

OUTREACH NETWORK FOR GENE DRIVE RESEARCH

Outcome Statement UN Convention on Biological Diversity

12 November 2024

The Outreach Network for Gene Drive Research welcomes the agreement reached at the 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the 11th Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Cartagena Protocol. The outcomes mark a turning point in discussions around gene drive, with the adoption of new risk assessment guidance and a focus on capacity building to ensure gene drive research is carried out safely and responsibly.

The Additional and Voluntary **Guidance for the Risk Assessment of Living-Modified Organisms (LMOs) Containing Engineering Gene Drives** will provide a valuable reference for all national authorities, researchers and other stakeholders interested in gene drive research. After two years of intensive work, the resulting guidance is balanced, helpful and consistent with the overall CBD approach to risk assessment and with current best practices in the field. It carefully makes provisions to consider both potential risks and benefits on a case-by-case basis, including contributions to human health and the impact on vector-borne disease burden, while accounting for the diverse range of gene drive technologies, strategies, and approaches. Building capacity for its use and implementation should now be a priority.

The Network also appreciates the outcomes of the discussions on synthetic biology, in particular the development of a **Thematic Action Plan** to support capacity-building and development. The plan aims to help countries research, use, and benefit from synthetic biology, ultimately reducing the gap between developed and developing economies. The establishment of a new Expert Group primarily focused on identifying synbio's current and potential contributions to conservation efforts will help fulfil a neglected part of the previous expert group's mandate.

In addition to the decisions on risk assessment and on synbio, COP16 marked ongoing progress in efforts to balance the positive use of biotechnologies with concerns about potential risks. For instance, the Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health, which aims to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) includes multiple mentions of the benefits of biotechnology for biodiversity and health. It also recognizes the need to eradicate invasive species – one potential application of gene drive tools.