



State of Global Environmental Governance 2022

International Institute for
Sustainable Development
Earth Negotiations Bulletin

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Earth Negotiations Bulletin

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State of Global Environmental Governance 2022

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Foreword

Never in the history of humanity has the world faced so many environmental threats. Climate change is now called a climate emergency. We are losing biodiversity at an alarming rate. Our oceans are being choked with plastic, and we continue to produce toxic chemicals that are harmful to humans and wildlife. For millions of people, access to fresh water and sanitation is a growing challenge. The basic human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights are at risk. As Article 3 of the Declaration states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” Sadly, too many lives are being lost because of our profligate abuse of the natural environment.

Now more than ever, the international community must step up and ensure that the global environment is properly protected. The *State of Global Environmental Governance* produced by the International Institute for Sustainable Development provides an excellent overview of progress made in global environmental governance in the last 12 months. There are hopeful stories, and there are tragedies.

In 2022 we witnessed the launch of negotiations on a new treaty on plastics. This is a huge and long-anticipated step forward. Let us hope that the negotiations are not protracted and that the treaty can be implemented as soon as possible.



Ian Fry, Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the context of Climate Change

Following in the footsteps of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the international community launched negotiations on a science-policy body for chemicals, waste, and pollution. This is critically important. For too long, concerns about toxic chemicals, waste, and pollution have taken a back seat to the more newsworthy issues of climate change and biodiversity. This new scientific body will hopefully put these chemical and pollution

issues at the forefront of concern. Let us not forget Rachel Carson's seminal 1962 book, *The Silent Spring*, which exposed the harmful effects of DDT. This book awakened the world to the fact that our faith in the chemical industry had to be seriously questioned. Carson faced considerable vilification and harassment by the agrochemical industry as a scientist and as a woman. Her fortitude and bravery in facing the power of the chemical industry cannot be overstated. Let us hope that the new science-policy body for chemicals, waste, and pollution will become the platform for many, many Rachel Carsons.

As the Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, the decision by the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution on the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment was, for me, one of the key milestones of 2022. While the resolution is not legally binding, it showed a clear commitment by the international community that environmental protection and sustainable development cannot be separated from human rights. It told us that every human has a right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Undoubtedly, we will see many court cases seeking affirmation of that right.

Linking human rights and climate change was another pivotal moment in 2022 when parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed to establish a loss and damage fund. Millions of people are

already suffering from the impacts of climate change. With the establishment of the fund, major polluters, both public and private, may be forced to pay reparations for the harm they are causing. Let us hope that this fund will be truly significant.

These are only a few of the issues that fall within the ambit of global environmental governance. There are many more to be found in this report. Let me conclude by congratulating all the writers who put together this report. Let me also congratulate all the writers, editors, and photographers that work so hard to bring us the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*. Their work is the foundation for this report. Without the concise and authoritative reporting by ENB, we would be a lot intellectually poorer and less well-informed. I, for one, am an avid reader of the ENB, and I recommend everyone else to do the same.

Ian Fry, PhD

Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change

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United
Climate

MRM EL-SHARAH
EGYPT 2022



Letter from the Editor

If, like me, you're an [environmental policy nerd](#)—or, more kindly, passionate about protecting the natural world—2022 was a feast. The coronavirus pandemic loosened its grip, making multilateralism truly possible. Global negotiations covered nearly every part of our environment, from the atmosphere to the Ocean's depths.

I found it surprising how quickly everything returned to (nearly) normal. We started the year with daily COVID tests and masks and ended the year with a mix of either stringent protocols or none at all. For the most part, meetings were face-to-face, with some online options. China continued to support online participation to accommodate its zero-COVID policy. That policy has ended, and online participation platforms remain very expensive. Still, online options may be here to stay, particularly for some smaller or shorter meetings. It could help reduce the travel-related emissions of global meetings, and it also increases the accessibility of these negotiations for people who cannot travel for health or other reasons.

In this burst of activity, there were a lot of triumphs. Some were long-awaited, from launching talks for a plastics treaty to adopting the global biodiversity framework. Section 2 outlines some wins and misses of this remarkably hectic year. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

