

: Conference Report

Bonn Symposium 2021 – Online

sef:

The Global Biodiversity Framework: A Key Building Block for Local Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Ingo Nordmann

In 2022, the topic of biological diversity will have its “Paris moment”: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is currently negotiating a new international nature conservation agreement – the Global Biodiversity Framework – which aims to stop the dramatic loss of species diversity and ecosystems worldwide. In terms of its significance, the Framework is being compared to the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change: preserving biological diversity is, after all, of crucial importance for humanity’s natural bases of life and is thus a key building block for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There are numerous entry points for cities and municipalities to contribute to the protection of

the biosphere while simultaneously improving their citizens’ quality of life. They range from protecting regional flora and fauna and promoting a green economy and lifestyle to adopting local biodiversity and sustainability strategies and raising public awareness. These opportunities were discussed by more than 100 representatives from politics and government, science, business and civil society at the Bonn Symposium 2021, held at the UN Campus in Bonn. This second online edition of the event was hosted by the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) in cooperation with Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW)/Engagement Global gGmbH.

Multiple crises and “human-caused decline”

The climate crisis, the coronavirus crisis, the food crisis and numerous natural disasters are all connected, directly or indirectly with the destruction of ecosystems and biological diversity. These challenges should therefore not be seen as separate; they can only be overcome with a holistic approach. This was the urgent appeal voiced by Professor Josef Settele, Head of Department at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) and a member of the German Advisory Council on the Environment. He pointed to humanity’s devastating impact on the biosphere and atmosphere: 75% of the Earth’s land area is already degraded, more than 85% of the world’s wetlands have been lost, and more animal and plant species are at acute risk of extinction than ever before.



Bonn Symposium 2021: Opening of the reception in the Old Town Hall
Bonn by Lord Mayor Katja Dörner

Professor Settele also shared his experience as a lead author with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services



Keynote by Professor Josef Settele

(IPBES), where, until 2018, he led the publication of its Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services – the flagship report informing the global public about the dramatic state of the biosphere worldwide. He summed up the 1,500-page report in three words: “human-caused decline”.

Inducements are needed to protect biodiversity, Professor Settele said, but it is equally important to abolish harmful incentives: the wrong type of subsidies which fail to internalise environmental and social costs are costing millions in damage. Ultimately, what is needed is a reform of the global financial and economic systems, as well as new indicators. Instead of short-term growth, a long-term, sustainable approach to the economy and lifestyles should be promoted, aimed at “holistic, transformative change” within society.

“If we continue along this path, we will be subsidising the next pandemic”

Professor Settele also explained that by destroying the rainforests and allowing the uncontrolled expansion of agriculture to continue, humankind is creating a perfect storm – the ideal conditions for the transmission of pathogens from animals to humans. There are around 1.7 million unidentified viruses, any one of which could cause the next pandemic. The new Global Biodiversity Framework, he said, must therefore also be recognised as a contribution to future pandemic prevention. An intact, diverse biosphere reduces the frequency of zoonoses (i.e. infectious diseases which originate in animals and are then transmitted to humans, such as COVID-19 and malaria) and is essential for the protection of human health.

Professor Thomas Hildebrandt, Head of Department at Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Berlin, then explained why some wildlife species are so important for us humans. The disappearance of “keystone species” can trigger the collapse of entire ecosystems, with potentially fatal consequences for humanity. Insects, for example, are the main source of food for many species of bat. If the insect populations decline, bats are more likely to search for food in urban areas, possibly bringing the next pandemic with them. Such processes are very difficult to predict and track scientifically, which is why many people are not aware of this potentially deadly threat.

