Analysis of Capacity Gaps and Opportunities to Accelerate Progress in Implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

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NBSAP Accelerator Partnership

Executive Summary

Countries have made substantial progress in articulating ambitious national biodiversity goals aligned with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Updated National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and national targets demonstrate strong political intent across regions and income groups. However, evidence from recent SBI reviews, regional capacity assessments, NBSAP Accelerator Partnership analyses and other sources shows that although ambition is rising, national systems' ability to deliver results at the pace and scale required are limited.

Unlike many capacity assessments that simply list existing gaps, this review looks at the deeper system and institutional issues that explain why the same capacity challenges keep coming up across regions and countries, even after repeated support efforts.

Across multiple data sources, five interrelated capacity gaps emerge as binding constraints on accelerated implementation.

First, implementation pathways remain underdeveloped. While NBSAPs increasingly reflect ambitious goals, they often lack clear theories of change, prioritization under real-world constraints, defined delivery pathways, and sequencing of actions. As a result, strategies frequently take the form of comprehensive action lists rather than coherent delivery frameworks, weakening translation from ambition to action.

Second, stakeholder engagement is commonly emphasized during NBSAP preparation but is less consistently embedded within governance, implementation, and accountability systems. Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, and non-state actors are not systematically empowered as delivery partners, limiting scale, durability, and legitimacy.

Third, integration into development, economic, and spatial decision-making remains uneven (UNEP). Biodiversity objectives are weakly embedded in sectoral policies, national development plans, climate strategies, spatial planning frameworks, and incentive systems. Misaligned policies, harmful subsidies, and fragmented governance continue to offset biodiversity gains, while limited spatialization constrains area-based implementation.

Fourth, the enabling environment is often misaligned with ambition. Political commitment is not consistently sustained or operationalized; institutional mandates and delegated authority are frequently weak; biodiversity priorities are rarely integrated into national budgeting and public finance systems; and accountability and oversight mechanisms remain uneven.

Finally, capacity for systemic transformation remains limited. Biodiversity action is still largely project-based, with weak mechanisms to scale and institutionalize successful approaches. Economic frameworks often treat biodiversity as an externality rather than as development infrastructure, while institutional cultures and narratives remain siloed and incremental.

Together, these gaps explain why progress remains fragmented despite rising ambition. They also point to a clear opportunity: shifting capacity support from fragmented technical interventions toward strengthening national delivery systems. Addressing these capacity gaps is foundational to converting ambition into durable, nature-positive development outcomes at scale.

Introduction

The NBSAP Accelerator Partnership (NBSAP AP) is a country-led initiative that supports countries in accelerating implementation of ambitious NBSAPs to achieve the goals and targets of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The partnership brings together governments, institutions, and non-state actors to strengthen national implementation capacity, mobilize technical and financial resources, and foster coordinated action across sectors and society to deliver the GBF's ambitious goals. It provides direct support to countries through mechanisms such as the MatchMaking Mechanism, which connects national biodiversity needs with relevant technical and financial partners, and the Facilitator Programme, which embeds in-country expertise to accelerate planning, prioritization, and delivery of biodiversity actions.

In an era of unprecedented biodiversity loss, the KMGBF sets an urgent global agenda, with targets covering conservation, sustainable use, restoration, equity, and governance, that depends on translating national ambition into effective, sustained action. Despite widespread adoption of updated NBSAPs and alignment of national targets with the GBF, there is growing recognition that implementation capacity remains the central bottleneck to achieving real change on the ground. Countries face persistent challenges in turning plans into policies, coordinating across government and society, and aligning economic, fiscal, and governance systems with biodiversity objectives. This report goes beyond listing capacity gaps. It looks at why these gaps keep happening, how they slow down implementation, and what that means for how the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership should shape its support. Rather than focusing on symptoms, it examines the underlying system failures that stand in the way of accelerated implementation of NBSAPs. This review draws on a multi-source evidence base that includes intergovernmental assessments from the CBD Subsidiary Body on Implementation, regional capacity needs assessments, and NBSAP AP analytics, including the Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment and the synthesis of progress on national target alignment. It systematically synthesizes findings from these sources to identify recurring patterns of implementation barriers and opportunities for acceleration across five capacity domains: implementation pathways; inclusive governance; integration and alignment; enabling environment; and systemic transformation.

This review is diagnostic in nature. It identifies cross-cutting capacity gaps that constrain implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Evidence was analyzed using a framework that maps observed challenges, allowing identification of thematic areas where capacity gaps most directly constrain progress toward GBF targets. Where possible, findings are supported by direct quotations and quantitative indicators to ensure rigor and transparency. The resulting synthesis aims to inform both country planning and the NBSAP AP's support priorities, helping shape collaborative, demand-driven responses that strengthen national systems for biodiversity action.

