



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS  
on the occasion of  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
8 MARCH 2016**

*“Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality”*

The theme for this year's International Women's Day, “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality”, is well-aligned with the ambitious Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which integrates gender equality and women's empowerment as a cross-cutting theme across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 targets, making it clear that equality and empowerment are a necessary part of a sustainable future. This is no less important for SDGs 14 and 15, which together emphasize the conservation and sustainable use of ocean and marine resources, terrestrial ecosystems and halting biodiversity loss.

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have recognized these linkages, with the adoption of a Gender Plan of Action under the Convention in 2008, and an updated 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action to align with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. This updated Plan includes possible actions for Parties to integrate gender into their biodiversity policy, planning and programming.

These calls and commitments to action reinforce the message that more effort is needed to make lasting changes in how we work to achieve the objectives of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the related goals of Agenda 2030, including to halt biodiversity loss. Data demonstrates that women have a limited role in international environmental decision-making, with women found to represent less than one-third of decision-makers in six out of nine decision-making processes analysed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in its Environment and Gender Index (EGI). This lack of representation is consistent across international, national and local levels. The EGI found women serving as the heads of national environmental-sector ministries in only 12 per cent of countries analysed. Evidence further demonstrates that women are generally underrepresented in forest user groups, such as village forest committees and community forest associations. Having women at the table is important to help ensure their needs and priorities are considered, and effectively that a broader range of issues are addressed. For example, studies indicate that greater involvement of women in forest governance could



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
United Nations Environment Programme  
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada  
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 Fax : +1 514 288 6588  
[secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int) [www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int)



help ensure that forest policy and planning is more sensitive to the food security needs of communities, which are generally women's responsibility.

Increasing women's representation as decision-makers in the environmental arena is an important measure, but more is needed to reduce the constraints that limit women's abilities to engage as effective actors in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. Policies need to incorporate gender considerations and, where appropriate, include actions targeted to address barriers to women's participation and engagement, with adequate financing attached. Women lag behind men in ownership and access to land and other productive resources, as well as in participation in the formal economy and in payment. Stark gender disparities are apparent in land holdings in developing regions, wherein an estimated 10-20 per cent of all land owners are women, who typically control holdings of smaller size and lesser quality compared to that of men. Women's participation in the fisheries sector is similarly limited, with less access rights and decision-making authority; women's activities are generally less profitable than those of men.

Such statistics indicate a lack of opportunity, but only hint at what potential might be realized if these inequalities are redressed. In recognizing gender equality and women's empowerment as central components of sustainable development, we are recognizing that women can play an even greater role in helping to build a more sustainable future. The commitment to mainstream gender provided by the Convention's 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action is one important step to help take us there. To implement the Plan, the Secretariat is working with international partners, including IUCN, and with support from the Japan Biodiversity Fund and the Government of Finland. Together, we are working to increase understanding and awareness on the needs and the means to address gender issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and to support all Parties to take a gender-responsive approach in their efforts. One such measure underway is to support developing country Parties to integrate gender into their biodiversity policy, planning and programming.

Sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity depend on the understanding, commitment and participation of all women and men. This is needed to ensure that decisions may be taken based on the full extent of knowledge available, and consideration given to the needs and priorities of all affected, so that the efforts we make will have a greater chance of succeeding. Helping to grant women the rights, responsibilities, tools and means to play more effective roles to achieve the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets is a step in the right direction for a Planet 50-50 by 2030.

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