It is often a different situation in indigenous societies, as Lucy Mulenkei, Executive Director of the Indigenous Information Network in Kenya, explained. In these societies, awareness of the importance of biological diversity as humanity’s natural basis of life is a given. Indigenous people often have a holistic understanding that human health is bound up in complex ways with the health of wildlife, plants and our shared environment. This is no different from the “One Health” approach, which at present is increasingly being “sold” in Western societies as an innovative solution. According to Lucy Mulenkei, the Maasai in Kenya, for example, have been extremely



Thomas Hildebrandt and Merjam Wakili at the Studio, UN Campus Bonn

concerned for decades about large-scale destruction of forests and the associated decline of numerous species of fauna and flora. It is quite clear to these communities, she said, that we “must live in harmony with nature if we wish to survive”.

Towards a new global nature protection agreement

Like Professor Settele, Basile van Havre from Montreal in Canada talked about a triple crisis consisting of climate change, species extinction and pandemics.

He is Co-Chair of the Working Group of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which is currently revising the draft of the new Global Biodiversity Framework, due to be adopted by the Parties in May 2022. He explained that the current draft is remarkably ambitious, but conceded that it could still be watered down during later stages of the negotiations; this is a normal part of the process. Notwithstanding all the justified criticism, he emphasised the openness of the process. Documents and drafts are freely available, enabling a rapid response by the public. This is important in order to exert positive pressure on the negotiators to set an even higher level of ambition when defining the goals.

Indigenous knowledge in the field of biodiversity is also being channelled into the negotiations, he assured Lucy Mulenkei. Ultimately, however, even the



Bonn Symposium 2021: Backstage

best agreement is no more than a plan; everything hinges on how it is implemented. This is where cities and municipalities come in: there are numerous starting points at local level to make a contribution to preserving biodiversity. “Cities are where we should start,” said Lucy Mulenkei. In Basile van Havre’s view, the new Global Biodiversity Framework could potentially create a more enabling environment for cities to initiate positive change.

The local level in the international negotiations

Often, the local and the global levels seem to be worlds apart. Even so, local decision-makers can contribute to the international process, as Kobie Brand, ICLEI Deputy Secretary General and Director of the Cities Biodiversity Center, explained. With that aim in mind, ICLEI has, since 2006, organised the participation of local authorities in UN climate and biodiversity summits, inter alia with official parallel events at the meetings of the Conferences of the Parties.

One specific opportunity for cities and municipalities to contribute at the international level is the Edinburgh Declaration. In this document, local authorities set out their key demands for the new Global Biodiversity Framework in order to make their voices heard in the international process. More than 200 cities and municipalities have already signed the Declaration. As Kobie Brand explained, the aim is to ensure that frameworks and action plans specifically for the local level are enshrined in the new agreement. This would be a major step towards more recognition and respect for the local level in the international negotiations and boost its scope to take action and make decisions in the future.

As Kobie Brand pointed out, until a few years ago, cities and nature were regarded as conflicting spheres, whereas today, they are increasingly seen as complementary. The coronavirus pandemic in particular has raised awareness of the importance of natural spaces within urban settlements. Cheryl Jones Fur, Deputy Lord Mayor of Växjö in Sweden, confirmed this from her municipality’s perspective. In surveys, she said, access to nature is mentioned time and time again by local citizens and businesses alike as the most important factor for quality of life in Växjö. Not only are the health and recreation aspects significant in this context; so too are the economic development and marketing opportunities that nature provides for the municipality. In Växjö, politicians are successful only if they take environmental

Mainstreaming Biodiversity at the Local Level – Municipal Sustainability and Biodiversity Strategies

Interactive Workshop on 10 November 2021

Sustainability or biodiversity strategies are one way to mainstream the conservation of biodiversity as a strategic goal at the local level. At this workshop, Jörg Lummitsch, Head of the Department of Environmental and Nature Conservation, City of Erfurt, reported on the city’s local biodiversity strategy, which was adopted unanimously by the City Council in 2010. In the strategy, the city set itself the target of granting protected status to 20% of the urban space. Since 2021, the target has formed part of the city’s Globally Sustainable Municipality strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The added value of such a strategy for municipalities and the process for achieving it were discussed at the workshop, along with practical issues, such as which climate-adapted tree species are appropriate for inner cities affected by drought and what should be done about all-gravel gardens. Moderator Till Winkelmann, Project Leader at SKEW, summed up: “Developing a strategy is not a sprint, but a marathon, but it is certainly a very worthwhile endeavour.”

protection and biodiversity into account. Against this background, it is exciting for Vaxjö, as a municipality, to engage in ICLEI and the international negotiations.