The remainder of this report is organized around five interrelated capacity gaps that consistently emerge across global and regional evidence and that collectively shape countries' ability to implement NBSAPs at the pace and scale required by the KMGBF. For each capacity gap, the report: (i) clarifies what the gap means in practical terms; (ii) explains why it matters for effective and durable implementation; and (iii) synthesizes what the evidence shows, drawing on CBD analyses, regional assessments, and NBSAP AP diagnostics. Together, these sections provide a structured, evidence-based diagnosis of implementation constraints and point toward priority capacity areas where targeted support can unlock faster, more systemic progress toward biodiversity goals.

CAPACITY GAP 1. National ambition exists, but often exceeds the ability for national systems to deliver results at the pace and scale required to achieve that ambition

What this capacity gap means

Many countries have articulated ambitious national biodiversity goals aligned with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Most Parties have submitted national targets aligned with the Global Biodiversity Framework, indicating a high level of political commitment to the Framework's goals (UNEP). For example, of the countries analyzed in the Convention on Biological Diversity's Online Report Tool, most countries had submitted national targets that partially or fully addressed the ambition of Targets 2 (61%) and Target 3 (87%). However, implementation pathways for delivering these ambitions are often underdeveloped. For example, 80% of countries either did not address, or addressed to a limited extent, national targets related to spatial planning, an implementation prerequisite for Targets 2 and 3, and the UNEP report found that limited spatial data, mapping tools, and integrated land-use planning capacity constrain countries' ability to operationalize area-based targets, despite strong alignment with GBF Targets (UNEP). In many cases, NBSAPs also lack a clear logic linking goals to prioritized actions, responsible actors, sequencing, and expected outcomes. Theories of change, where present, are frequently implicit rather than operational.

As a result, national biodiversity strategies often take the form of comprehensive lists of actions rather than coherent delivery frameworks. Prioritization under real-world constraints, sequencing and phasing of actions, and bundling of interventions into implementable packages are inconsistently addressed. Roles and responsibilities across ministries and levels of government are often unclear, and national commitments are weakly translated into subnational or spatially explicit delivery pathways.

This delivery gap is foundational: without clear implementation pathways, other capacities, such as inclusion, integration across sectors, financing, and systemic transformation, cannot be effectively mobilized. Taken together, these gaps limit countries' ability to move from ambition to action, creating a disconnect between what NBSAPs commit to achieve and what national systems are currently equipped to deliver.

Why this capacity gap matters

The KMGBF represents an unprecedented level of global ambition, with national biodiversity strategies and action plans serving as the primary vehicle for translating that ambition into country-level action. Across regions and income groups, countries have demonstrated strong political commitment by submitting national targets that align closely with the goals and targets of the Framework. Recent synthesis analyses, including the UNEP report, indicate that most Parties have articulated national targets reflecting a high level of ambition.

However, evidence from multiple assessment processes points to a persistent gap between ambition and delivery. While countries are increasingly able to define *what* should be achieved, national systems often lack the clarity, structure, and operational mechanisms required to determine *how* those outcomes will be delivered. Reviews of NBSAPs and capacity needs assessments consistently highlight challenges in translating strategies into sequenced, prioritized, and implementable action pathways.

This gap is not primarily the result of insufficient political will or motivation. Rather, it reflects structural challenges in how NBSAPs are designed and embedded within existing planning, governance, and financing systems. Without clear implementation logic, prioritization mechanisms, and delivery pathways, ambitious commitments risk remaining aspirational. As such, strengthening implementation pathways is not an additional technical requirement, but the organizing condition that determines whether other investments in inclusion, integration, financing, and transformation can deliver results.

What the evidence shows

Across global, regional, and country-level assessments, a consistent pattern emerges: while national biodiversity ambition has increased markedly, national systems often lack the implementation architecture required to translate ambition into timely, prioritized, and scalable action. Evidence from capacity needs assessments, NBSAP reviews, and analyses of national targets reveals four interrelated implementation capacity gaps.

1.1 Implementation logic and theories of change are often underdeveloped

Multiple capacity assessments highlight the absence of clearly articulated implementation logic linking biodiversity goals to concrete actions, responsible actors, and expected outcomes. The SANBI Technical and Scientific Cooperation Centre regional capacity needs assessment underscores the foundational role of a theory of change in implementation, defining its purpose as ensuring that relevant actors "are conscious of the causal relationships, the change pathways, the expected changes or capacity results, and the important contextual factors and underlying assumptions" (SANBI Report).

However, the review of updated NBSAPs indicates that this level of clarity is often missing in practice. While NBSAPs frequently articulate *what* should be achieved, they less consistently specify *how* change will occur, *who* is responsible at each stage of delivery, and *where* interventions are likely to have the greatest leverage. The CBD's review of NBSAPs aligned with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework notes that many strategies "lack sufficient detail on implementation arrangements, sequencing, and operational pathways" (CBD NBSAP Analysis, SBI-06-INF-05,).

This absence of explicit implementation logic contributes to fragmented delivery, where actions are pursued as discrete activities or projects rather than as components of a coherent national pathway. As several assessments note, without a shared theory of change, implementation risks becoming activity-driven rather than outcome-oriented, limiting effectiveness and scalability (SANBI Report and CBD Capacity Gaps Review, SBI-06-INF-02).

