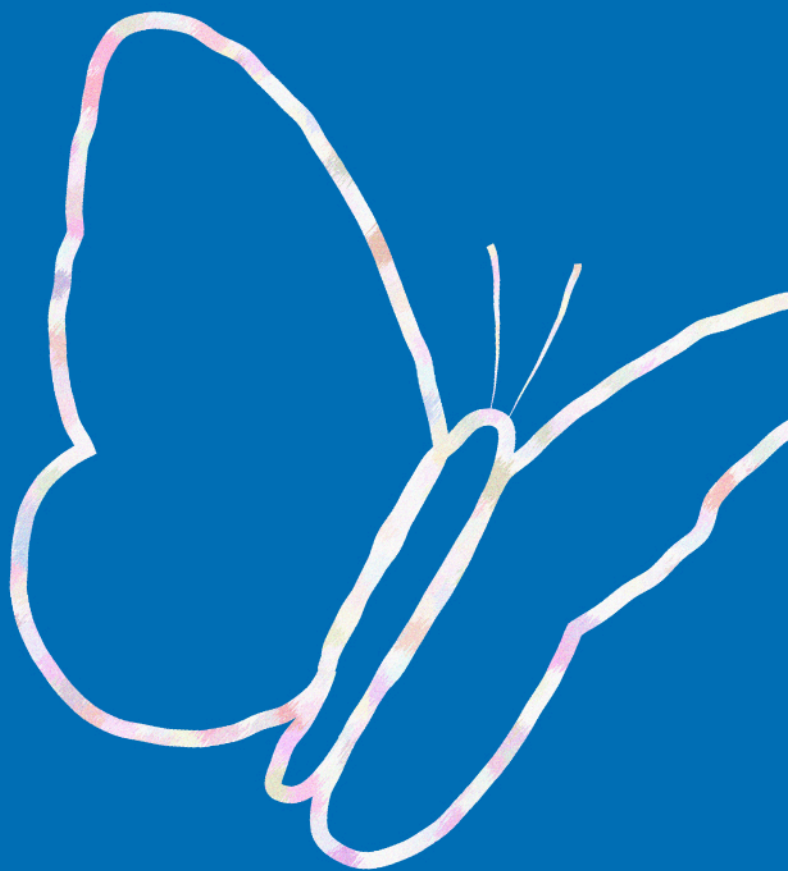




Nordic Council
of Ministers

NORDIC YOUTH TOOLKIT ON BIODIVERSITY ACTION



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NORDIC YOUTH TOOLKIT ON BIODIVERSITY ACTION

Presented here is a Nordic Youth Toolkit on biodiversity policy, and how to engage and take action for nature.

The toolkit is based on information and lessons learned from the COP16 taskforce, and presents views and recommendations from the group. The taskforce worked together from September 2024 to June 2025, as part of a project on youth engagement in biodiversity and the UN CBD, financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and supported by the Nordic Working Group for Biodiversity. The activities conducted by the taskforce included preparation for and participation during COP16 in Cali, Colombia. After COP16, the taskforce held various presentations about the conference from a youth perspective throughout the Nordic countries.



INTRODUCTION

The Nordic region is home to a wide variety of ecosystems, from Denmark's wide beaches to deep forest of Finland and Sweden and the rocky cliffs of Iceland. These ecosystems are unfortunately under human induced threats and what we have grown to know as nature might not survive. This toolkit was thought of after a group of young professionals participated in COP16, orienting the world of biodiversity policy and negotiations. They now want to pass on their knowledge.

This guide aims to empower young individuals across the Nordic region to become active voices in biodiversity policy and negotiations. It bridges the gap between complex scientific concepts and practical action, translating the outcomes of major international agreements like the Global Biodiversity Framework into meaningful steps you can take in your own community - nation, municipality, neighbourhood - you name it!

Who is it for?

Whether you are a student just starting to explore environmental topics in Helsinki, a young professional curious about sustainable development in Oslo, or an activist eager to deepen your understanding for climate action in Copenhagen, this toolkit is for you. Created for youth across the Nordics, it offers clear, accessible guidance for anyone interested in learning more about biodiversity and how to apply that knowledge in practice.

How to use it

Think of this toolkit as your personal guide through the complex world of biodiversity policy. You can read it from start to finish for a comprehensive foundation, or dive directly into sections that spark your interest. Each section builds on the previous one, but we have designed it to be accessible whether you are a complete beginner or already have some background in environmental issues.