Learning from each other: international partnership projects

Likewise, Jacqueline Samson, Executive Director, Department for Planning, Development and Human Settlements in Drakenstein, South Africa, described how her municipality had attracted numerous investors and created employment for local people with its environmental projects in the urban space. As an example, she mentioned the establishment of a climate smart park with an education centre in Drakenstein, linking the city's business quarter with residential areas. This is relevant both as an economic factor for the city and as an attraction for tourists and businesses.

For the past eight years, Drakenstein has maintained a successful municipal climate partnership with the City of Neumarkt in Oberpfalz (Upper Palatinate), Germany. The partnership is sponsored by Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW). More than 80 partnership projects have been implemented since 2011 within this framework, offering opportunities for international knowledge-sharing between municipalities from the Global North and South. In the areas of biodiversity and climate change, this is particularly worthwhile for municipalities from the North, as regions in the South have, in many instances, been affected to a greater extent and for longer by climate change and have already made progress on adaptation.

Ralf Mützel, Director of Neumarkt's Sustainability Office, explained that the partnership with Drakenstein provided the inspiration for the new design of Neumarkt's city park, as well as ideas for a green classroom and a multilingual climate trail. He also emphasised that setting up this type of partnership is surprisingly easy with support and funding from SKEW, and he encouraged all local authorities to consider making use of this opportunity.

Local solutions from Berlin, Cape Town, Bad Saulgau and Lilongwe

Progressive municipalities all over the world are leading by example and showing what kind of innovative opportunities exist at local level to protect the biosphere. Dr Darla Nickel from Berlin's Rainwater Agency explained what can be done to turn Berlin into a "Sponge City". This is about the use of rainwater as a valuable resource. During periods of drought, it is important to retain water in the city, whereas

during periods of heavy rainfall, what counts is the city's ability to allow the rapid outflow of the water. Both types of extreme weather event are increasing in frequency as a result of climate change.

Steps towards becoming a Sponge City include creating more green spaces, the use of rain as process water, and unsealing surfaces to allow rainwater to trickle away quickly. One of the challenges identified by Dr Nickel is the growing competition for land: there is a high demand for new housing and these construction schemes conflict with efforts to preserve green and open space. Intensive dialogue and communication are necessary, she said, in order to win over as many people as possible.

Similar challenges were also reported by Saul Roux, Head of Environmental Strategy Implementation in Cape Town in South Africa. Cape Town is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, with more than 3,000 plant species and 21 vegetation types occurring within the boundaries of the city. However, the city is hemmed in physically by coasts and mountains, and with ongoing urbanisation and a high demand for housing, this creates intense competition for land. The city is responding to this challenge with a fine-scale conservation plan, known as BioNet, which



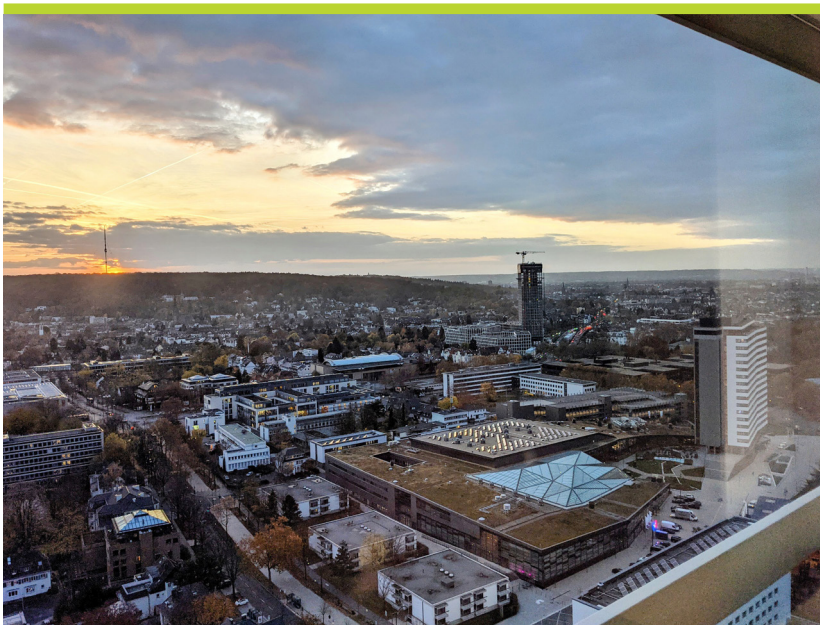
Ingo Nordmann (sef:) and Merjam Wakili setting up the cameras