1.2 Prioritization under real resource constraints remains weak

A second recurring finding is the limited capacity to prioritize biodiversity actions under real-world financial, institutional, and political constraints. The NBSAP Accelerator Partnership Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment found that "a universal need for capacity to prioritize early action on NBSAP target alignment was identified across all participating countries," alongside recognition that "governments require sufficient time to develop internal procedures and coordination mechanisms before they can effectively sequence and implement national biodiversity actions" (NBSAP AP Capacity Report).

In the absence of explicit prioritization frameworks, NBSAPs often take the form of comprehensive lists of actions that exceed feasible implementation capacity. Reviews highlight limited use of decision-support tools, structured trade-off analysis, and criteria to distinguish between near-term actions, reform-dependent actions, and longer-term investments (CBD Capacity Gaps Review, p. 8; SANBI Report).

Regional evidence reinforces this pattern. The CARICOM capacity assessment observes that even where political commitment to biodiversity objectives is strong, "coordination, prioritization, and institutional readiness remain key constraints to effective implementation" (CARICOM Report). When all actions are

treated as equally urgent, ambition becomes operationally diluted, and early momentum is difficult to achieve.

1.3 Roles, responsibilities, and delivery pathways are often unclear

Clear institutional roles and delivery pathways are consistently identified as a determinant of implementation success. The CBD's review of updated NBSAPs emphasizes that "the institutional arrangements in place for the development, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the NBSAP are key to the success of biodiversity action" (CBD NBSAP Analysis, SBI-06-INF-05).

Yet evidence indicates that such arrangements remain uneven. Of the NBSAPs reviewed in the CBD's NBSAP analysis, only 43 percent reported having a formal coordination mechanism for implementation, with mandates varying widely in scope and authority, and a slight decline observed compared to earlier NBSAP cycles. Parties themselves acknowledged the need to strengthen institutional arrangements to support delivery.

The NBSAP Accelerator Partnership capacity assessment further found "overwhelming reliance on the national entity responsible for environment and biodiversity for coordinating NBSAP revision and implementation," signaling "a lack of shared responsibility across governmental departments or agencies" (NBSAP AP Capacity Report). Engagement of planning, finance, and sectoral ministries remains limited in many contexts.

Regional assessments echo these findings. The CARICOM report identifies unclear institutional mandates and limited delegated authority for biodiversity agencies as recurring constraints, particularly where implementation depends on coordination with ministries responsible for land use, infrastructure, agriculture, and fisheries (CARICOM Report).

These governance gaps are compounded by weak translation of national commitments into subnational delivery pathways. Although the KMGBF emphasizes area-based action and integrated land- and seascape management, many NBSAPs lack spatialized implementation frameworks. The synthesis of national target alignment notes that "many Parties have yet to establish mechanisms to spatially prioritize actions across ecosystems, sectors and jurisdictions, limiting the operationalization of area-based targets" (GEF/NBSAP AP Target Alignment Review, p. 11). Without spatial and subnational pathways, coordination, investment alignment, and trade-off management remain challenging.

1.4 Sequencing, phasing, and bundling of actions is rarely explicit

Finally, multiple sources point to the absence of explicit sequencing and phasing strategies within NBSAPs. The CBD Secretariat's broader implementation analyses emphasize that structured, phased approaches are critical to achieving early wins, sustaining political momentum, and progressively institutionalizing reforms (CBD Capacity Gaps Review).

At national level, however, actions are rarely bundled into coherent implementation packages or aligned with planning and budget cycles. This limits the development of investment-ready pipelines and constrains the ability to move from planning to delivery. Without sequencing, reform-oriented actions may stall due to political or institutional constraints, while opportunities for early action are missed, widening the gap between ambition and implementation.

Summary of implementation capacity gaps and opportunities for acceleration

Across data sources, a consistent picture emerges:

- Ambition is rising faster than delivery capacity.
- Implementation logic is often implicit rather than explicit.
- Prioritization mechanisms remain underdeveloped.
- Institutional responsibilities are unclear or overly centralized.
- National plans are weakly translated into spatial and subnational action.
- Sequencing and phasing of actions is rarely systematic.

While these challenges together constrain the ability of countries to implement ambitious NBSAPs at the pace and scale required by the KMGBF, this capacity gap also points to a critical opportunity to shift support away from fragmented capacity interventions toward implementation pathway design. Rather than focusing solely on individual technical gaps, countries require structured support to a) articulate clear theories of change for NBSAP delivery; b) prioritize actions under real-world constraints; c) define roles and institutional responsibilities and translate national ambition into spatial and subnational pathways; and d) sequence, phase, and bundle actions into implementable packages aligned with planning and financing cycles.

Addressing this capacity gap is foundational. Without clear implementation pathways, progress on inclusion, integration, financing, and transformation will remain constrained, regardless of ambition.