PART 1: WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY POLICY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

What is biodiversity?

When people hear "biodiversity," they might think of counting species or how many different animals and plants live in a particular place. But biodiversity is so much richer and more complex than that. It is the entire symphony of life on Earth, encompassing not just the number of different species, but the genetic variations within each species and the intricate ecosystems they call home.

Think of it this way: biodiversity is like a vast, interconnected web where every strand matters. Remove too many strands, and the entire web begins to collapse. This web supports all the processes that make life on Earth possible, from the soil microorganisms that help plants grow, to the complex predator-prey relationships that keep ecosystems in balance.

The Nordic region tells a particularly compelling biodiversity story. Our landscapes paint a picture of incredible diversity, shaped by ice ages, volcanic activity, and thousands of years of human interaction with nature.

- **Species Diversity:** From the charismatic Atlantic puffins that nest on Iceland's cliffs to the reindeer that migrate across Norway's tundra, our region hosts species found nowhere else on Earth. But the real heroes of Nordic biodiversity often go unnoticed: the lichens that survive Arctic winters, the soil fungi that connect forest trees in underground networks, and the countless invertebrates that keep our ecosystems functioning.
- **Ecosystem Diversity:** Take a journey from Greenland's ice sheets to Denmark's agricultural landscapes, and you will traverse some of the world's most distinct ecosystems. Arctic tundra gives way to vast boreal forests, which transition into coastal wetlands and marine environments. Each ecosystem supports unique communities of life while providing services essential to human well-being.
- **Genetic Diversity:** Perhaps most fascinating is the genetic story written in Nordic species. Reindeer populations across different regions have evolved distinct genetic adaptations, some better suited to deep snow, others to coastal conditions. This diversity provides resilience and the potential to adapt, but nature evolves slowly. In a time of rapid biodiversity loss and climate change, it is a reminder of the importance of halting these crises to give ecosystems a chance to keep up.

Why biodiversity matters

Understanding why biodiversity matters requires us to see ourselves as part of nature, not separate from it. Every breath you take, every meal you eat, every glass of water you drink connects you to biodiversity.

The Services Nature Provides

- **Ecosystem Services:** Nordic biodiversity works for us every day, often invisibly. Bees and other pollinators ensure that our apple orchards, crops and other farmlands produce yields. Wetlands across the region filter pollutants from water before it reaches our lakes. Old-growth forests store carbon that would otherwise contribute to climate change. These are not abstract concepts, they are concrete benefits worth billions of euros annually to Nordic economies.
- **Climate Resilience:** Our region's peatlands represent one of the world's most effective carbon storage systems, locking away carbon accumulated over thousands of years. When these ecosystems are healthy and diverse, they are remarkably resilient to disturbances. But as biodiversity declines, this resilience erodes, making us more vulnerable to climate impacts.

Cultural Connections

For many Nordic communities, especially Indigenous peoples like the Sámi, biodiversity is not just about ecosystem services, it is about identity, tradition, and way of life. Reindeer herding practices developed over centuries represent sophisticated knowledge systems for managing Arctic ecosystems. Traditional fishing methods in coastal communities reflect a deep understanding of marine ecology. Skiers and hikers are drawn to the grandeur of the mountains. In short, our interactions with nature are part of what defines us, both as individuals and as communities.

Inherent value

Furthermore, biodiversity is not just a means to human ends. It can be argued that all living beings have inherent value - meaning they are valuable regardless of their contribution to human welfare. After all, humans are only one of more than two million identified species on planet earth. Within each of these species, there are countless individuals. Each and one of these individual beings, whether a stinging nettle, an earthworm or an elephant, are acting with a will to self-sustain, a will to live. As much as possible, we should respect this desire.

The Biodiversity Crisis

Here is the uncomfortable truth: we are living through what scientists call the sixth mass extinction, and unlike the previous five, this one is caused by human activity (UNEP, 2019). The numbers are stark, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimates that around one million species face extinction in the coming decades, representing an extinction rate 100 to 1,000 times higher than the rates in pre-industrial times (IPBES, 2019).