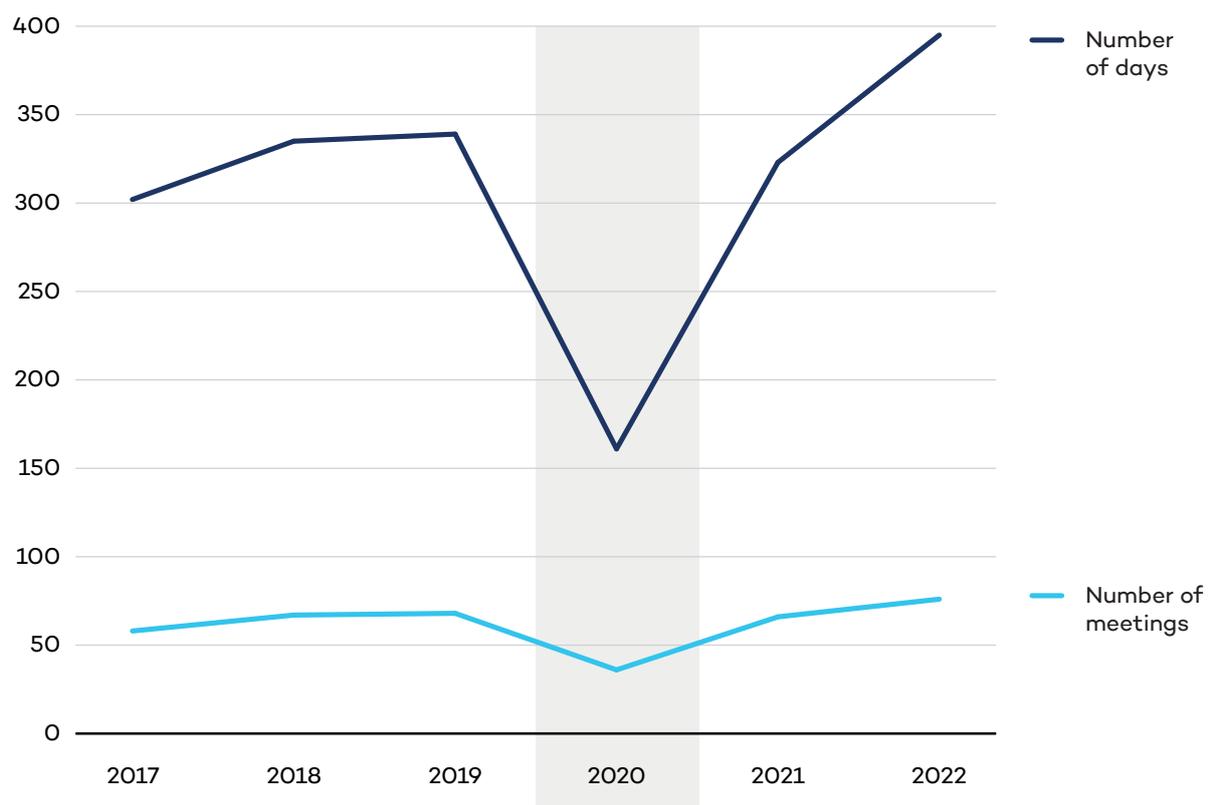
capped off years of negotiations. It sets out a series of goals and targets to protect nature. This approach also means there are clear benchmarks to measure progress.

There were also celebrations in the midst of this catch-up of pandemic-delayed work. The Stockholm+50 conference marked 50 years since the UN Conference on the Human Environment put the environment on the global agenda. Much has happened since, but the core idea—that solving global problems requires global cooperation—remains.

Spare a thought for the negotiators, Secretariat staff, and civil society who worked in these face-to-face and online spaces in such a busy year. Secretariats had to organize all the meetings while also catching up on technical assistance and capacity-building activities. Civil society had to adapt again, moving from social media-based activism back to the hallways of venues worldwide.

This year wasn't just about "doing more." Ideas came to the fore that previously were considered on the sidelines. Environment ministers invoked "carbon colonialism" at the Sharm El-Sheikh Climate Conference. The idea even briefly appeared in an early draft of the mitigation decision. The UN Environment Programme popularized the term "triple planetary crisis" to refer to the climate, biodiversity, and pollution

Figure 1. The post-COVID rebound in 2022



Source: Author's calculations

emergencies we collectively face. Some older ideas finally got their due. The concept of nature-based solutions pollinated environmental decisions in various negotiations. Loss and damage as an idea has been a slow burn to be recognized, institutionalized, and finally, in 2023, financed (see Section 3).

Geopolitical turbulence rumbled beneath all this multilateral activity. Global financial instability rose to new levels. Recovery from

the pandemic was uneven; commodity prices were volatile. Together, environmental and economic perils pushed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—the global blueprint to achieve a better future for all—further out of reach.

In 2022, Europe again found itself at war. The conflict in Ukraine may have done more for renewable energy than years of climate negotiations. Energy is now a national security issue. Governments are making

record investments in renewable energy. Forecasts of renewable energy capacity rapidly tilted upward, nearly 30%. The world is on track to add [as much renewable energy in the next 5 years as it did in the past 20](#).

The deployment of renewable energy cannot come fast enough. 2022 was the fifth warmest year in recorded history. While the Danube, Rhine, and Loire rivers nearly ran dry, over 1,700 people died in unprecedented floods in Pakistan. The damage in Pakistan reveals the devastation of our new climate reality. After the waters receded, [nearly 10 million children](#) remained at risk from contaminated water and hunger. All this tragedy and we're only at 1.2°C of global warming, still below the Paris Agreement's goals.

UNEP's use of "crisis" is apt. Our very human rights are at stake. For example, chemicals in our bodies threaten children's rights, and nature loss infringes on Indigenous Peoples' rights. Section 3 lays out the challenges in realizing human rights in environmental decisions. On the bright side, in 2022, the UN General Assembly recognized the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

There were other bright spots. A "[climate election](#)" brought a new, greener government to power in Australia. Brazil elected Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as president, giving rise to [new hope for the Amazon](#). The United States passed the Inflation Reduction Act, an odd name for a potentially [powerful piece of](#)

[climate legislation](#). Europe is experimenting with climate policy. The European Union is experimenting with climate policy with its [carbon border adjustment mechanism](#). It will adjust the price of a range of imported goods from countries with lower climate ambition.

California banned "forever chemicals" (or, per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances [PFAS]) in products. And there are many affected products (seriously: everything from non-stick cookware to fire-fighting foams). Also, in good chemicals news, the [ozone hole continues to shrink](#).

Looking ahead to 2023, as we do in Section 4, there will be many "performance reviews." Various bodies for climate, endangered species, and chemicals, among others, will review countries' collective efforts. We may be left wanting countries to do more and more quickly.