CAPACITY GAP 2: Inclusion is often procedural and surficial rather than structural and substantive, and "whole of society" approaches are not embedded as an NBSAP delivery system

What this capacity gap means

Across many countries, inclusion in the context of NBSAPs is primarily operationalized as a procedural requirement of planning processes rather than as a structural component of implementation and delivery systems. The UNEP report found that stakeholder engagement is recognized as important, but engagement mechanisms are often *ad hoc* and not sustained across implementation, monitoring, and accountability processes. For example, the UNEP report found that participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and non-state actors is frequently limited to consultation, with few countries reporting mechanisms that assign clear implementation roles, authority, or accountability

Stakeholder engagement and consultation are commonly emphasized during NBSAP development and revision, but are less consistently embedded in the governance arrangements, institutional roles, and implementation pathways that follow.

As a result, "whole-of-society" approaches are frequently articulated in principle but not systematically designed into how NBSAPs are implemented in practice. Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, civil society organizations, and other non-state actors are often recognized as important stakeholders, yet their roles in decision-making, implementation, and accountability are not always clearly defined, resourced, or sustained over time. This gap reflects a broader tendency to treat inclusion as an input to planning rather than as a core delivery mechanism. Where inclusion is not structurally embedded, implementation remains centralized and project-based, limiting the scale, durability, and effectiveness of biodiversity action.

Inclusion challenges look different from country to country. In least developed countries, the main constraints are often limited institutional reach, funding, and capacity at the local level. In middle-income countries, the challenges are more about weak coordination, misaligned incentives, and unclear institutional responsibilities. Federal or highly centralized systems also struggle to turn national commitments into action on the ground. In countries with strong Indigenous governance systems, progress depends on tailored approaches that treat customary institutions as full implementation partners, not just groups to be consulted.

Why this capacity gap matters

The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework calls for a scale and accelerated pace of implementation that cannot be delivered by government institutions alone. Achieving the Framework's targets depends on mobilizing the full implementation capacity of society, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, and subnational authorities. When inclusion is treated primarily as consultation rather than as a delivery mechanism, this capacity remains largely untapped.

Weak or procedural inclusion constrains implementation in several ways. Without inclusive governance structures and clearly defined roles for non-state actors, implementation tends to remain centralized within environment ministries and dependent on discrete projects. Opportunities to leverage local

knowledge, customary governance systems, and community-level implementation capacity are missed, reducing both speed and scale of delivery.

The absence of structurally embedded inclusion also undermines legitimacy and shared ownership of biodiversity commitments. Where decision-making authority, implementation responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms are unclear, NBSAP implementation risks being perceived as a sectoral or technocratic exercise rather than a collective national endeavor. This weakens political traction beyond environmental institutions and limits the ability to build broad-based coalitions for reform.

Gender equality and social inclusion gaps further constrain delivery. When women's leadership, differentiated impacts, and social barriers to participation are not addressed in implementation design, biodiversity actions risk reinforcing existing inequalities and failing to reach key constituencies.

When inclusion is not embedded as a core feature of NBSAP delivery systems, ambition is harder to translate into action at the pace and scale required; inclusion becomes a force multiplier only when it is designed as part of the delivery system, not appended to it.

What the evidence shows

Across global, regional, and thematic assessments, a consistent pattern emerges: while commitments to inclusive participation are increasingly reflected in NBSAP narratives and national targets, the institutional, operational, and resourcing arrangements needed to make inclusion a functional delivery mechanism remain weak or incomplete. "Whole-of-society" intent is visible in many NBSAP processes, but it is unevenly institutionalized — most often expressed through consultation during planning rather than embedded within governance structures, implementation roles, and accountability systems.

The CBD Secretariat's analysis of updated NBSAPs finds that while many Parties report some form of stakeholder engagement, participation thins significantly for groups central to delivery. Only 25 percent of Parties reported engaging Indigenous Peoples and local communities, 27 percent reported engaging youth, and 25 percent reported engaging citizens and the general public (CBD NBSAP Analysis, SBI-06-INF-05). This pattern reflects a broader inclusion gap that manifests across four interrelated capacity dimensions.

2.1 Inclusive governance structures are often limited to consultation and planning phases

Evidence consistently shows that stakeholder engagement is more common during NBSAP development than during implementation. The CBD NBSAP review explicitly links the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms to the extent to which stakeholders are meaningfully engaged throughout the full NBSAP cycle, noting that inclusive governance arrangements are a key determinant of implementation effectiveness (CBD NBSAP Analysis).

While 76 percent of reviewed NBSAPs describe being developed with "some level of stakeholder engagement," the review observes that what varies most is whether this engagement is translated into sustained governance arrangements for delivery, such as formal coordination bodies, defined participation roles, or implementation responsibilities (CBD NBSAP Analysis). A structural governance gap is further indicated by the finding that 29% ofNBSAPs lacked a formal coordination mechanism altogether, with some relying on informal or overlapping bodies of unclear mandate (CBD NBSAP Analysis).

Regional assessments reinforce this finding. The CARICOM capacity assessment stresses that stakeholder engagement must extend across the full "life cycle" of implementation rather than remaining confined to consultation phases, highlighting the absence of institutionalized mechanisms that sustain participation during delivery and monitoring (CARICOM Report).

