

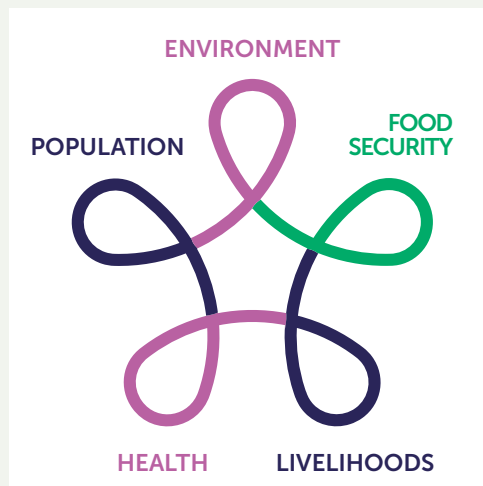
Reproductive choice in national biodiversity policy:

Guidance on how to
ensure PHE and removing
barriers to rights-based and
voluntary family planning
are included in NBSAPs



Time for change

The most effective time to seek changes to a national policy is when there is mounting evidence supporting the change, a growing movement of organisations promoting the change and a window of opportunity when the policy is due to be revised. This year is such a moment. In 2024, almost two hundred nations are starting, or have just started, the process of revising their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, in order to align with the goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework. This guide introduces the background to these plans, highlights how to engage in national revision processes and suggests points to consider raising when seeking to promote the importance of removing barriers to voluntary and rights-based family planning¹ and the development of new Population, Health and Environment (PHE) programmes within those plans.



Population, Health and Environment, or PHE, is a multisectoral and holistic approach to biodiversity conservation, human health, and sustainable livelihoods. PHE implementers recognise the related health, climate, gender, livelihood and environmental challenges many communities face.

Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity is a multilateral treaty which was opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and entered into force in December 1993. The Convention is legally binding on the countries, known as Parties, which have signed it. Today, there are 196 such Parties, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. The Convention has three main goals:

- the conservation of biological diversity;
- the sustainable use of its components; and
- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

The Convention recognises that natural resources are finite and that economic development is essential to meet human needs, meaning sustainable use of nature is essential for the long-term success of development.



Peer educators perform a drama in Rukiga, Uganda, highlighting connections between health, climate smart agriculture, sustainable livelihoods and the environment.

¹ As this guide is written for those engaging in processes under the Convention on Biological Diversity, we use phraseology which is accessible to ministries of environment. The authors support the full spectrum of sexual and reproductive health and rights, or SRHR, and believe that by using the most relevant existing entry points in existing policies, such as those stated in this guide, is the most pragmatic way to support efforts promoting SRHR more broadly.

Global Biodiversity Framework

In December 2022, at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, a new set of biodiversity goals, known as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (**GBF**), was adopted. The GBF has four goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030. The most well-known target, and the target which has gained the most media coverage, is the target to designate 30% of land and sea as protected areas by 2030, better known as the “30 by 30” initiative. Less attention has been paid to the GBF targets focussed on meeting people’s needs and the numerous references to health and gender. For instance, the GBF “*acknowledges the interlinkages between biodiversity and health*” and “*is to be implemented with consideration of the One Health Approach, among other holistic approaches*” (our emphasis).



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In Rukiga, Uganda, Rugarama Hospital undertakes clinical outreach as part of a PHE project undertaken with the Margaret Pyke Trust and International Crane Foundation. Most PHE projects serve remote rural communities, where health services are likely to be poorer.

The adoption of the GBF means that the Convention now has targets which are relevant for those promoting programmatic actions responding to the connections between biodiversity and health and holistic approaches like PHE. Furthermore, with two of the GBF’s targets referencing the importance of gender equality and gender responsive action, advocates can highlight that multi-sectoral programmes such as PHE, which typically strive to reduce gender inequality, are supported by the GBF.

National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

Article 6 of the Convention provides that each Party shall, “*Develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity [and integrate] as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies.*” The strategies are known as National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (**NBSAPs**), they are the main instrument for implementing the Convention at the country level.

By April 2024, 194 of 196 of the Parties to the Convention had developed at least one NBSAP. With the GBF replacing the previous set of targets, known as the Aichi Targets, Parties to the Convention are now required to revise their NBSAPs, to reflect the GBF’s targets. The replacement of the Aichi Targets by the GBF could be seen as the biodiversity equivalent of the Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**) replacing the Millennium Development Goals. Just as the adoption of the SDGs led to national development plans being updated to reflect the SDGs, the adoption of the GBF means NBSAPs are being updated to reflect the GBF.