covers 34% of the urban area and is regularly consulted in municipal spatial planning and construction projects.

For more than 30 years, a small town in the south of Germany has been pursuing innovative strategies to protect the biosphere. Bad Saulgau, Baden-Württemberg's State Capital of Biodiversity, has received numerous awards and now advises other local authorities on nature conservation issues. Its municipal biodiversity strategy rests on five pillars: educational nature trails, watercourse renaturalisation, biotopes, nature theme parks and the transformation of

uniform green spaces into species-rich areas. This is accompanied by broad-scale efforts to publicise the strategy's objectives.

At first, a great deal of painstaking pioneering work had to be done, as Bad Saulgau's Environment Commissioner Thomas Lehenherr explained. Now, however, the conservation of biodiversity is a marketing tool for the municipality and has created a sense of cohesion within the local community. Initially, there was often some scepticism due to the supposedly high costs of environmental conservation measures. From today's perspective, however, it is clear that these forward-looking measures save a great deal of money in the long term.



Bonn Symposium 2021: View from “Langer Eugen” (venue) over Bonn's former government district

A comprehensive strategy to protect urban biodiversity has also been adopted by Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi in southern Africa. John Chome, Chief Executive Officer of Lilongwe City Council, presented the Lilongwe Ecological Corridor Initiative (LECI), a multi-stakeholder initiative which aims to protect the city's natural assets and biological diversity and promote sustainable tourism, access to nature for all and environmental education. The “green heart” of the project is a 400-hectare protected area, centrally located, which offers habitats for flora and fauna, improves urban air quality and climate and aims to create local employment at the same time. John Chome explained that here too, various sections of the city administration had to overcome their departmental “silo” thinking in order to pursue a holistic approach towards more sustainability and quality of life.

The private sector: a strong partner for biodiversity conservation

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), half of the world's total GDP is dependent on nature and its services. For that reason, business can and should be a strong partner in preserving natural capital (biodiversity). Dr Hans-Dietrich Reckhaus, Transforming Partner and Director of the Reckhaus company, has adopted radical and progressive measures within his business in order to halt the dramatic loss of biodiversity. His family-owned firm has been manufacturing biocides for the past 60 years. He has transformed it into a business that aims to protect insects rather than destroying them; he also set up the Insect Respect initiative, which preserves insect habitats and raises awareness of their importance.

Dr Reckhaus explained that he initially encountered massive opposition within his own company, with a 25% drop in turnover and a 75% fall in profits over the short term. Many of his staff were worried about their jobs, and even rival companies accused him of inflicting reputational damage on the industry as a whole. It was only after many years, following various media reports and external awards, that attitudes within and outside the company changed. Today, most members of staff are proud to work for a progressive employer, and the use of the quality mark “Insect Respect” by commercial undertakings has opened up new areas of business.

Professor Volker Mosbrugger, President of the Polytechnic Foundation of Frankfurt am Main and Former Director General of the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research (SGN), applauded Dr Reckhaus's courageous approach, but conceded that such a radical change of direction may not be feasible for many companies that are responsible for thousands of staff. What is needed instead is a holistic transformation of the global economic model.