2.2 Locally led and community-based implementation is unevenly enabled and institutionalized

Engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is reported far less frequently than engagement of other actor groups, pointing to a persistent gap between whole-of-society ambition and locally led delivery pathways. The CBD NBSAP analysis found that only one-quarter of Parties reported engaging Indigenous Peoples and local communities in NBSAP processes (CBD NBSAP Analysis).

This gap is mirrored in national target submissions. Analysis of targets aligned with the Global Biodiversity Framework indicates that roughly two-thirds of Parties do not have national targets addressing Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights in relation to protected areas and other equity-related dimensions (GEF/NBSAP AP Target Alignment Review).

While some NBSAPs demonstrate more inclusive approaches — for example, Peru's NBSAP, which explicitly reflects the proposals, knowledge, and visions of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendants — such examples remain the exception rather than the norm (CBD NBSAP Analysis, Box examples).

Regional evidence underscores the implementation implications of this gap. The SANBI regional capacity assessment notes that while policy intent to support community-based approaches exists, "practice lags behind policy," often due to limited technical capacity, insufficient resourcing, and unclear coordination arrangements (SANBI Report, pp. 16–18). The CARICOM assessment similarly highlights the need to move beyond consultation toward empowerment of local actors as implementers within national systems (CARICOM Report).

2.3 Gender equality and social inclusion are insufficiently operationalized in implementation design

While gender equality is increasingly referenced in national targets and NBSAP narratives, evidence points to persistent gaps in operationalization. Analysis of national targets shows that only around one-third of Parties have targets that fully address women's participation and leadership in biodiversity decision-making, and even fewer address equal rights to land and natural resources (GEF/NBSAP AP Target Alignment Review).

The CBD NBSAP analysis identifies recurring needs for gender-responsive budgeting, institutional focal points, capacity building for government officials, and systems to track participation and outcomes — indicating that gender is often treated as a cross-cutting aspiration rather than a delivery requirement (CBD NBSAP Analysis).

The NBSAP Accelerator Partnership Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment reinforces this finding, noting that while gender is frequently referenced, it is rarely reflected in implementation roles, leadership structures, or resourcing arrangements within NBSAP delivery systems (NBSAP AP Capacity Report). SANBI's regional assessment further finds that only two countries reported having gender analysis frameworks usable within the biodiversity sector, with most countries remaining in early or initiation phases (SANBI Report, p.

19). The CARICOM report likewise emphasizes the need for meaningful involvement of women and marginalized groups in implementation, not only in planning processes (CARICOM Report).

2.4 Multi-stakeholder collaboration remains ad hoc and project-driven rather than systemic

While engagement rates are higher for certain stakeholder categories — including other ministries (67 percent), NGOs and civil society (53 percent), subnational governments (43 percent), and the private sector (41 percent) — evidence suggests that collaboration often remains ad hoc and project-based rather than organized as a coherent national delivery architecture (CBD NBSAP Analysis).

National target submissions further indicate that only a small proportion explicitly describe involvement of non-state actors as implementers, with most references limited to discrete activities such as awareness-raising, restoration, monitoring, or research (CBD NBSAP Analysis). At the same time, Parties frequently identify coordination across stakeholders as a practical capacity need, alongside technical cooperation and technology access, underscoring that collaboration is recognized as an operational challenge rather than merely a normative principle.

Summary of inclusion capacity gaps and opportunities for acceleration

Across data sources, a consistent picture emerges: inclusion in NBSAP processes is most often treated as a feature of plan preparation rather than as a core design principle of implementation systems. Key inclusion-related capacity gaps include:

- Stakeholder participation is emphasized during NBSAP development but is less consistently embedded in governance and delivery arrangements.
- Inclusion mechanisms are frequently procedural rather than structural.
- Roles, participation rights, and responsibilities for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and other non-state actors are often unclear or unevenly defined.
- Locally led and community-based implementation remains uneven.
- Gender equality and social inclusion are acknowledged in principle but insufficiently operationalized in implementation design.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration is often *ad hoc* and project driven.

Together, these gaps constrain countries' ability to mobilize the full implementation capacity of society and to deliver biodiversity action at the pace, scale, and durability required by the KMGBF. Where inclusion remains limited to consultation, delivery remains overly centralized, fragmented, and dependent on a narrow set of institutions. Rather than treating inclusion as a cross-cutting principle or procedural requirement, countries can strengthen delivery by embedding whole-of-society approaches directly into NBSAP implementation systems. Addressing this gap is not only a matter of equity or participation; it is a critical enabler of accelerated implementation and transformative change.

CAPACITY GAP #3: Biodiversity remains insufficiently integrated and aligned into development, economic, and spatial decision-making frameworks

What this capacity gap means

Despite increasingly ambitious biodiversity commitments, NBSAP objectives are often weakly embedded in the sectoral, spatial, fiscal, and governance systems that shape national development outcomes. In many countries, NBSAPs continue to function primarily as environmental planning instruments rather than as cross-government strategies that guide decisions in agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure, energy, water, extractives, and finance.