Government engagement

Every Party to the Convention appoints a National Focal Point who is likely to be based within the national ministry of environment or other similar government agency. The National Focal Point acts as the liaison with the Convention and is designated to represent their Party between Conferences of the Parties to the Convention. The Convention provides the contact details of all National Focal Points. Each National Focal Point should be able to confirm the specific process and timing of the update process for their NBSAP including any requirements to register as a consultee, forthcoming consultation dates, existing drafts and the national engagement process.

Once advocates have registered as consultees on their NBSAP review, there are a range of potential points to be made when seeking references to the importance of removing barriers to voluntary and rights-based family planning and the PHE approach. In this guide, we provide ten suggestions.

GLOBAL SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1 The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)² has recently published a plan which can support efforts to ensure NBSAPs reference family planning, including in relation to Target 14 of the GBF.

IUCN developed their Global Species Action Plan specifically to support the implementation of the GBF, by setting out key strategic actions. It is an important resource to guide those involved in the NBSAP revision process. One key and strategic action in the Global Species Action Plan suggested by IUCN is, “14.5 Ensure removal of barriers to rights-based voluntary family planning”. IUCN also suggests tools and resources including resources from USAID and Population Reference Bureau relevant to PHE and family planning. Advocates involved with the NBSAP review process can therefore highlight that IUCN has not only called for removal of barriers to family planning in relation to Target 14 of the GBF but also supports PHE.

The IUCN recognition of barriers to family planning, and PHE as a conservation model, pre-dates their recently published Global Species Action Plan. In 2021, at IUCN World Conservation Congress, the IUCN membership passed the resolution, “Importance for the conservation of nature of removing barriers to rights-based voluntary family planning” and the establishment of the IUCN Biodiversity & Family Planning Task Force was one of the results of the resolution.

Barriers to family planning

Barriers to family planning are the physical, financial, educational, social, religious, personal or legal obstacles which prevent women and girls from accessing contraception.



Target 14 of the GBF

“Ensure the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning and development processes, poverty eradication strategies, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and, as appropriate, national accounting, within and across all levels of government and across all sectors, in particular those with significant impacts on biodiversity, progressively aligning all relevant public and private activities, fiscal and financial flows with the goals and targets of this framework.”

² The IUCN is a membership union that is uniquely composed of civil society organisations, including indigenous peoples’ organisations and governments. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. It benefits from the resources and expertise of its over 1,400 members and 16,000 experts.

AN ACCEPTED CONSERVATION MODEL

2 IUCN is not alone in recognising PHE, so has the Conservation Measures Partnership (**CMP**), which provides this definition, *"PHE is a multisectoral partnership approach to biodiversity conservation, human health, and sustainable livelihoods. PHE approaches are developed inclusively and equitably in response to local situations and the expressed needs of the people most closely linked to biodiversity conservation. PHE is intended to improve human health, particularly reproductive health, while empowering communities to achieve sustainable livelihoods, manage natural resources, conserve biodiversity, and maintain ecosystem services. By integrating actions across multiple sectors, PHE can reach more people linked to biodiversity outcomes, engage more men in reproductive health, and more women in livelihood and natural resource management. PHE can, ultimately, achieve more significant and longer lasting conservation outcomes than would likely occur without integration. When barriers to family planning are removed and contraceptive needs are met, women and girls can exercise their reproductive rights, leading to healthier timing and spacing of pregnancies, improved health of women and their children, and more time and energy to engage in education, conservation, and livelihood activities."*

CMP is a community of partners which foster and guide conservation efforts, drawing on the expertise of their collective of NGOs, government agencies, and private businesses. CMP aims to ensure better design, management and measurement of conservation action. The CMP definition of PHE is the definition supported by the authors of this guide and it could be highlighted to those involved in the NBSAP review process that CMP's definition of PHE, referencing health, and acknowledging the interlinkages between biodiversity and health, is the kind of holistic approach supported by the GBF, as set out above. The CMP definition builds on the work of a community of PHE practitioners, which has been growing since around the turn of the century.



Two farmers sort their crop of climbing beans. 43% of the global agricultural labour force are women.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE FOR THOSE MOST IMPACTED

3 Future NBSAPs are likely to have a far greater focus on both the impacts of climate change and importance of building climate resilience. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted, in its Fifth Assessment Report, the eligibility of voluntary, rights-based family planning as part of climate adaptation. The more recent Sixth Assessment Report (Chapter 7 and Chapter 18) includes numerous references to sexual and reproductive health as part of adaptation and resilience; it highlights improved child and maternal health, resulting from access to family planning, as an important part of climate resilient development. The IPCC reports provide an important entry point for the inclusion of reproductive health as part of multi-sectoral, gender sensitive approaches to building individual and community resilience to climate change.



