CBD Women

CBD Women's Caucus submission on views and information relating to the strategic review and analysis of the current Programme of work on protected areas (PowPA) in the context of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework - https://www.cbd.int/notifications/2025-135

1. **What aspects should be incorporated or reinforced in the current review of the Programme of Work to improve alignment with the KMGBF?**

The updated version of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) must be grounded in a human rights and justice-based approach, with gender justice at its core, in order to align meaningfully with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF). Evidence from implementation demonstrates that exclusionary conservation approaches continue to generate social harms, undermine rights, and weaken conservation outcomes. These risks are particularly acute for women and girls in all their diversity, including those from Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Peoples of African descent comprising collectives embodying traditional lifestyles.

A revised PoWPA must explicitly recognize environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) — and in particular women environmental human rights defenders (WEHRDs) — as central actors in biodiversity conservation whose protection is an enabling condition for effective implementation, in line with KM-GBF Target 22. Conservation interventions frequently intersect with land conflicts, militarized enforcement, illegal extraction, trafficking, and organized crime, placing defenders at heightened risk of intimidation, criminalization, gender-based violence, and murder. The absence of explicit safeguards in the current PoWPA constitutes a critical gap that must be addressed through clear guidance, accountability measures, and gender-responsive protection protocols.

The revised PoWPA must therefore move decisively away from beneficiary-based narratives toward a rights-holder framework, recognizing women and girls in all their diversity — including those from Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Peoples of African descent comprising traditional lifestyles — as rights-holders, stewards, and decision-makers, not passive recipients of conservation benefits. This shift is essential to dismantle donor-driven, extractive implementation models that undermine local governance, concentrate power in large institutions, and weaken the agency and security of local actors, particularly women.

In this context, PoWPA must be reframed from a narrow protected-area model toward a rights-based area-based conservation approach, moving beyond fortress conservation. This includes explicit recognition of protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), and Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) as equally valid and complementary pathways, grounded in diverse value systems, biocultural approaches, and Indigenous and local worldviews. Legal and policy frameworks governing protected and conserved areas should be updated to integrate Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' own territorial management categories, knowledge systems, and relationships with land, water and biodiversity.

The revised PoWPA must also clearly articulate and operationalize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in line with international human rights standards, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This includes explicit respect for self-determination and rights to lands, territories and resources. Within this framework, Indigenous women must be explicitly recognized as rights-holders of particular importance, given both their central role in biodiversity conservation and the multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and violence they face, including exclusion, criminalization and gender-based violence linked to conservation interventions.

To ensure coherence with the KM-GBF, PoWPA must be explicitly aligned with:

- Section C of the Framework, including full and effective participation, gender equality, intergenerational equity and a human rights-based approach;
- Target 3, including recognition of ITTs as equally valid conservation pathways;
- Target 22, on access to rights, justice and the protection of environmental human rights defenders;
- Target 23, on gender equality and women's rights to land and natural resources; and
- the Gender Plan of Action, including commitments on women's land rights and the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence.

In line with these commitments, PoWPA should be reinforced through alignment with the Programme of Work on Article 8(j) and other provisions related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities to 2030, particularly its elements on conservation and restoration, sustainable use, human rights, and localization of funding, as well as decision 16/6 on Peoples of African descent comprising collectives embodying traditional lifestyles, .

Finally, the revised PoWPA should include explicit guidance and protocols for the protection of environmental human rights defenders, particularly women environmental human rights defenders, whose risks are often intensified by conservation-related land conflicts and enforcement practices. Synergies with regional instruments such as the Escazú Agreement and Aarhus Convention should be encouraged, alongside reference to UNEP's 10 Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders, to ensure that conservation finance and private-sector engagement uphold human rights standards.

2. **How could the implementation approach be revised to better contribute to Target 3?**

To better contribute to achieving Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), the implementation approach of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) must shift from a designation- and planning-driven model to a rights-based, co-created, and management-focused approach that delivers all qualitative elements of Target 3, not only area coverage.

First, implementation must be underpinned by updated legal and policy frameworks for area-based conservation, aligned with the KM-GBF and reinforced by the Programme of Work on Article 8(j), including its elements on conservation and restoration, sustainable use, and cross-cutting commitments on a human rights-based approach and localization of funding. Within these frameworks, Indigenous and

Traditional Territories (ITTs) must be fully recognized as equally valid conservation pathways, alongside protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

Second, implementation must move decisively beyond fortress conservation and be grounded in biocultural and rights-based approaches, including free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and co-creation at all stages. This includes co-creation of objectives, management plans, budgets, governance arrangements and benefit-sharing mechanisms, with local assemblies, cooperatives and community organizations. Implementation that bypasses these actors or relies on externally driven delivery risks exclusion, FPIC violations and weakened local governance.

Third, PoWPA implementation must ensure explicit attention to management effectiveness, accountability, monitoring of illegal activities, adaptive management, and the protection of rights-holders, including environmental human rights defenders.