The Nordic Reality Check

- **Biological Integrity Under Pressure:** Even in our Nordic landscapes, the wholeness of natural systems is fragmenting. Industrial forestry creates monoculture plantations where diverse old-growth forests once stood. Road networks and other infrastructure fragment habitats, making it difficult for species to move and adapt.
- **Genetic Erosion:** Genetic diversity, the raw material for adaptation, is declining in Nordic species. Overfishing has reduced genetic diversity in Atlantic cod populations, for example. Small, isolated populations of Arctic foxes lack the genetic variation needed to adapt to changing conditions from climate change, to name another example.
- **Climate-Biodiversity Feedback Loops:** Climate change and biodiversity loss amplify each other in dangerous ways. A concrete example, as Arctic ice melts, polar bears lose hunting grounds, but the loss of ice also reduces the Arctic's ability to reflect sunlight, accelerating global warming.

Some stark numbers

- **Farmland birds:** Since 1970, populations of birds like skylarks and lapwings have declined by over 30% in Sweden and Denmark (The Local Denmark, 2018; Wretenberg, 2006).
- **Baltic Sea dead zones:** Nutrient pollution, for example from agricultural runoff, creates oxygen-depleted areas covering thousands of square kilometers in the Baltic Sea (European Geosciences Union, 2018).
- **Old-growth forests:** Sweden retains only about 3% of its original old-growth forests (Future Earth, 2022).
- **Forest cover:** In Iceland, forest cover has declined from an estimated 25% at the time of the first settlers to just 1% today (Runólfsson & Ágústsdóttir, 2011).

PART 2: UNDERSTANDING BIODIVERSITY POLICY

What is Biodiversity Policy

Biodiversity policy is essentially the roadmap for how we protect, restore and sustainably use Earth's incredible variety of life. Think of it as society's way of figuring out how to balance human needs with keeping our natural world healthy and thriving.

COPs: Where Global Decisions Get Made

The Conferences of the Parties (COPs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are where countries come together to set biodiversity targets, figure out funding, and decide how to actually implement conservation and restoration efforts. The CBD COP:s take place every second year.

- **COP15 in Kunming-Montreal (2022)** was a game-changer. Countries adopted the Global Biodiversity Framework with 23 ambitious targets aimed at stopping and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 (CBD, 2022).
- **COP16 in Cali and Rome (2024–2025)** focused on making those targets reality. Key outcomes included better biodiversity financing, the creation of the "Cali Fund" to fairly share benefits from digital genetic information, and formal ways for Indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making (CBD, 2025; Cultural Survival, 2024).

About COP: The number in the name refers to how many times the Conference of the Parties (COP) has taken place. For example, COP15 means it is the 15th meeting since the process began. Photos by Antonia Hamann



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The Global Biodiversity Framework: Our 2030 Blueprint

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework sets out an ambitious plan to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and restore ecosystems by 2050 (CBD, n.d.).

The Four Big Goals:

- Goal A: Keep ecosystems healthy and stop species from going extinct
- Goal B: Use biodiversity sustainably and manage it well
- Goal C: Share the benefits from genetic resources fairly
- Goal D: Bridge the massive funding gap for biodiversity work

Besides the goals, there are also 22 targets, similar to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Key Targets You Should Know:

- **Target 3:** ("30x30"): Protect 30% of land and ocean by 2030 (CBD, n.d.)
- **Target 15:** Businesses must assess and disclose biodiversity impacts (CBD, n.d.)
- **Target 19:** Mobilize \$200 billion annually (CBD, n.d.)
- **Target 21:** Ensure that knowledge is available and accessible to guide biodiversity action through, among others, education (CBD, n.d.)
- **Target 22:** Ensure participation of Indigenous peoples, local communities and youth (CBD, n.d.)



Justice and Biodiversity

The biodiversity crisis is not just an environmental issue, it is deeply connected to questions of justice, fairness, and cultural survival. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities often bear the brunt of biodiversity loss, yet they are also some of our most effective biodiversity protectors. Their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices have safeguarded ecosystems for generations, Indigenous territories contain 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, despite Indigenous peoples making up only 5% of the global population (Mongabay, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

Nordic youth strongly support inclusive approaches to biodiversity policy. According to the Nordic Youth Position Paper on Biodiversity, the majority of consulted youth believe that cultural interests should be prioritized over economic interests when these are in conflict, and they emphasize the need for Indigenous peoples to be more included in various areas of politics, especially in matters relevant to their culture and way of life (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

NYBN's 2024 position paper presented at COP16 further emphasizes this commitment, demanding that Nordic countries ensure meaningful youth participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making when designing environmental policies, integrate Indigenous traditional knowledge into biodiversity research, and provide sufficient funding for Indigenous youth engagement in biodiversity initiatives (NYBN, 2025).