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A medical outreach camp in the Maasai Mara supported by CHASE Africa as part of a health and conservation partnership with The Maa Trust.

A RECOGNISED GLOBAL PRIORITY

4 Those updating NBSAPs will not only want to ensure the NBSAP reflects the GBF but also the SDGs. Anyone working on an NBSAP will be very familiar with SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land) but might be less familiar with SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 5 (gender equality). This presents PHE advocates with further opportunities to inform those drafting NBSAPs.



Target 3.7 of the SDGs states “By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies, and programmes” (our emphasis).



Target 5.6 states, “Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences”.

Consequently, it is already recognised that such universal access to sexual and reproductive health services is a global priority, and one requiring inclusion in national plans and strategies, the NBSAPs being just one example of a relevant national strategy.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ADVANCED BY A PHE PROJECT



Additionally, some PHE projects will also support SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation).

A BROADER RESPONSE TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

5 Whilst IUCN and CMP have recognised PHE as a programmatic model, others have focussed attention on the connections between access to family planning and education. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as one example, has identified a suite of actions that further gender equality, women’s empowerment, economic development and biodiversity conservation. UNEP’s Sixth Global Environment Outlook, published in 2019, calls for greater access to family planning programmes to address inequality along with education and employment opportunities, and their 2021 report Making Peace with Nature echoes these arguments. Environmental ministries revising NBSAPs might not be aware of the extent to which family planning has already been recognised by UNEP and other agencies.



GENDER AND RIGHTS IN THE GBF

6 Women often play a vital role in managing natural resources and promoting sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries. They also face unique and complex barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services, due to cultural and social norms. When women have equal access to resources, land, education, healthcare and economic opportunities, and can choose the number, timing and spacing of children, they are better able to participate in decision-making processes and advocate for environmental protection. Targets 22 and 23 of the GBF call for the representation and participation of women in decision-making related to biodiversity and for gender equality in its implementation (also supported by an accompanying 2022-2030 Gender Plan of Action).

Target 23 of the GBF is to “Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the framework through a gender-responsive approach where all women and girls have equal opportunity and capacity to contribute to the three objectives of the Convention, including by recognizing their equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-making related to biodiversity.” Until everyone has the ability to choose if, when and with whom to have children, we cannot attain gender equality. Ensuring bodily autonomy, including through reproductive choice, is a cornerstone of gender equality, as well as a powerful pathway to better environmental outcomes. That unrestricted access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is fundamental to gender equality is elementary to those working in health and gender. Many of those working in biodiversity focussed organisations, or based in ministries of environment, are recognising the need for holistic community focussed conservation programmes, making PHE a particularly appropriate, and little known response, to those which are seeking to further holistic and rights-based³ approaches. Whilst many of these arguments might be new to environmental ministries, they are not complex and fit well within the GBF framework.

³ Section C, paragraph 14 of the GBF highlights “The implementation of the framework should follow a human rights-based approach respecting, protecting, promoting and fulfilling human rights. The framework acknowledges the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.”

DEMOGRAPHY: AN NBSAP ENTRY POINT

7 Demographic factors are a topic which many environmental ministries have considered in existing NBSAPs. For instance, the Zimbabwean Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate, states in its NBSAP which is soon to be revised, *“The growth of human populations and human affluence has placed increased pressure on biodiversity, threatening human wellbeing.”* Cameroon’s Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development has explained in its existing NBSAP, *“Demographic pressure and the associated development in local populations directly affect resource use and drives habitat conversion in biodiversity hotspots with irreversible degradation of ecosystems.”* Similar references are included in many other NBSAPs.⁴

A review carried out by the Margaret Pyke Trust in 2019 revealed that NBSAPs of the majority of the world’s countries where reproductive health needs were greatest, also identified national demographic projections as a primary driver of biodiversity loss. Only a handful of NBSAPs went on to identify that the rights-based way to respond to such challenges is to meet communities’ needs for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services. In the countries where previous NBSAPs have referenced the connections between biodiversity and demography, advocates will be particularly well placed to encourage policy makers to recognise that improved reproductive health information and services, which are likely promoted by national health plans, can also influence the demographic factors ministries of environment have recognised previously.



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Quality family planning counselling supports informed and voluntary decision-making on whether to use contraception and which method to use, if wanted.