This gap manifests across several interrelated dimensions. Biodiversity objectives are not consistently aligned with sectoral policies, climate strategies, food and water security plans, or national development frameworks, limiting their influence on high-impact policy and investment decisions. At the same time, many countries lack the capacity to translate national targets into integrated spatial priorities that reconcile conservation, restoration, sustainable use, and development across landscapes and seascapes. Policy, incentive, and regulatory frameworks often remain misaligned, with harmful subsidies, sectoral policy conflicts, and weak enforcement continuing to undermine biodiversity outcomes. Fragmented governance across ministries and levels of government further constrain integration, leaving biodiversity objectives disconnected from the systems that drive development trajectories.

Why this capacity gap matters

The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework places unprecedented emphasis on integration and alignment as core conditions for success. Targets related to spatial planning, protected areas, restoration, sustainable use, and incentive reform are explicitly designed to reshape how land, water, and resources are managed across sectors and levels of government. Achieving these targets requires biodiversity objectives to meaningfully influence development, climate, and economic decision.

Where biodiversity remains weakly integrated into sectoral policies, national development plans, climate strategies, and spatial frameworks, progress toward the Framework's goals is routinely undermined. Sectoral policies and public investments in agriculture, infrastructure, energy, water, and extractives remain among the strongest drivers of biodiversity loss. Without alignment, gains achieved through biodiversity-specific actions are often offset by losses driven by development decisions elsewhere.

This gap is particularly consequential for area-based implementation. Without spatially explicit priorities that reconcile conservation, restoration, sustainable use, and development across landscapes and seascapes, countries struggle to coordinate action across jurisdictions, align investments geographically, and manage trade-offs effectively.

Misaligned incentives and regulatory frameworks further exacerbate these challenges. Harmful subsidies, conflicting sectoral policies, and weak enforcement mechanisms lock countries into development pathways that are costly to reverse. Without integration, countries face a high risk of policy incoherence, where biodiversity gains are systematically offset by development decisions elsewhere. In short, integration and alignment act as multipliers of impact. Where biodiversity objectives are embedded across sectoral, spatial, fiscal, and governance systems, progress can accelerate rapidly. Where they are not, ambition remains siloed, implementation fragmented, and transformation elusive.

What the evidence shows

Evidence from recent SBI reviews, national target syntheses, and regional capacity assessments consistently indicates that while biodiversity ambition has increased markedly, integration into the systems that shape development outcomes remains uneven. Across sources, countries face persistent challenges in embedding biodiversity objectives within sectoral policies, climate strategies, spatial planning frameworks, incentive systems, and multi-level governance arrangements. Together, these findings identify integration and alignment as a central capacity constraint on accelerated implementation of the KMGBF, with four interrelated gaps emerging.

3.1 Biodiversity remains weakly integrated into sectoral, climate, and development planning

Multiple assessments show that NBSAPs continue to function primarily as environmental planning instruments, with limited influence over sectoral and development decision-making. The CBD Secretariat's review of updated NBSAPs finds that while many Parties reference linkages to other national plans, explicit alignment with sectoral policies, climate strategies, and national development frameworks remains uneven (CBD NBSAP Analysis, SBI-06-INF-05). In many cases, biodiversity strategies operate in parallel to development planning cycles rather than being embedded within them.

The synthesis of national targets reinforces this finding. While national targets aligned with the KMGBF generally reflect high ambition, fewer specify how biodiversity objectives will be operationalized through sectoral policies or development plans, suggesting that integration remains aspirational rather than institutionalized (GEF/NBSAP AP Target Alignment Review).

Regional assessments echo this pattern. The CARICOM capacity assessment identifies persistent fragmentation between environmental authorities and sectoral ministries, noting that biodiversity considerations are not consistently mainstreamed into economic and development decision-making, limiting their influence on investment priorities and policy reform (CARICOM Report). Together, these findings suggest that biodiversity is still widely treated as a sector-specific concern rather than as a cross-cutting development priority that must shape decisions in agriculture, infrastructure, energy, fisheries, water, and finance.

3.2 National targets are not consistently translated into spatially explicit implementation pathways

The KMGBF places strong emphasis on spatial planning and area-based action, particularly through Targets 1–3. However, evidence indicates that many countries lack the capacity to translate national targets into integrated spatial priorities that can guide implementation across landscapes and seascapes.

The SBI synthesis on progress in national target alignment highlights that while Parties have adopted national targets aligned with Targets 1–3, far fewer have spatialized these targets or embedded them within integrated spatial planning frameworks (Synthesis of Progress on National Targets, SBI-04). As a result, biodiversity commitments often remain disconnected from land-use planning, infrastructure development, and subnational decision-making processes.

The Target 2 Capacity Brief reinforces this challenge, emphasizing that restoration and sustainable use objectives depend on spatial prioritization, coordination across sectors, and alignment with land-use and development planning systems.

