

The Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and COP16: Advancing Peasants' Rights in Biodiversity Conservation

The forthcoming 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to be held in Cali, Colombia in October 2024, represents a critical opportunity for advancing the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. As outlined by the Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, the intersection of biodiversity conservation and the rights of rural communities, particularly peasants, forms a pivotal point for discussion and action at COP16. This is the first COP to be held under the Working Group's mandate, making it a significant platform to push for stronger recognition of the role of rural populations in biodiversity conservation.

The Role of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The CBD, a legally binding international treaty created during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, is foundational in shaping global biodiversity policy. With over 190 signatory states, the CBD focuses on three core objectives:

1. The conservation of biological diversity.
2. The sustainable use of its components.
3. The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

The COP, which takes place every two years, serves as a platform for signatory states to assess progress and adopt new policies in pursuit of these goals. COP15, held in 2022, resulted in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which set forth specific actions and targets to conserve biodiversity. The upcoming COP16 will further advance these objectives and provide an avenue to integrate the rights and needs of rural communities, particularly peasants, into biodiversity planning. It is also important to recognize and elevate the role of peasants and their associations as key contributors to biodiversity conservation.

The Role of Peasants and Rural Communities in Biodiversity Conservation

The recognition of peasants and rural communities as central actors in biodiversity conservation is essential. The global peasantry, often impoverished and marginalized, is disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the exclusion from critical policy-making processes that

affect their livelihoods. They maintain an intrinsic relationship with the land and ecosystems, making them invaluable stewards of biodiversity.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) underscores the importance of safeguarding the rights of these communities. The articles of UNDROP directly relevant to the COP16 discussions include:

- **Article 5** (Right to sovereignty over natural resources).
- **Article 10** (Right to participate in decision-making).
- **Article 11** (Right to biodiversity and to preserve seeds).
- **Article 13** (Right to work)
- **Article 15** (Right to land and territory).
- **Article 17** (Right to food sovereignty).
- **Article 18** (Right to environmental conservation and protection).
- **Article 19** (Right to the conservation of local knowledge).

The integration of these provisions into the CBD framework could ensure that biodiversity conservation efforts are led by the very communities who are most affected by and connected to the environment.

National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

The COP16 represents an opportunity for states to revise and strengthen their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), which are the principal mechanisms through which signatory states implement the CBD's objectives at the national level. Historically, many NBSAPs have overlooked the rights and participation of local communities, particularly peasants. However, as the Working Group emphasizes, these plans must become more inclusive and participatory, respecting the knowledge and agency of rural communities. States should update their NBSAPs to ensure they align with the provisions of both the Global Biodiversity Framework and UNDROP.

Articles 8(j) and 10 of the CBD: Participation and Local Knowledge

The inclusion of peasants and rural people within the scope of the CBD is explicitly supported by articles 8(j) and 10(c, d).

- **Article 8(j)** calls on Parties to respect, preserve, and maintain the knowledge, innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities that are relevant for biodiversity conservation.
- **Article 10(c)** encourages the protection and customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices.
- **Article 10(d)** promotes support for local populations to develop and implement remedial actions for degraded ecosystems.

These articles provide a strong legal basis for the active participation of peasants and rural communities in biodiversity conservation. The Working Group's involvement in COP16 is aimed at ensuring that these provisions are more robustly implemented and that rural populations are not merely subjects of environmental policies but key actors in shaping and executing them.

Harmonizing the Global Biodiversity Framework and UNDROP

The adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at COP15 marked a crucial step toward safeguarding biodiversity, but it is essential that this framework be harmonized with the principles of UNDROP. Such alignment would promote a more equitable distribution of the benefits of biodiversity conservation, recognizing the contributions of peasants and rural workers to ecosystem sustainability.

Key areas for harmonization include:

- Ensuring land rights and access to natural resources for peasants (Article 15 of UNDROP).
- Promoting seed sovereignty and the right to use traditional agricultural practices (Article 11).
- Facilitating community-led conservation efforts, where rural populations actively manage and protect biodiversity (Articles 8(j) and 10 of the CBD).

Conclusion: COP16 as a Platform for Advancing Peasant Rights

The upcoming COP16 provides a vital platform for advancing the rights of peasants and other rural populations in the context of biodiversity conservation. By integrating the provisions of UNDROP and ensuring that NBSAPs are updated to reflect the participation of rural communities, states can make significant strides toward more inclusive and effective environmental policies. Peasants, with their deep knowledge of and connection to the land, are crucial actors in the fight to conserve biodiversity.

*The [Working Group on Peasants and other people working in rural areas](#) is comprised of five independent experts from all regions of the world. The Chair-Rapporteur is **Geneviève Savigny** (France) and the Vice-Chair is **Carlos Duarte** (Columbia); other members are **Shalmali Guttal** (India), **Uche Ewelukwa Ofodile** (Nigeria) and **Davit Hakobyan** (Armenia).*

***Gina Romero** is the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.*

The Working Group was established for three years in 2023 by the Human Rights Council in resolution A/HRC/RES/54/9 to promote global recognition and protection of the rights of peasants and rural workers, particularly in the context of poverty, food insecurity, and environmental degradation. The resolution underscores the importance of addressing systemic inequalities, securing access to land, seeds, water, and biodiversity, and ensuring that peasants participate in decision-making processes at all levels. It also provides assistance in the implementation by States of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#).

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For more information and media requests, please contact Stefano Sensi: stefano.sensi@un.org or Stee Asbjornsen stee.asbjornsen@un.org.

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