In the Nordic region, the Sámi people perfectly illustrate this reality. Their lives, culture, and identity are intimately connected to the landscapes they have traditionally cared for. Yet Sámi communities face serious challenges:

- **Land Rights Conflicts:** Mining, logging, and tourism operations threaten Sámi autonomy and ecological balance.
- **Climate Disruption:** Rising temperatures are changing grazing patterns and disrupting traditional ways of life.
- **Political Exclusion:** Sámi voices are often left out of decision-making.



Photo by: German Krupenin on Unsplash

Case Study: The Deatnu (Tana) River Agreement

The Deatnu (Tana) River Agreement between Norway and Finland perfectly illustrates these tensions. This cross-border agreement was designed to manage Atlantic salmon populations in one of Europe's most important salmon rivers. However, it has become a flashpoint for debates over Indigenous rights, conservation effectiveness, and consultation processes.

The river, known as Deatnu in North Sámi and Tana in Norwegian/Finnish, has been central to Sámi culture and livelihoods for centuries. Traditional fishing practices here are not just about food security, they are deeply woven into cultural identity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and spiritual connection to the landscape.

While the agreement aims to protect declining salmon populations through fishing restrictions, Sámi communities argue that:

- They were not adequately consulted during the agreement's development.
- Their traditional ecological knowledge about sustainable fishing practices was largely ignored.
- The restrictions disproportionately affect Sámi fishing rights while allowing continued environmental pressures from hydroelectric development and climate change.
- The agreement fails to address root causes of salmon decline, focusing instead on restricting Indigenous practices that have been sustainable for generations.

This case reveals a fundamental challenge in biodiversity policy: how do you balance urgent conservation needs with Indigenous rights and traditional knowledge? The Deatnu situation shows that top-down conservation approaches, even when well-intentioned, can undermine both biodiversity goals and social justice if they do not meaningfully include Indigenous voices from the beginning.



Randers, Denmark. **Photo by:** Ian Murray on Unsplash



Västernorrlands län, Sweden. **Photo by:** Daiga Ellaby on Unsplash

Justice Checklist: Evaluating Biodiversity Policies

When you encounter biodiversity policies, ask:

- Whose voices were included in developing this policy?
- Who bears the costs and who receives the benefits?
- Does it respect Indigenous rights and traditional knowledge?
- Are there mechanisms for meaningful participation by affected communities?

The Policy Toolkit: How Biodiversity Protection Actually Works

Understanding biodiversity policy is not just about knowing the big international agreements, it is about understanding the practical tools that governments, communities, and businesses use to make conservation happen. Think of these as instruments in the biodiversity policy toolkit, each designed for different situations.

Regulatory Tools: The Legal Foundation

- **Protected Areas:** Designated spaces where natural ecosystems are preserved and human activities are restricted. Sweden's Sarek National Park protects one of Europe's last truly wild landscapes, while Norway's Lofoten marine zones safeguard critical spawning grounds for fish (UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2021).
- **Species Protection Laws:** Legal safeguards for specific threatened species. Denmark's strict regulations protecting the great crested newt require developers to survey for newts before construction and create replacement habitats if needed (European Environment Agency, 2019).
- **Land-Use Zoning:** Spatial planning that balances development with conservation. Finland uses zoning to safeguard reindeer migration routes in Sámi territories, integrating biodiversity conservation with cultural preservation.

Strengths:

Provide legal certainty and enforceable standards.

Limitations:

Only as strong as enforcement; can create conflicts if imposed top-down.

Economic Tools: Using finance for Nature

- **Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES):** Compensate landowners for managing land in ways that provide benefits like clean water or wildlife habitat. Sweden's programs reward forest owners who maintain old-growth patches and wildlife corridors.
- **Green Subsidies:** Financial support for sustainable practices. Under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, Nordic countries offer subsidies for organic farming and creating habitat corridors on agricultural land.
- **Pollution Taxes:** Make environmental damage costly. Denmark's pesticide tax has led to measurable improvements in water quality and reductions in chemical use (The Local Denmark, 2018)

Key insight:

Economic tools work by changing incentives rather than just imposing rules.

Advocacy tip:

Economic arguments often persuade policymakers who are not moved by purely environmental concerns.

Collaborative Approaches: Shared Responsibility

- **Community-Based Management:** Empowers local communities to manage natural resources sustainably. Sámi reindeer herding practices move herds across vast landscapes following patterns that maintain both cultural traditions and ecological health.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations between government and businesses to fund conservation initiatives that neither could accomplish alone.
- **Voluntary Conservation Programs:** Market-driven sustainability through certification schemes like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), creating consumer demand for biodiversity-friendly products.