Professor Mosbrugger emphasised that all the acute problems facing humanity, from species extinction to climate change and the pandemic, are caused by our “overuse of nature”. This is a systemic problem which requires a systemic solution: an eco-social market economy which creates a genuine balance across the three dimensions of sustainability – the economy, society and the environment. One practical approach towards achieving this goal could be to require all countries and companies to rigorously disclose the environmental damage that they cause. The costs of this damage are currently borne by society, resulting in major global injustice. If these costs were internalised instead and passed on through product prices, this would do much to incentive the production of eco-friendly goods that do not endanger humanity's natural bases of life.

As was the case with Reckhaus, the positive effects of such measures are often only felt in the long term, whereas the transition period is politically and economically challenging. However, many branches of industry, even the financial sector, are aware that a transformation towards more sustainability has to happen if humanity wishes to survive, according to Professor Mosbrugger. Courageous framework-setting by policy-makers across a variety of sectors, based on a holistic approach, is therefore essential.

Environmental protection or environmental use? Goal conflicts and holistic strategies

Progressive policy-making is often obstructed by goal conflicts and divergent interests. Economic growth vs. nature conservation, adequate food production vs. soil conservation, reintroduction of the wolf vs. protection of livestock: often, these individually justified objectives seem to be mutually exclusive.

The latest flagship report by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) talks about a “trilemma of global land use”, consisting of diverse demands made on land for climate change mitigation, the conservation of biological diversity and food security. WBGU’s Chair, Professor Karen Pittel, explained that out of these three challenges, the climate crisis is currently receiving most attention; however, the food crisis and the loss of biological diversity must be taken equally seriously. Professor Pittel also stressed that there needs to be a shift away from “silo thinking” towards “integrated policy-making” that addresses all three crises simultaneously. It is incumbent on policy-makers at national and international level to find win-win strategies here.

The challenges that stand in the way of this goal in every-day politics were described by Ina Scharrenbach, Minister for Regional Identity, Communities and Local Government, Building and Gender Equality in North Rhine-Westphalia. As an example, she mentioned the expansion of wind power, whose aim of generating more renewable energy often comes into conflict with various local concerns. In such instances, it is often worth engaging in in-depth dialogue and taking the positions of all sides seriously in order to find sustainable solutions. An aggressive “either/or” approach, which often prevails in the public debate, is not productive.

Ina Scharrenbach also confirmed that various specialist areas of policy-making operate far too often in their own silos. The reluctance to engage with others must be addressed and legal frameworks clarified to pinpoint where there are incompatibilities – e.g. in planning law – between environmen-

tal provisions and other areas of administration. Through its funding policy, NRW supports the joint search for solutions. Professor Pittel agreed that many goal conflicts could be defused if policy frameworks were more clearly structured; she mentioned the introduction of payments for ecosystem services as a possible starting point.

Mrinalini Rai, Director of Women4Biodiversity, broadened the debate by offering a global perspective. As she pointed out, there must be better



Moderator Merjam Wakili in front of the green screen in the UN studio

synergies between various multilateral environment agreements, including human-rights based approaches. Many goal conflicts at the international level are not simply about balancing divergent political interests; in many instances, human rights – e.g. of indigenous peoples and rural communities – are at stake. In the conservation of biological diversity, countries in the Global South often have to bear additional burdens, even though they have contributed relatively little to the problem of global species decline; the same applies to climate change as well.

Due to their already precarious economic situation, smallholder farmers, for example, are disproportionately impacted by the loss of biological diversity and the resulting environmental disasters. This particularly affects women and girls, whose contribution to the economy, e.g. in the informal sector or caregiving, is often invisible and therefore rarely considered in policy and planning. These injustices must be borne in mind and addressed in the negotiations on the new Global Biodiversity Framework.