EXISTING NATIONAL HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER PLANS

8 Most countries experiencing complex conservation and health challenges will have existing sectoral plans, including in the health, gender, or broader national development agendas, that are supportive of reproductive health. As ministries of environment and other environmental government authorities are not regularly involved in the development of these sectoral plans and policies, it is important that any relevant supportive plans are identified and referenced. Decision 15/6, adopted by the fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, encourages *“Parties to adopt the revised or updated NBSAPs as policy and/or legal instruments and to mainstream them (or elements thereof) with broader strategies and plans, such as national sustainable development plans, national development plans, poverty reduction strategies and other relevant national sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, in line with national circumstances and priorities.”* When improving reproductive health services is already supported in national development, health or other plans or policies, there are clear entry points for introducing reproductive health in the NBSAP revision process.

⁴ We do not believe environmental ministries seek to blame citizens for biodiversity loss in these NBSAPs, but rather highlight that in the absence of alternative livelihoods, they have little choice.

EXISTING NATIONAL ALLIES AND SOURCES

9 Some countries, such as Madagascar, have national networks which advocate for policy change furthering PHE and the removal of barriers to family planning within their national plans. Creating alliances with such networks, to engage collectively in NBSAP review processes, will likely increase chances of success. Other countries, such as Kenya, have existing national policies on PHE which highlight national support for the approach. We encourage collective advocacy, rooted in national contexts where possible. The People Planet Connection website, as one example, is a useful resource to find potential allies and resources.

“In Madagascar, whilst demographic dimensions and population dynamics were not really considered during the development of the previous NBSAP, our government is now positioning removing barriers to family planning as a pillar of Madagascar’s sustainable development. The cross-sectoral importance of family planning is being recognised more and more. We are working with the Madagascan government on the NBSAP review, not only using many of the arguments in this guide, but also using the local project examples and national policies we know of. The Madagascar PHE Network has a vision of ‘Healthy and resilient communities living in a healthy environment with sustainable livelihoods’ and to reach this vision means health and environmental sectors working together more closely.”

Nantenaina Andriamalala
Coordinator
Madagascar PHE Network



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Madagascar is famed for its endemic biodiversity, such as Ring-tailed lemur (*Lemur catta*) and also has a thriving community of PHE advocates

NATIONALLY RELEVANT SPECIES PLANS

10 An additional supporting policy tool is the IUCN’s *Cercocebus* and *Mandrillus* spp. Conservation Action Plan 2024-2028⁵ which highlights that PHE is an appropriate conservation model in relation to the conservation of the following primates, with priority conservation sites for those species in the following countries:

| Species | IUCN Red List status | Countries with priority conservation sites |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| Tana River mangabey (<i>Cercocebus galeritus</i>) | Critically Endangered | Kenya |
| Sanje mangabey (<i>Cercocebus sanjei</i>) | Endangered | Tanzania |
| Golden-bellied mangabey (<i>Cercocebus chrysogaster</i>) | Endangered | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| White-naped mangabey (<i>Cercocebus lunulatus</i>) | Endangered | Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana |
| Sooty mangabey (<i>Cercocebus atys</i>) | Vulnerable | Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone |

This one conservation action plan therefore provides policy support for PHE in 11 nations. National experts will know other relevant documents supporting PHE in their countries too. If health and rights advocates engage in NBSAP revision processes, we can ensure PHE and removing barriers to voluntary and rights-based family planning attain the level of policy support which is justified by the greater biodiversity, health and gender outcomes PHE can generate.



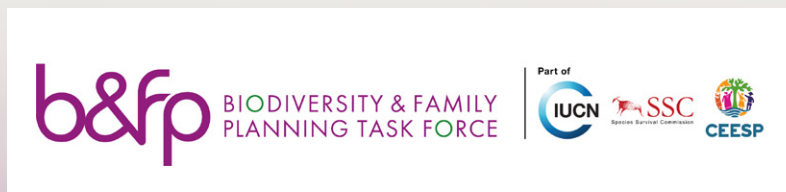
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White-naped mangabey (*Cercocebus lunulatus*).

⁵ The latest updates can be found on the conservation action plan’s website: <https://cam-conservation.org/a>

Movement building and contact

The authors have already engaged with seven Parties to the Convention and have experienced an openness to our approaches. We now seek to build a movement of organisations in multiple countries to work together to seek changes in as many NBSAPs as is appropriate. Once the first post-GBF NBSAP references the importance of removing barriers to voluntary and rights-based family planning and the development of new PHE programmes, it will likely be easier to encourage other governments to follow suit. We encourage anyone who uses this guide, or is already involved with this work, to let us know and we will connect national organisations which are engaged in these processes to amplify our collective work.



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