

POLICY BRIEF

CBD COP17:

FROM COMMITMENTS TO IMPLEMENTATION— RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A GENDER-RESPONSIVE BIODIVERSITY AGENDA

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From commitments to implementation – Recommendations for a gender-responsive biodiversity agenda

As governments gather at the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Yerevan, Armenia, the international community faces a critical opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, mid-way through implementation. While important progress has been made in recognising the links between biodiversity, gender equality, peacebuilding and sustainable development, implementation continues to lag behind political commitments. The mid-term review of the CBD Gender Plan of Action (GPA) provides a unique opportunity to close this implementation gap and ensure that gender equality becomes a core requirement for biodiversity governance rather than a standalone issue.

Drawing on Kvinna till Kvinna's work with women's rights organisations in conflict-affected and environmentally vulnerable contexts; concrete input from Armenian women's rights organisations FemForward and Women's agenda; as well as findings from the GPA review process, this brief outlines key priorities for governments, donors and civil society seeking to advance both biodiversity outcomes and gender equality.

Women's organisations, local women's groups and women environmental human rights defenders are already playing a central role in ecosystem protection, climate adaptation, environmental peacebuilding and community resilience. Yet they remain underrepresented in decision-making and programming, and chronically underfunded despite carrying much of the implementation burden.

Gender equality must be mainstreamed throughout biodiversity implementation

One of the clearest findings emerging from the mid-term review is that gender equality remains largely treated as a participation issue rather than an implementation issue. Increasing women's participation is of course essential, but stronger focus now needs to be on implementing decisions, agreements and programmes. While many countries increasingly recognise that biodiversity loss affects women and men differently, gender considerations are often absent from financing decisions, monitoring frameworks, governance systems and accountability mechanisms. As a result, commitments remain insufficiently resourced and poorly implemented.

COP17 should therefore establish that **gender equality is not a separate objective** alongside biodiversity action. It is a **prerequisite for successful**

implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework.¹ This requires integrating gender-responsive indicators, sex-disaggregated data and accountability mechanisms into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), biodiversity monitoring systems and reporting processes. Governments should support the use of agreed indicators under Target 23 and ensure that implementation progress can be **measured, monitored and publicly reported**.

Experiences from Armenia illustrate why this shift is necessary. National policies treat climate change and disaster response as purely technical or infrastructure issues while treating gender equality as a separate social issue. Disaster risk reduction plans routinely fail to address the mobility constraints, caregiving burdens, and communication barriers that keep women trapped in high-risk zones during climate emergencies. During the recent flooding in Armenia in spring 2024 and the subsequent response activities, for example, women were disproportionately affected, as many were isolated by caregiving responsibilities and had limited access to emergency information and preparedness measures.

These examples demonstrate the need for biodiversity, climate, disaster risk reduction and gender policies to be designed and implemented together rather than through separate policy silos.

The challenge is not only implementation within biodiversity frameworks, but also policy coherence across existing strategies. Armenia has important entry points through the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans and the National Gender Strategy and Action Plan (2025-2028). However, climate, biodiversity, gender equality and human security considerations are often developed and implemented through separate institutional processes. Stronger alignment between these frameworks would improve accountability, implementation and resource allocation. Significant evidence gaps also remain regarding the gendered impacts of biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and climate-related risks, particularly in rural, border and conflict-affected communities. Strengthening gender-disaggregated and intersectional data collection is therefore essential for effective policymaking and monitoring.

Women's organisations are essential biodiversity actors

Kvinna till Kvinna's experience across conflict-affected contexts shows that local women's organisations frequently serve as first responders, community organisers, environmental guardians and peacebuilders. They generate local knowledge, strengthen community resilience, and often identify environmental risks long before they appear in national statistics. Yet their contributions remain inadequately recognised within biodiversity and environmental governance systems.

The GPA mid-term review confirms this pattern, finding that women-led organisations are already implementing biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and environmental peacebuilding but continue to face severe barriers to accessing funding and decision-making spaces. Women's rights organisations

¹ See also for example: Lau, J.D (2020). "Three lessons for gender equity in biodiversity conservation". *Conservation Biology*. Volume34, Issue6, December 2020.

should not be viewed solely as beneficiaries of biodiversity programmes. They are **implementation partners** and should be recognised and resourced accordingly.

Examples from the work in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus highlight this role clearly. In Moldova, women-led and community-based actors are advancing climate resilience, sustainable agriculture, natural resource management and community cohesion. In Ukraine, women farmers and local organisations are contributing to biodiversity protection, climate adaptation and sustainable livelihood development despite the ongoing impacts of war.

In Armenia, women comprise a large share of environmental activists, including those advocating around mining and environmental protection. Yet women remain largely absent from senior leadership positions within environmental governance structures, including environmental inspection bodies, natural resource institutions and water management systems. For example, women make up a massive portion of environmental NGOs, activists fighting against Amulsar mining company through protests and legal claims, community volunteers, and university biology departments. However, at high-level decision-making (regional environmental inspectors, directors of national parks, heads of water user associations, etc), women are absent.