But these performance reviews underscore a vital function of global environmental governance—one likely to become more critical over time. Almost all environmental treaties are in implementation mode, meaning countries have firm obligations to live up to. Transparency may become the primary function of global environmental governance: telling the world about the state of the environment and countries' efforts to solve problems. For many of the environmental crises we face, it's not a moment too soon. It's time to act and hold states accountable.



The Year at a Glance

Great expectations were laid on 2022. After 2 years of online meetings that proved far from effective at reaching decisions, many hoped 2022 would be a year of landmark outcomes. The year nearly lived up to those lofty expectations. Despite the “permacrises” of 2022—war, energy insecurity, famine, inflation, climate change, nature loss, and more—there were major wins for global environmental governance. New decisions and rules arose that should help improve the global environment. Still, a few milestones remain unmet.

Delivering Change Amidst Global Crises

In a normal year, we’d laud the many decisions that advanced the implementation work of various environmental Conventions. There were over 634 decisions, just in the 10 COPs and MOPs (the highest decision-making bodies for treaties). Many of these related to biodiversity. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) accounted for over half the yearly total, with a record 365 decisions. Major milestones punctuated these sometimes routine—but vital—decisions, despite the geopolitical and economic winds blowing against global cooperation (see Table 1). More wetlands protected. New chemicals added to the

Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions. More species benefiting from the protections offered by CITES.

Then there were many decisions made by the subsidiary bodies. Add in the UN Environment Assembly resolutions and the progress tracking at the [High-Level Political Forum](#). Reaffirmations abounded, including the UN Convention to Combat Desertification’s [Abidjan Call](#), confirming governments’ commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially SDG 15.3 on achieving land degradation neutrality by 2030. So it was indeed a very busy year.

Biodiversity negotiations epitomize resilience in the face of the challenges of the past 2 years. After delays, online meetings, and moving venues from China to Canada, the [UN Biodiversity Conference](#) adopted the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (GBF). This framework will guide future biodiversity policy. It replaces the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, most of which were not met. This time around, the targets are more comprehensive, specific, and time-bound. Guided by a vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050, the GBF includes four overarching goals and a set of 23 targets to be reached by 2030.

Table 1. Milestones met (and not) in 2022

Meeting	Possible outcomes	Delivered?
UN Environment Assembly	Launch negotiations for a plastics treaty	✓
	Launch negotiations for a science-policy body for chemicals, waste, and pollution	✓
Convention on Biological Diversity COP 15	Post-2020 global biodiversity framework	✓
UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)	New legally binding instrument	✗
IPBES	Assessment reports on values and on sustainable use	✓
IPCC	Working Group II (impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability) and III (mitigation) reports	✓
	Sixth Assessment Synthesis Report	✗
World Trade Organization	Agreement on fisheries subsidies	✓

Source: Author's calculations.

Even the World Trade Organization (WTO) did its part for biodiversity. After over 2 decades of talks, WTO members clinched a [deal on fisheries subsidies](#). The treaty curbs subsidies to:

- illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing
- fishing of overfished stocks
- fishing on the high seas outside the control of regional fisheries management organizations.

With this agreement, governments have gone a long way toward fulfilling the mandate of SDG 14.6 (end subsidies contributing to

overfishing). There is [more work to do](#), but it's a start.

Important talks got underway in 2022. There is hope for global cooperation to address the flood of plastics polluting land and water. The process, which is ambitiously set to conclude in 2024, held its [first meeting](#) in November 2022, with an exchange of views on the treaty's scope. Early talks also began on establishing a science-policy panel on chemicals and waste to prevent pollution. Many hope this body will help raise the profile of chemicals and waste issues, as the IPCC and IPBES have done for climate change and biodiversity.

Some Surprises

Global environmental governance can be unpredictable. When thousands of negotiators representing nearly 200 countries gather, almost anything can happen. Nevertheless, there were breakthroughs in 2022 on long-standing controversial topics that have plagued biodiversity and climate governance.

The [UN Biodiversity Conference](#) surprisingly agreed to establish a multilateral mechanism for benefit sharing from data derived from genetic resources or digital sequence information. Such digital information can lead to medical and food security breakthroughs, but the benefits are often unequally shared. The decision aims to ensure the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adapts to technological developments and ensures respect for its third objective: fair and equitable benefit sharing.

The [Sharm El-Sheikh Climate Change Conference](#) agreed on new funding arrangements to help vulnerable countries respond to loss and damage—the permanent effects when climate change pushes natural and human systems beyond their ability to adapt. A committee will hash out the details. The mere recognition of the need for finance to help vulnerable countries deal with loss and damage is a significant milestone.

Work Remaining

It wasn't a clean sweep of significant decisions in 2022. Work remains to finalize key climate reports and address the future of chemicals management and high seas biodiversity.

In some cases, the delays can be partly attributed to the lasting effects of the COVID disruptions. The IPCC approved the overdue reports for Working Groups II ([Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability](#)) and III ([Mitigation](#)) in 2022. The Synthesis Report was further delayed to 2023. As a result, it is not yet helping inform the Global Stocktake under the UNFCCC. The IPCC relies on the volunteer efforts of hundreds of climate scientists, and it has felt the effects of the pandemic's squeeze on individuals' time acutely. Voices were raised in favour of bold reforms to the IPCC's organizational structure and work program. New products and activities were also called for that would allow the Panel to stay relevant.