Policy Tools at a Glance - Some Examples

The following chart summarizes the policy tools mentioned above, what they are suitable for and examples of where they have been used.

Tool type	What it does	Nordic example	Best for
Protected areas	Legally designated conservation zones	Sarek National Park (Sweden)	Protecting critical habitats
Species laws	Legal protection for threatened species	Great crested newt protection (Denmark)	Preventing extinctions
PES Schemes	Pay landowners for ecosystem services	Forest biodiversity payments (Sweden)	Incentivizing good stewardship
Green Subsidies	Financial support for sustainable practices	Organic farming support (EU-wide)	Shifting sector practices
Community Management	Local control of natural resources	Sámi reindeer herding systems	Incorporating traditional knowledge

PART 3: WHAT CAN YOU DO? FROM LOCAL ACTION TO GLOBAL IMPACT

Nordic youth are already leading the way in demanding action. According to the Nordic Youth Position Paper on Biodiversity, 4 out of 5 young people are very concerned about biodiversity loss, highlighting as their foremost concerns: the right of all living beings to exist, our need for ecosystem services, and the importance of biodiversity in preventing further irreversible climate change. Nordic youth see climate and nature crises as fundamental threats that require urgent, joint, and holistic solutions (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

At COP16 in 2024, NYBN presented updated demands calling on Nordic governments to exceed their "fair share" in protecting biodiversity for future generations, with a vision of "a world where biodiversity thrives, human rights are upheld, and the biosphere is recognized as an essential system we depend on—not a resource to exploit" (NYBN, 2025).

Action Mindset

Start where you are, with what you have. Every biodiversity champion started with a single action. Your background, location, and resources are assets, not limitations. The key is finding the intersection between what you care about, what you are good at, and what the world needs.

Tools & Resources

- iNaturalist app — Identify plants and animals while contributing to science.
- Local botanical gardens — Often offer workshops and native plant sales.
- Seed libraries — Community-based collections of locally-adapted seeds.

Advocate, Influence, and Participate

Policy engagement might seem intimidating, but democratic systems depend on citizen participation. Our generation will live with the consequences of today's biodiversity policy decisions longer than anyone else.

Nordic youth strongly support meaningful participation in decision-making. Research shows that more than half of the Nordic youth consulted support youth quotas in decision-making processes, and they emphasize the need for intergenerational collaboration that includes youth in relevant political and legislative decisions (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

NYBN's latest position, presented at COP16, specifically demands that Nordic countries ensure formalized and continuous youth participation within the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, including the appointment of national UN CBD youth delegates, and provide capacity building and education for diverse youth on how to participate effectively in political processes related to biodiversity (NYBN, 2025).

Join Networks: The Power of Collective Action

Nordic Youth Biodiversity Network (NYBN) represents youth voices in Nordic biodiversity policy, creating pathways for young people to influence national and regional strategies. The network provides training, coordinates advocacy campaigns, and ensures youth perspectives reach decision-makers.

Policy Engagement: Making Your Voice Heard

- **Local Level:** Municipal planning meetings, school board participation, community organization leadership.
- **National Level:** Public consultations on biodiversity strategies, parliamentary committee hearings.
- **International Level:** COP youth delegations, UN youth forums, regional networks.

Awareness Campaigns: Changing Hearts and Minds

Effective campaigns combine emotional connection with practical information, inspiring action while building political support for biodiversity conservation.

How to Co-Create Nature Positive^[1] Futures

Collaborative Planning

Learning to facilitate inclusive planning processes helps ensure that nature positive strategies are both effective and equitable. This involves stakeholder mapping, shared vision development, and strategy co-creation.

Innovation: Developing Nature-Based Solutions

Nature-based solutions use natural processes to address societal challenges while providing biodiversity benefits. Examples include green infrastructure for stormwater management, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable agriculture practices.

1. Nature positive means halting and reversing biodiversity loss through measurable improvements in the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species, ecosystems, and natural processes. It is commonly connected to the goal in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, committing to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to 2030 (WWF, n.d.).

Education: Promoting Biodiversity Literacy

Education creates the foundation for all other biodiversity action. This can happen through formal curriculum development, informal community workshops, online content creation, and peer education programs.