Testimonies from Armenia, for example, show how deep-seated stereotypes still frame strategic sectors, like forestry, mining oversight, and emergency management, as "men's work." This creates a strong psychological barrier, leading many qualified young women to self-select out of applying for public leadership positions in these fields.

These examples also highlight the distinction between women's participation and meaningful decision-making power. While women are increasingly visible in environmental activism, community initiatives and civil society organisations, this involvement does not automatically translate into influence over policies, funding decisions or governance outcomes. Increasing participation alone is therefore insufficient unless accompanied by genuine opportunities to shape decisions and priorities.

COP17 should therefore **strengthen recognition of women's rights organisations as strategic biodiversity actors** and ensure that they are systematically included in planning, implementation, monitoring and decision-making processes.

Financing must reach women's rights organisations directly

The failure to adequately finance women's leadership remains one of the most significant barriers to implementation. The evidence reviewed by Kvinna till Kvinna demonstrates that women's organisations continue to receive only a fraction of available climate and environmental funding despite delivering concrete results on the ground. The GPA review identifies direct access to finance as a prerequisite for successful implementation, while estimates suggest that less than 0.2 per cent of climate finance reaches women-led climate initiatives directly.² The lack of gender-disaggregated biodiversity finance data means that there is no globally

² [Accelerating Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change Through Women's Leadership – FP Analytics](#)

accepted measure of how much biodiversity funding reaches women-led organisations directly, despite widespread recognition of women's critical role in biodiversity conservation.

A meaningful outcome from COP17 should therefore **include stronger commitments to gender-responsive biodiversity finance**. Governments and donors should establish dedicated and accessible financing mechanisms for women's rights organisations, Indigenous women, women environmental human rights defenders and grassroots groups. Biodiversity finance mechanisms should apply gender-responsive allocation criteria and track how funding reaches women-led organisations and local communities.³

Greater attention should also be given to scaling locally led solutions. Rural women are already developing innovative approaches to water management, land stewardship and climate adaptation, yet women-led initiatives frequently lack direct access to financing and institutional support. Biodiversity finance should therefore support the expansion of proven local solutions and strengthen women's leadership within environmental governance systems.

Investing in women's organisations is not only a gender equality measure. It is an investment in biodiversity protection, conflict prevention, local resilience and sustainable development.

Strengthening women's leadership, civic space and environmental peacebuilding

The GPA mid-term review also presents an opportunity to strengthen commitments on women's leadership and civic space. Across many regions, women environmental human rights defenders face increasing threats, while shrinking civic space and gender-based violence undermine participation in environmental governance. At the same time, women continue to be portrayed primarily as vulnerable groups rather than as leaders, knowledge holders and agents of change.

COP17 should support stronger language on the protection of women environmental defenders, address risks of violence and reprisals, and recognise civic space as a prerequisite for effective biodiversity governance. In addition, governments should promote meaningful participation that goes beyond consultation and **ensures influence over decisions, resources and outcomes**. Indigenous, local and traditional ecological knowledge held by women should be recognised and incorporated into biodiversity governance at all levels.⁴

Kvinna till Kvinna's experience demonstrates that biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, conflict and insecurity are closely interconnected and should be understood through a human security lens. Their impacts extend beyond environmental outcomes to affect livelihoods, displacement risks, social cohesion

³ Lucas, B., Cheeseman, K., Van Doninck, N. (2024). "Transformative Change for Global Biodiversity: the Role of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. Background Notes for the Wilton Park Conference". September 2024. K4DD *Rapid Evidence Review* 133

⁴ See for example: Woodhouse, E. Moreau, M-A. Booker, F. Anthem, H. Coulthard, S. Eghenter, C. Goldman, M. (2022) "Why Gender Matters for Biodiversity Conservation". London: *IIED*.

and community resilience, particularly in conflict-affected and border regions. Environmental degradation, resource scarcity, social tensions and insecurity often reinforce one another, yet environmental and peacebuilding frameworks remain poorly connected.. The CBD Gender Plan of Action review therefore offers an opportunity to strengthen conflict-sensitive approaches to biodiversity implementation and better integrate women, peace and security perspectives where relevant. Broadening the security aspects to a human security perspective would allow for a stronger connection to environment and biodiversity work.

Kvinna till Kvinna's key recommendations for COP17

1. **Mainstream gender across implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework** by integrating gender considerations into biodiversity planning, monitoring, reporting, governance and accountability systems, supported by gender-responsive indicators, gender-environment-security indicators where relevant, and sex-disaggregated data.
2. **Provide direct and accessible financing for women's rights organisations**, Indigenous women, grassroots groups and women environmental human rights defenders working on biodiversity conservation, environmental peacebuilding and climate adaptation.
3. **Use the GPA mid-term review to close the implementation gap** by strengthening accountability, monitoring, institutional responsibilities and reporting requirements.
4. **Protect women environmental human rights defenders and civic space** and recognise meaningful participation, leadership and influence as necessary conditions for successful biodiversity governance.
5. **Strengthen links between biodiversity, climate and peacebuilding**, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and recognise women's organisations as strategic actors at this nexus.
6. **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans** should be aligned with, and explicitly reference, **Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans** and **National Gender Strategies** to strengthen policy coherence and support integrated approaches to biodiversity conservation, human security, peacebuilding and gender equality.