SANBI's regional assessment further identifies gaps in access to spatial data, decision-support tools, and technical capacity for integrated spatial planning — particularly tools capable of reconciling biodiversity, climate, and development objectives within a single analytical framework (SANBI Report). Without spatialized implementation pathways, countries face difficulties aligning investments geographically, coordinating action across levels of government, and achieving cumulative, system-level outcomes from area-based targets.

3.3 Incentives, policies, and regulatory frameworks remain misaligned with biodiversity objectives

Evidence from national target submissions and capacity assessments indicates that misaligned incentives and regulatory frameworks continue to undermine biodiversity implementation. The synthesis of national targets highlights frequent references to the need for support in reforming harmful incentives and subsidies, aligning sectoral policies with biodiversity objectives, and strengthening regulatory coherence, particularly in sectors where economic incentives remain strong drivers of biodiversity loss (GEF/NBSAP AP Target Alignment Review).

Finance-related assessments reinforce this finding. CBD resource mobilization and capacity gap analyses indicate that biodiversity objectives are rarely embedded in national budgeting processes or fiscal planning frameworks, limiting countries' ability to redirect public finance, reform subsidies, or establish sustained domestic financing mechanisms aligned with biodiversity goals (CBD Capacity Gaps Review, SBI-06-INF-02).

Regional assessments confirm that misaligned incentives and weak regulatory coherence often lock countries into development pathways that are politically and economically costly to reverse. Both the CARICOM and SANBI reports identify incentive misalignment and regulatory fragmentation as persistent constraints on biodiversity outcomes, even where policy commitments are strong (CARICOM Report; SANBI Report). Without addressing these structural drivers, biodiversity action remains dependent on isolated projects rather than embedded within national economic systems.

3.4 Weak vertical and horizontal coordination constrains implementation at scale

Fragmented governance and limited coordination emerge across assessments as persistent constraints on integration and alignment. The CBD NBSAP review and the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment show that implementation responsibilities often remain concentrated within environment ministries, with limited shared ownership across planning, finance, and sectoral institutions (CBD NBSAP Analysis; NBSAP AP Capacity Report). Horizontal coordination mechanisms across ministries are frequently informal, advisory in nature, or lack authority to influence sectoral priorities.

At the same time, regional assessments emphasize challenges related to vertical coordination between national and subnational levels. The CARICOM and SANBI reports note that in countries where land-use planning, resource management, and service delivery are decentralized, national biodiversity objectives often struggle to shape subnational plans, investments, and regulatory decisions in the absence of clear coordination mechanisms and delegated authority (CARICOM Report; SANBI Report). Where coordination bodies do exist, mandates and accountability across governance levels are often unclear, weakening implementation and slowing progress. Together, these coordination gaps limit countries' ability to align biodiversity objectives with development decisions across jurisdictions and to act coherently at scale.

Summary of alignment capacity gaps and opportunities for change and acceleration

Across data sources, a consistent picture emerges: biodiversity objectives remain weakly embedded in the systems that govern development, spatial planning, incentives, and public investment. While national biodiversity targets aligned with the Global Biodiversity Framework are increasingly ambitious, they are often not integrated into sectoral policies, national development plans, or the decision-making frameworks that shape land use, infrastructure, food systems, and public finance.

Key alignment-related capacity gaps include:

- Biodiversity objectives are weakly embedded in sectoral, climate, and national development planning frameworks.
- NBSAPs continue to function primarily as environmental strategies, with limited influence over high-impact sectoral policies and investments.
- National targets are not consistently translated into spatially explicit, integrated land- and seascape planning frameworks.
- Policy, incentive, and regulatory frameworks remain misaligned, including the persistence of harmful subsidies and sectoral policy conflicts.
- Vertical and horizontal coordination across ministries and levels of government remains limited.

Together, these gaps constrain countries' ability to deliver biodiversity outcomes at scale. Where biodiversity remains siloed from development, spatial, fiscal, and governance systems, implementation becomes fragmented and cumulative impact is lost, with gains in one area often offset by losses in another. Therefore, this capacity gap presents a major opportunity for acceleration. Integration and alignment function as multipliers of impact. Embedding biodiversity objectives within sectoral strategies, spatial frameworks, incentive systems, and multi-level governance arrangements can significantly increase the scale, speed, and durability of implementation. Strengthening these systems is therefore essential to translating biodiversity ambition into lasting biodiversity and development outcomes.

CAPACITY GAP #4: The enabling environment—political commitment, institutional authority, financing, and accountability—often remains misaligned with the scale and durability of GBF ambition

What this capacity gap means

This capacity gap reflects the political, institutional, financial, and accountability conditions that determine whether biodiversity commitments can be implemented consistently, at scale, and over time. While many countries have articulated ambitious biodiversity objectives through updated NBSAPs and national targets, the broader enabling environment required to sustain and deliver these commitments often remains fragmented and insufficiently aligned with the ambition of the KMGBF.