For marine biodiversity, COVID delays complicated already complex negotiations. Talks toward a high seas treaty were expected to conclude in August 2022 (as the revised deadline) but still need to [finish](#). However, hopes are high for a conclusion in 2023, with several lauding 2022 as the year where parties made “more progress than in the last decade.”

With most of the catch-up complete, the pace inevitably slows in 2023. There may be space to work through these last issues. Informal discussions, often happening between meetings, can be powerful ways to remove roadblocks. There may finally be time.



#LossAnd
Damage

PayUp4Loss
AndDamage

PayUp4Loss
AndDamage

PayUp4Loss
AndDamage

Old Ideas to New Action: Loss and damage and nature- based solutions

Sometimes ideas need time to seep into mainstream conversations. In 2022, loss and damage finally achieved institutional depth: beyond recognition and technical support, there will be funding arrangements. Nature-based solutions gained breadth. The idea spread across decisions of various treaties—not always smoothly, but successfully.

Loss and Damage

The name almost says it all. Loss and damage refers to the permanent effects of climate change beyond what can be adapted to. Effects can be slow or rapid, economic or not (see Figure 2). The effects are here and now and unequally distributed geographically and socially. Losses and damages disproportionately impact vulnerable countries and members of society, including children, the elderly, migrants, women, and people of low socioeconomic status.

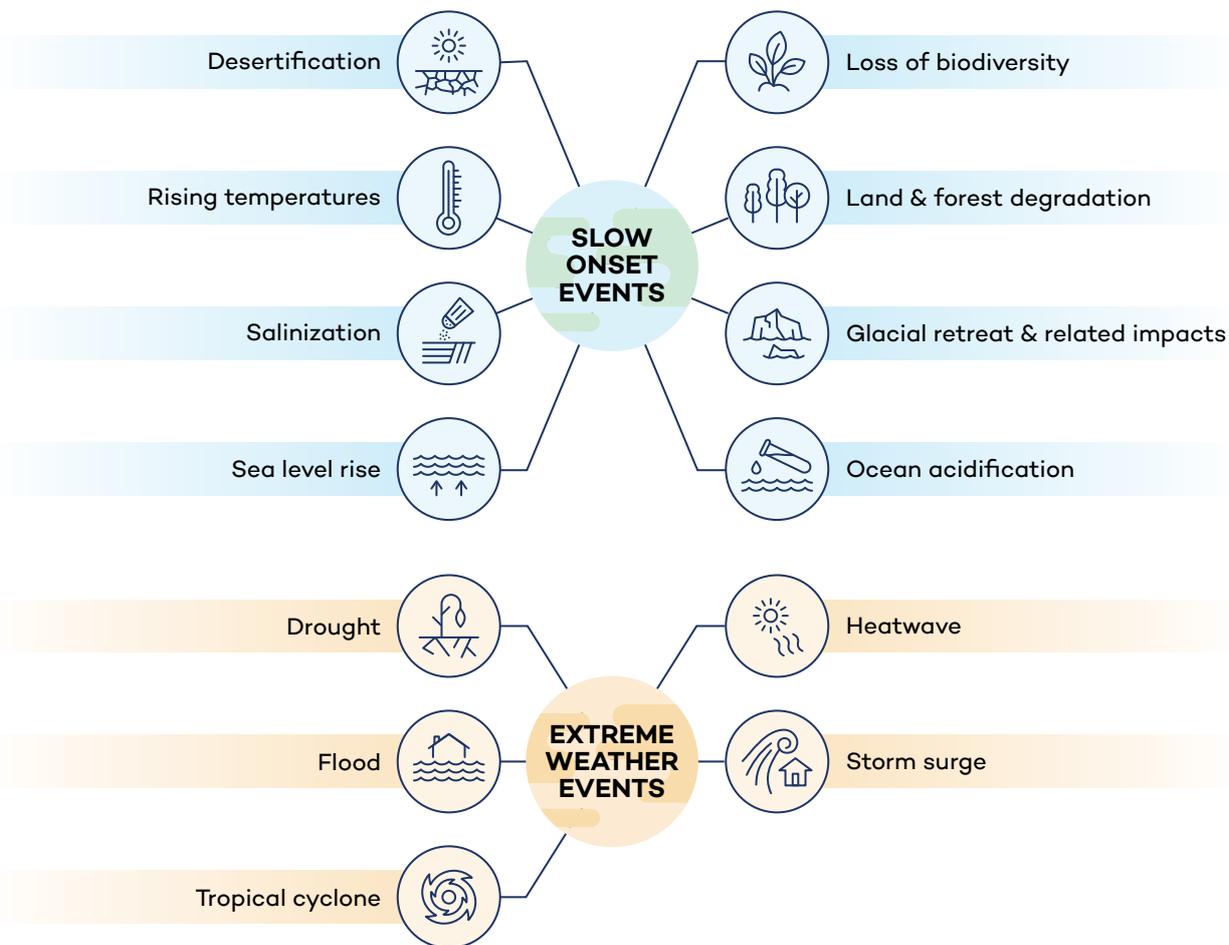
The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) introduced the idea of loss and damage in the 1990s. At that time, the Alliance called for compensation for countries vulnerable to rising sea levels, much as it does today.

Recognition came slowly. It was first included on a formal negotiations agenda in 2011 and institutionalized in the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts in 2013.