Raising awareness: emotions and clear communication as solutions

For long-term changes in behaviour, comprehensive public awareness-raising is essential. As part of its efforts to inspire people to take an interest in biodiversity and the conservation of the environment, Naturgut Ophoven, a large environmental education centre in Leverkusen, therefore starts with the very young, engaging in learning activities on a daily basis with children's nurseries and schools in order to sensitise young people to this topic. As its Director, Hans-Martin Kochanek, explained, this takes



Bonn Symposium 2021 – Political Outlook: Merjam Wakili, Karen Pittel, Mrinalini Rai and Ina Scharrenbach (l.t.r.)

place out of school and in small groups with the specific aim of providing a learning experience that connects on an emotional level. An important role, in this context, is played by target group-appropriate communication, which must be personal, accessible and sensitive in order to facilitate changes in participants' attitudes and behaviour.

This was endorsed by Zita Sebesvari, Deputy Director of the Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) at United Nations University and one of the authors of the recent UNU-EHS Interconnected Disaster Risks report. The report reveals that seemingly unconnected global events and disasters often share the same root causes and therefore require an interconnected approach. As examples from the sphere of biodiversity, she mentioned the extinction of the Chinese paddlefish, mass coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef and the locust infestations in East Africa, all of which are causally linked. The study provides scientific evidence for the sense that "everything is connected". Zita Sebesvari emphasised that although the interconnections are highly complex, plain language, appealing graphics and a lack of scientific jargon are crucial in genuinely reaching people.

Conclusions: psychology, joined-up thinking and local solutions

"We must connect rational knowledge with emotional experiences," said sef: Executive Director Dr Michèle Roth, summarising a key finding of the conference in her wrap-up. The Symposium, she said, had clearly revealed what really counts when conveying the importance of biodiversity. Key elements include target group-specific and personal communication, exciting stories, vivid images and good public relations. It is essential to reach people on an emotional level so that they are inspired to take a sustained interest in the topic and change their attitudes or behaviour.

Cooperation across silos and a holistic view of the multiple crises were other recurring demands. Promoting biodiversity should not be viewed as a task for the environmental agencies alone; it should be mainstreamed in every department of the administration, in every branch of industry and the economy, and across all sectors of society. Policy areas and administrative units that normally have little contact must communicate more effectively and overcome their reluctance to engage with each other.

There are already signs of some initial progress that points in this direction. During the Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow, a Nature Day was held for the first time in order to show how biodiversity and climate action are interconnected. The

How Do We Want To Live Well Together? A New Eco-Social Contract

UNRISD's New Global Network: Launch event on 10 November 2021

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), in partnership with the Green Economy Coalition (GEC), has launched a new Global Research and Action Network. With international actors from the UN, local authorities, civil society and academia, the aim is to explore opportunities and conditions for a new eco-social contract in which the conservation of biodiversity and social and environmental issues play a key role.

The launch of the Global Network was celebrated with a kick-off event at the Bonn Symposium. Speakers included Kumi Naidoo, former Director of Greenpeace and Amnesty International, Elisa Loncón Antileo, President of Chile's Constitutional Convention, and Paul Ladd, Director of UNRISD. The event was moderated by Oliver Greenfield from the Green Economy Coalition. In the evening, the Mayor of the City of Bonn, Katja Dörner, hosted a reception in the Old Town Hall to mark the Network's launch and the Bonn Symposium.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and IPBES also presented their first joint report in 2021, which warns that some climate change mitigation measures may in fact be harmful to the conservation of biodiversity. If diverse organisations and sectors were to engage in more and deeper dialogue, this would benefit everyone.

The local level has a key role to play in persuading the public and overcoming silo thinking. Cities and municipalities are places to which people are emotionally connected and where they feel at home.

So this is where they are most receptive to emotional messages and innovative approaches to protect biodiversity, which – in a best-case scenario – can result in long-term and sustainable changes in their thinking and behaviour. The local level is also the place where various policy areas and stakeholders (have to) work together, and where they can resolve goal conflicts and develop and implement innovative strategies. A wealth of ideas already exist at the local level, as the Bonn Symposium impressively demonstrated.

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