Photo by: Daniel Sessleron Unsplash

CREATING YOUR PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

Effective biodiversity action starts with honest self-assessment and strategic planning. Consider your interests, skills, resources, and circumstances to develop an approach that is both impactful and sustainable for you.

Self-Assessment Questions

Interests:

- What aspects of biodiversity excite you most?
- Do you prefer hands-on restoration work, policy advocacy, education, or innovation?
- Are you drawn to local community work or international engagement?

Skills:

- What are you already good at that could contribute to biodiversity work?
- What skills do you want to develop by engaging in biodiversity-related action?
- How do your academic or professional interests connect with biodiversity?

Resources:

- How much time can you realistically commit to biodiversity action?
- What financial resources do you have available for projects or travel?
- What support networks (family, friends, institutions) can help your efforts?

Context:

- What biodiversity challenges are most pressing in your area?
- What opportunities exist in your community, region, or country?
- How do your cultural background and values inform your approach?

Action Planning Framework

- **Start Small, Think Big:** Begin with manageable projects that build your skills and confidence while contributing to larger biodiversity goals. Success in small projects creates credibility and resources for more ambitious efforts.
- **Combine Approaches:** The most effective biodiversity advocates work across multiple scales and use diverse strategies. A pollinator corridor project might include policy advocacy for pesticide restrictions and educational campaigns about native plants.
- **Build Partnerships:** Identify organizations, institutions, and individuals who share your conservation goals. Collaboration amplifies impact while reducing individual workload and stress.
- **Plan for Learning:** Treat every project as an opportunity to develop new skills and deepen your understanding. Regular reflection helps you identify what is working and what needs adjustment.
- **Maintain Balance:** Halting and reversing biodiversity loss is a marathon, not a sprint. Sustainable engagement requires attention to your own well-being and other life priorities.



Photo by: Winston Tjia on Unsplash

Action Planning Template

My 6-Month Goals:

Local action:

Skill development:

Network building:

My 2-Year Vision:

Impact I want to create:

Role I want to play:

Partnerships I want to build:

Support I Need:

Learning opportunities:

Mentorship:

Resources:

Remember: The biodiversity crisis requires urgent action, but it also offers unprecedented opportunities for our generation to reshape humanity's relationship with the natural world. Your voice, energy, and creativity are essential for creating a future where both human communities and natural ecosystems can thrive.

The time for action is now. The question is not whether you can make a difference, it is how you will choose to use your unique combination of skills, passion, and circumstances to contribute to the most important challenge of our time – the biodiversity crisis.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Biodiversity: The variety of life in all its forms and interactions, including genetic diversity within species, species diversity within ecosystems, and ecosystem diversity across landscapes.

CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity): The main international legal framework for biodiversity conservation, establishing principles for conservation, sustainable use, and equitable benefit-sharing.

COPs (Conferences of the Parties): Decision-making forums under the CBD where countries negotiate biodiversity targets, financing mechanisms, and implementation strategies.

GBF (Global Biodiversity Framework): The current global strategy adopted at COP15 setting targets to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and restore ecosystems by 2050.

IPBES: The international body that assesses the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services to inform policy decisions—think of it as the "IPCC for biodiversity."

Nature-Based Solutions: Approaches that use natural processes and ecosystem functions to address societal challenges while providing biodiversity benefits.

PES (Payments for Ecosystem Services): Economic instruments that compensate landowners for managing their land in ways that provide ecosystem benefits.

Polluter-Pays An environmental policy principle requiring those who cause environmental damage to bear the costs of their impacts, creating financial disincentives for harmful practices.

Principle: An environmental policy principle requiring those who cause environmental damage to bear the costs of their impacts, creating financial disincentives for harmful practices.

Target 3 ("30x30"): A Global Biodiversity Framework target aiming to protect 30% of land and ocean areas globally by 2030.

Essential Resources

Policy Documents:

- [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) - Complete Kunming-Montreal framework with all targets
- [COP16 Outcomes Summary](#) - Key decisions including the Cali Fund

Youth Networks:

- [Nordic Youth Biodiversity Network \(NYBN\)](#) - Nordic youth engagement portal
- [Global Youth Biodiversity Network \(GYBN\)](#) - International youth voice in biodiversity policy

Tools & Data:

- [iNaturalist](#) - Citizen science platform for biodiversity observation
- [GBIF](#) - Open access biodiversity data

About this publication

NORDIC YOUTH TOOLKIT ON BIODIVERSITY ACTION

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