The concept shifted along the way. Contentious talks led to a stand-alone article for loss and damage in the Paris Agreement. This agreement ruled out compensation and liability. Over time, expert groups and technical groups have worked under the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on types of losses, displacement, and comprehensive risk management.

The issue of finance was stuck in circular conversations for years. Even at the [2022 subsidiary bodies meeting](#), a proposed agenda item on loss and damage finance was blocked by developed countries. However, just months later, there was a breakthrough. Not only was loss and damage finance on the agenda for the first time, but the parties established a fund and process to operationalize it.

Figure 2. Examples of loss and damage



Source: UNFCCC [Online Guide to Loss and Damage](#). Reproduced with permission.

What Broke the Logjam?

It seems to be a mix of global solidarity and clever diplomacy. Loss and damage arrived in the Global North. [Hurricane Fiona](#) was one of the costliest climate disasters to date and the most expensive to hit Canada. Estimates released in 2022 put the economic cost of climate disasters in Europe at [EUR 145 billion in the last 10 years](#).

[Funding pledges](#) emerged throughout 2022. Scotland added GBP 5 million to its previous GBP 2 million commitment. Denmark put forward USD 13.7 million. Some of the world’s wealthiest countries (in the G7) came together with the most

vulnerable (V20) to create the [Global Shield against Climate Risks](#).

In Egypt, at COP 27 itself, the negotiation dynamics were, well, dynamic. The G-77 and China maintained a united front in getting loss and damage on the agenda. Given that the Group includes small island states and oil-producing countries with wildly varied interests, their unity was a remarkable feat. Small island states used their membership of the High-Ambition Coalition (HAC) to bring key developed countries on board. The compromise to put the issue on the agenda was an explicit reaffirmation that this discussion [would not be about liability or compensation](#).

The EU agreed to establish a fund at this COP in a dramatic speech just days before the meeting’s scheduled end ... if there was equally significant progress on mitigation. That demand was not met. The mitigation outcome was viewed by many as putting “1.5°C on life support.” But the promise was out there—that a fund could be established in 2023, with details to be worked out. In the closing plenary, the decision on loss and damage was agreed to even before many had read the mitigation or cover decisions. Developed countries had lost their bargaining chip and had run out of time to press for more on mitigation.

The deadline for the details is 2023 at COP 28. First, the small committee will have to identify the existing funding sources. Then, there is the thorny question of who should donate to the fund. It will also have to confront uncertainties. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group II report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability notes, methods for assessing loss and damage are currently underdeveloped. Some losses, like cultural lands and homes, may be immeasurable and impossible to quantify.

Nature-Based Solutions

The concept of “nature-based solutions” (NbS) pioneered by the IUCN is 20 years old. The heart of the idea is that healthy ecosystems can achieve other environmental and social goals. Rather than technologies

or built infrastructure, nature can help us reduce carbon emissions, adapt to a warmer world, be protected from storm waters, enhance farming productivity, and more.

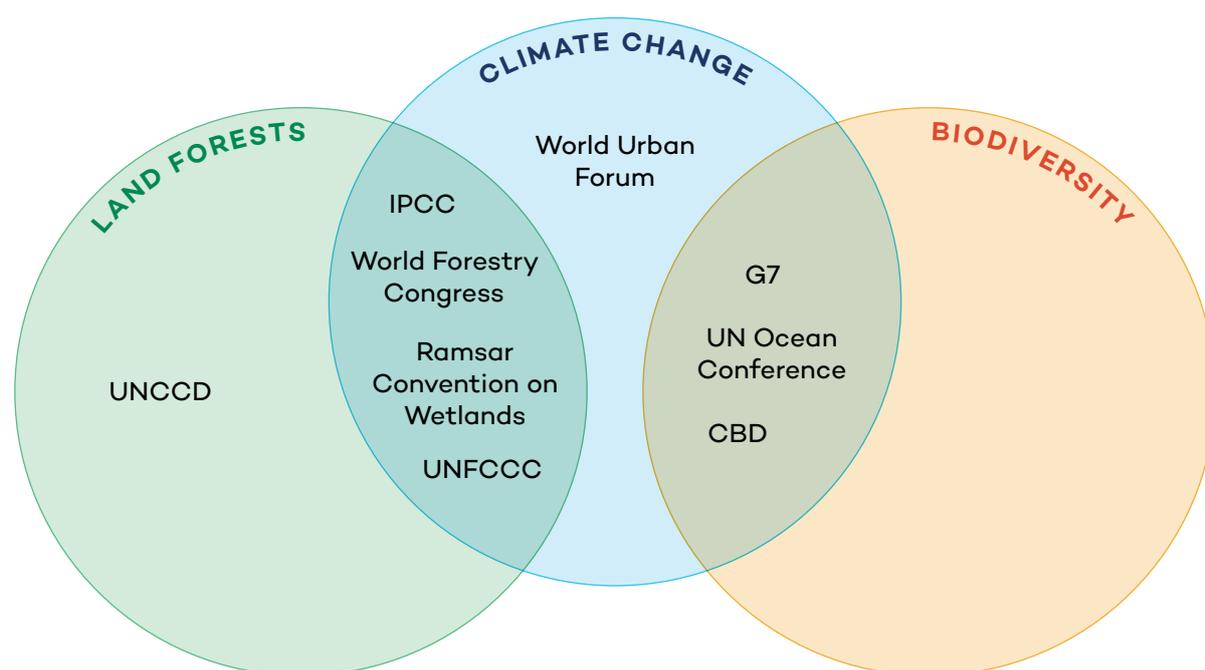
NbS is a powerful idea that could reorient our approaches to environmental policy, but it only appeared in global decisions in 2022. The term appeared in several treaty bodies and even further afield, from the [G7](#) to the [World Urban Forum](#). Even the International Labour Organization (ILO) considered how [NbS could create green jobs](#), especially in rural areas where forestry and agriculture are key sectors.