Fourth, implementation requires stronger institutional collaboration between the CBD Secretariat, national protected area authorities and site-level managers to bridge the gap between global commitments and daily management practice.

Fifth, implementation approaches must address benefit-sharing and livelihoods as core determinants of success. Inadequate benefit-sharing disproportionately affects women's livelihoods and household food security, increasing dependency on natural resources and, in some contexts, elevating risks of gender-based violence.

Finally, the revised implementation approach must include robust monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms with indicators that measure progress across all elements of Target 3, including equitable governance, rights protection, management effectiveness and sustainability — not only spatial coverage.

3. Which PoWPA goals, targets, or activities should be prioritised to support implementation of the KM-GBF by 2030?

PoWPA element / goal	Suggested priority activities
Goal 1.4 – Site-based protected area planning and management	• Require management plans (not only planning processes) that integrate all dimensions of the ecosystem approach: planning and zoning; management and conservation; socio-environmental and cultural aspects; governance and participation; sustainability and finance. • Ensure management plans integrate AOPs, EIAs, surveillance and monitoring systems, environmental education programmes, territorial planning, and participatory governance. • Mandate gender-responsive and rights-based management plans, co-created with IP, lcs, women, youth and children. • Require FPIC- and co-creation–based management plans, including co-design of budgets, enforcement approaches and monitoring, with IP, lcs and women-led organizations.

Goal 1.5 – Prevent and mitigate negative impacts and threats	• Expand threat assessments (1.5.5) to include human rights risks, including violence, criminalization and gender-based violence affecting women and EHRDs. • Strengthen governance and enforcement measures (1.5.6) to include gender-responsive protection protocols, whistleblowing mechanisms, and safeguards for EHRDs and WEHRDs. • Build capacities and allocate resources for rights-based threat prevention and enforcement, consistent with HRBA and the Gender Plan of Action. • Establish certification / verification mechanisms to ensure reported conservation services and enforcement actions are effectively delivered and do not facilitate illegal activities. • Create safe and enabling spaces and institutional support mechanisms for women environmental human rights defenders, in collaboration with women-led conservation organizations.
Goal 2.1 – Promote equity and benefit-sharing	• Address lack of transparency in benefit-sharing by establishing clear, gender-responsive benefit-sharing mechanisms. • Ensure benefits contribute to women's livelihoods, food security and economic autonomy, reducing dependency on protected area resources and associated GBV risks. • Link benefit-sharing explicitly to women's leadership and participation in governance.
Goal 2.2 – Enhance and secure involvement of indigenous and local communities and stakeholders	• Recognize Indigenous Peoples, local communities, Afro-descendant peoples, women, youth and EHRDs as rights-holders, not beneficiaries. • Conduct participatory, gender- and intersectionality-based national assessments (2.2.1) of barriers to participation, rights, safety and leadership. • Develop PA-level Gender Action Plans based on these assessments, with affirmative actions for women's participation, organization and leadership. • Institute gender quotas in decision-making bodies and formally recognize women-led governance structures (networks, collectives) for PAs and OECMs.
Goal 3.1 – Enabling policy, institutional and socio-economic environment	• Update laws, policies and strategies to explicitly recognize women's rights to land, forests, territories and common natural resources, aligned with Target 23 and the Gender Plan of Action. • Integrate a gender and human-rights perspective into legal and institutional frameworks governing PAs, OECMs and ITTs.
Goal 3.2 – Capacity-building	• Combine targeted training on the Gender Plan of Action with broader capacity-building on biodiversity and gender justice for protected area authorities and conservation organizations. • Support grassroots training for women on rights, gender, organization, advocacy and affirmative action. • Recognize intergenerational knowledge transmission between women and girls as a core conservation activity.
Goal 3.4 – Financial sustainability	• Guarantee equitable and direct access to funding for women-led governance structures and local organizations. • Avoid intermediary-heavy financing models that exclude local women's groups, cooperatives and collectives.

Goal 4.2 – Evaluate and improve management effectiveness	• Integrate gender- and rights-responsive indicators into management effectiveness evaluations, including women's participation, leadership, tenure security, GBV prevention capacity, and protection of EHRDs. • Include verification, whistleblowing and grievance mechanisms as part of management effectiveness evaluations.
Goal 4.3 – Monitor protected area status and trends	• Establish robust monitoring systems and standardized databases for PAs and OECMs that respect and recognize Indigenous and local knowledge, particularly women's knowledge. • Track progress using gender-transformative indicators, including women's governance roles, livelihoods, food sovereignty, and women-led conservation initiatives.

This is submission on behalf of the CBD Women's Caucus, with contributions from Amelia Arreguin-Prado, Berta Medrano, Camila Cosse Braslavsky, Christina Dirany, Cristina Eghenter, Marie Salvatrice Musabyeyezu and Silje Heldt Zaltzman.

The CBD Women's Caucus (CBD WC) is the women's constituency within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It stands as a self-organised global platform, supporting women and girls worldwide to advocate for their rights within biodiversity-related decision-making processes across all levels.

For more information: coordination@cbdwomenscaucus.org

November, 2025