The first environmental body to formally recognize NbS in 2022 was the [UN Environment Assembly](#). Resolution 1/5 gives an exhaustive definition of NbS as

actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits.

This is the type of definition that can appear when 193 member states are involved. However, it preserves the core of the idea: improve nature for its own sake and improve peoples’ lives.

Figure 3. Different visions of nature-based solutions



Source: Author's calculations.

The idea is not without controversy. Across the Rio Conventions (UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC), the [IPCC](#), and the [Ramsar Convention on Wetlands](#), there was pushback against NbS by some developing countries, often led by Brazil. Protracted debates weighing NbS against ecosystem approaches ensued in each forum. In part, the concern is principled. Why should developing countries be responsible for the “solutions” to problems caused by the Global North? Adding the qualifier “and/or ecosystem approaches” after NbS appeased those concerned.

Different visions emerged as the concept diffused across forums (see Figure 3). Only the UNEA resolution is broad. The other forums tended to invoke NbS in specific contexts. Most used NbS to link at least two environmental challenges. This was the hope of the [UN Convention to Combat Desertification](#). It was the first Rio Convention to recognize NbS in a decision in 2022. The Abidjan Declaration adopted in May views NbS as cost-effective and efficient.

In climate governance, the [Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan](#) nests NbS in a section

on forests. The decision references the UNEA resolution on NbS and encourages countries to consider NbS or ecosystem-based approaches for their mitigation and adaptation actions. Climate projects have been connected to [land grabs and human rights abuses](#). The decision calls for ensuring relevant social and environmental safeguards.

The contentious discussions on NbS happened in biodiversity politics. Throughout 2022, negotiations for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework returned to the question of whether to include NbS. References were proposed across [several targets and sections](#):

- Target 8, on minimizing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity
- Target 11, on regulating services provided by ecosystem services and nature
- Section B(bis), on principles and approaches

When decisions were due at the December meeting, NbS featured throughout the final texts. Targets 8 and 11 reference “nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches.” Guidance to the Global Environment Facility, the financial mechanism for the CBD, also included NbS.

The hope at UNCCD that NbS could promote solutions seems partially borne out, but the connections are uneven. Climate thinks of NbS in terms of forests; biodiversity in terms of climate. And, so far, UNCCD

speaks of NbS in terms of land degradation. The diffusion may have been smooth in 2022, but it may be just a first step.

The breakthroughs in 2022 are likely to lead to greater traction for this term, despite the opposition of some countries. Already, several initiatives are on the horizon, some spearheaded by the World Bank and IUCN planned for 2023, that further encourage the use of NbS.



Russian Federation



Александр ШЕШТАКОВ
Russian Federation
PARTY

Human Rights and Conflict Issues in Environmental Negotiations

In July 2022, the [UN General Assembly](#) recognized that access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right. To achieve this right, countries will have to fully implement multilateral environmental agreements. How human rights discussions played out in these treaties, however, remained tentative and contentious in 2022.

The UN General Assembly Resolution builds on over a decade of efforts by environmental and human rights activists to link human rights and climate change. In 2008, the Human Rights Council adopted a [resolution](#) highlighting how climate change could undermine other human rights. In 2021, the Council recognized the [human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment](#). It established a [Special Rapporteur](#) “to contribute towards ongoing efforts at all levels to address the adverse impact of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights.”

In 2022, much of the human rights focus was on biodiversity. On the eve of the Convention on Biological Diversity COP 15, UN human rights experts [stressed](#) the need for a human rights-based approach.

Measures intended to protect biodiversity, such as [“fortress conservation” practices can violate human rights](#).

The Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) adopted at COP 15 explicitly outlines a human rights-based approach to implementation. It reaffirms the rights, contributions, and unique value systems of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as biodiversity custodians and conservation partners. Target 22 of the GBF seeks to protect human rights defenders.

Despite these wins, several bodies struggled to incorporate human rights language in the past year. For example, the [Ramsar Convention on Wetlands](#) worked to integrate human rights language. However, negotiators worked and re-worked a reference reaffirming water as a human right until it became even more vague.

At the climate conference this year, negotiators included human rights language in the [Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan](#). It recognizes the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, the right to health, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, it couches this reference

carefully, saying countries should “consider” these rights when undertaking climate action.

Market mechanism discussions struggled to come to grips with protecting human rights, particularly for forest and other “removal” projects. Such projects are meant to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere using natural environments or technologies. Often used as offsets, such projects have a [patchy human rights record](#). Negotiators could not agree on rules related to environmental integrity, environmental and social safeguards, and human and Indigenous Peoples’ rights. The [issue was returned to the Article 6.4 Supervisory body](#) to work on and report back in 2023.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) continued to debate whether to consider the [impacts of its listing decisions](#) on livelihoods and conservation outcomes. At [CoP 19](#), countries debated if the effects on livelihoods should be a new criterion for species protection. The proposal to reopen the debate over listing criteria to include livelihoods failed. Many parties maintain the listing criteria are not the place to consider livelihoods so directly.

Conflicts

War is a sad reality every year. In 2022, conflict-related issues found their way into environmental discussions. Usually, delegates insulate environmental discussions from security issues. However, the year saw a growing recognition of the connections between conflict and environmental degradation.

Throughout 2022, at almost all environmental meetings, there were statements condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In some instances, delegates from Europe or North America walked out while Russia gave an opening statement. Disagreements over bureau member nominations from the Central and Eastern European region resulted in postponed elections in the plastics INC and UN Biodiversity Conference.

Significantly, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands discussed the environmental emergency and damage to wetlands in Ukraine stemming from Russian aggression, which resulted in [a landmark resolution](#) recognizing the impacts of the war in Ukraine on its environment, including disruption of the ecological status of 16 Ramsar Sites and potential damage to another 15 sites.

Rounding out the year, the UN General Assembly passed the [Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts](#). Its 27 legal principles were a decade in the

making and represent a comprehensive approach to the problem. The principles touch on natural resource extraction, given that “conflict” has become an adjective to describe resources from diamonds to timber. The conduct of corporations, rights of Indigenous Peoples, and effects of occupation are all included in what some have deemed a “[radical](#)” approach.

There are questions about whether armed conflict should be addressed in environmental governance forums. The damage and destruction caused by war directly affect the sustainability and well-being of humans and ecosystems. However, policy-makers have viewed geopolitical tensions as beyond the boundaries of environmental governance. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, CITES, CBD, and the World Heritage Convention have previously adopted resolutions and other measures recognizing the risks armed conflict poses to biodiversity, yet these historic resolutions never condemned aggression.

The war in Ukraine has affected the country’s environment as well as global food and energy supplies. The decision passed by countries at the Convention on Wetlands meeting could mark a new recognition that environmental governance does not exist in a vacuum, and—whether we like it or not—sustainable development and geopolitics are interconnected.



Looking Ahead to 2023

2023 could—fingers crossed—complete the return to a more normal schedule for global environmental governance. We are preparing to cover seven COPs/MOPs, rather than the extraordinary 10 COPs that took place in 2022. Fewer meetings, but they promise to offer an unprecedented look into the effectiveness of several global treaties. At the same time, new agreements will be negotiated and some hopefully concluded.

Assessing Effort and Impact

Performance reviews will be a theme of 2023. In various forms, assessments and stocktaking will be the focus of many meetings to shed light on how well countries are living up to their obligations. Through reports, dialogues, and high-profile events, there will be new information about the state of our planet and efforts to save it.

Figure 4. A sample of the year ahead, 2023



Source: Author's calculations.

Transparency and global awareness of action—or inaction—are usually how multilateral treaties are enforced. Environmental agreements have mechanisms to assess progress, with the hope of spurring further action. In 2023, progress on climate and chemicals action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be in the spotlight. A critical feature in these assessments will be the effort to identify lessons and levers to inspire further action.

2023 will mark the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda's 15-year agenda. In September, heads of state and government will gather for the SDG Summit. As at the [last Summit](#), they will very likely receive sobering assessments of the status of the Agenda's implementation. The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) will deliver some of the news. This report will identify entry points for the transformations the world needs to achieve.

To catalyze action on the water-related SDGs, the UN 2023 Water Conference will try to raise awareness and build partnerships. It's a once-in-a-generation event. Expect new commitments aplenty.

The first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement will conclude at the climate meeting in the United Arab Emirates. The technical phase of the Stocktake used innovative techniques to gather input throughout 2022. This first phase will conclude in June, turning over the findings to the political stage. The Synthesis Report from the sixth assessment cycle of

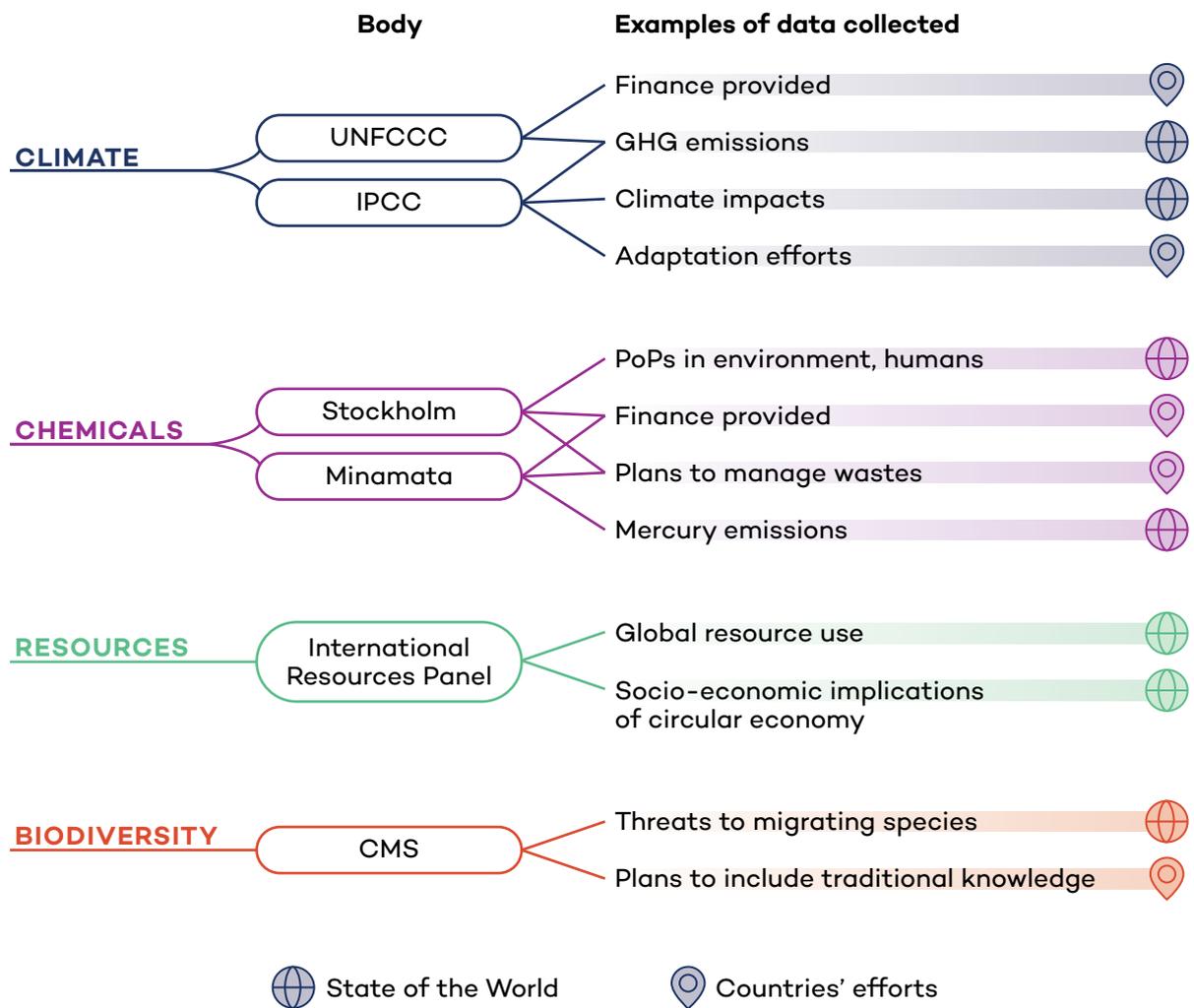
the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will be available to inform the Global Stocktake during its final, crucial year. In 2023, leaders will be given a wealth of information about the state of the world and their collective efforts (see Figure 5).

Other treaty bodies will conduct their evaluations. The Convention on Migratory Species will undertake assessments as the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015–2023 ends. The Plan sets out a series of targets. Underlying these was a hope that a strategic approach could bring [added political attention](#) to protecting migratory species. In 2023, countries may also consider if this less explicit goal was achieved.

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) will undertake an effectiveness evaluation. It will serve as an assessment of the Convention's ability to protect human health and the environment from POPs. The report will include data on a range of problems, from unintentional POP emissions to POP stockpiles and wastes. Crucially, we'll know whether POP levels in the environment are decreasing.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury has a similar exercise that will begin in 2023. It will be the first effectiveness evaluation of the Convention. Throughout the year, an Open-ended Scientific Group will work out how to accurately measure reductions in mercury in the environment—the real-world effect of the Convention. In 2023, we'll learn more about the chemical burden our planet—and our bodies—carry.

Figure 5. (Some of) what we'll learn in 2023



Source: Author's calculations.

Negotiating Something New

Negotiations of a [new science-policy panel for chemicals](#) will start in earnest in 2023. It's being negotiated with the hope that it will stand alongside the IPCC and IPBES, raising public and political attention around chemicals. Chemical production and use continue to grow exponentially. This panel could provide early warnings of threats to human health and the environment. But first, delegates must negotiate how such a “horizon scanning” function will operate.

This panel joins ongoing negotiations to establish new global rules for a range of issues (see Figure 5). Plastics will likely garner the most attention. Given the ubiquity of plastics—the many types and almost infinite uses—the goal to conclude negotiations by 2024 is ambitious. Some of the key issues may centre on turning off the tap: how to reduce plastic production and whether to consider the chemicals added to plastics. Countries' positions will become more apparent in 2023. Then, the arduous work of bridging these positions begins.

These new negotiations will join the continued talks that have yet to cross the finish line. For biodiversity on the high seas (or, of areas beyond national jurisdiction, or BBNJ), there are real hopes for success.

Negotiations for a post-2020 framework for the [sound management of chemicals and waste](#) are at the “zero draft” stage. There

are some elements of the future instrument emerging, which many hope to adopt in 2023.

Beside these wholly new agreements, expect to see a lot of discussion about finance. Without it, developing countries will struggle to live up to their obligations. In turn, the environment that we all share remains in crisis. Biodiversity finance is on a fast track—especially at the Global Environment Facility, one of the main finance arms for many environmental agreements. In addition, there will be the recommendations on a new loss and damage finance facility considered in December at the climate conference.

2023: Optimism or Dread?

We could leave 2023 with a sense of inertia. All the performance reviews could make for depressing reading. Countries' efforts are likely to fall short. The geopolitical tensions that seeped into environmental negotiations in 2022 may add to the challenges facing stakeholders in the coming year.

But 2023 could provide clarity and perhaps hope. We'll be even clearer on where the gaps lie and can focus on improving implementation. As the adage goes, “sunlight is the best disinfectant.” By the end of the year, stakeholders should have access to critical new information that can guide strategic planning and immediate action. We'll be on the lookout for strong signals that countries will use the information to redouble their efforts on all fronts.