At the political level, biodiversity commitments are not consistently embedded within high-level political agendas or core national priorities, leaving implementation vulnerable to short-term economic pressures and political change. Institutionally, responsibilities for NBSAP implementation are often dispersed across ministries and agencies with unclear mandates, limited delegated authority, and weak coordination mechanisms. Financially, biodiversity priorities are rarely integrated into national budgeting and fiscal frameworks, resulting in heavy reliance on project-based or external finance. Accountability, oversight, and justice mechanisms related to biodiversity also remain uneven, limiting transparency, enforcement, and public trust.

Why this capacity gap matters

The KMGBF sets targets that require not only effective planning and technical capacity, but also sustained political commitment, clear institutional authority, predictable financing, and credible accountability mechanisms. Without these enabling conditions, biodiversity commitments remain vulnerable to shifts in political priorities, fiscal constraints, and institutional fragmentation.

Political commitment is critical because many biodiversity-relevant decisions involve difficult trade-offs across sectors and time horizons. Where biodiversity is not consistently embedded within high-level political agendas, it struggles to compete with short-term development and economic priorities.

Clear institutional mandates and authority are equally important. Biodiversity implementation requires coordinated action across ministries, agencies, and levels of government that control key levers such as land-use planning, infrastructure development, permitting, and public investment. Where mandates are unclear or authority is not delegated, responsibility diffuses, coordination falters, and accountability weakens, slowing implementation at scale.

Financing and budget alignment determine durability. Biodiversity action that relies primarily on external or project-based funding remains fragmented and time-bound, limiting its ability to scale or persist. Without integration into national budgeting and fiscal systems, biodiversity priorities cannot reliably shape investment decisions or incentive structures, nor create enabling conditions for private and blended finance. Experience from GEF-8 enabling activities and biodiversity finance diagnostics further confirms that weak integration into budget processes remains a binding constraint on implementation.

Finally, accountability, oversight, and justice mechanisms underpin legitimacy and trust. Weak accountability reduces transparency, undermines safeguards, and undermines rule of law. In

combination, these enabling conditions determine whether biodiversity ambition can translate into lasting, system-wide change or remain fragile and reversible.

What the evidence shows

Across the SBI review of updated NBSAPs, the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment, and regional capacity assessments conducted by CARICOM and SANBI, a consistent set of enabling-environment capacity gaps emerges. These gaps are not limited to technical shortfalls, but reflect deeper weaknesses in the political, institutional, financial, and accountability conditions required to sustain biodiversity implementation at scale. Together, the evidence points to four interrelated enabling-environment capacity gaps that constrain acceleration of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

4.1 Political commitment is uneven and often not sustained or operationalized

Multiple sources highlight a recurring pattern: while biodiversity ambition is visible in national plans and targets, sustained high-level political attention and follow-through are often weak, particularly when biodiversity competes with short-term economic, infrastructure, and social priorities.

The CARICOM assessment reports that "engagement and feedback from politicians and policymakers on biodiversity issues remains low," noting that biodiversity "takes a back seat to climate change, livelihoods, and a number of other priorities" (CARICOM Report). The report further observes that meaningful collection and analysis of implementation information is frequently triggered by reporting obligations rather than embedded political demand, contributing to a system in which "'retrofitting' of information has become frequent" (CARICOM Report).

This evidence suggests that the core capacity gap is not simply insufficient political commitment, but limited ability to secure, embed, and sustain commitment in ways that translate into clear mandates, budgetary prioritization, and accountability over time — including across political cycles and changes in leadership.

4.2 Institutional mandates, delegated authority, and cross-government coordination are often too weak for delivery at scale

Across assessments, weak institutional mandates and limited delegated authority emerge as major constraints on effective implementation. The CBD Secretariat's review of updated NBSAPs emphasizes that "the institutional arrangements in place for the development, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the NBSAP are key to the success of biodiversity action," with implications for governance, accountability, sustainability, and cross-sectoral engagement (CBD NBSAP Analysis, SBI-06-INF-05).

Despite this recognition, fewer than half of reviewed NBSAPs report the existence of formal coordination mechanisms with clear mandates and authority to guide implementation across government (CBD NBSAP Analysis). Where coordination bodies exist, their scope, influence, and decision-making power vary significantly.

The NBSAP Accelerator Partnership Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment reinforces this finding, identifying an "overwhelming reliance on the national entity responsible for environment and biodiversity" as indicative of a lack of shared responsibility across government (NBSAP AP Capacity Report). Limited

engagement of intersectoral agencies responsible for planning, economic development, and coordination of national programmes was flagged as evidence of continued siloed implementation.

Regional assessments echo these challenges. Both CARICOM and SANBI highlight unclear institutional mandates and limited authority for biodiversity agencies, particularly where implementation depends on coordination with sectoral ministries responsible for land use, infrastructure, agriculture, and fisheries. These institutional gaps constrain whole-of-government delivery and weaken accountability for results.

4.3 Financing and budget alignment remain partial and weakly integrated into public finance systems

The evidence consistently shows that biodiversity financing challenges are not limited to funding volume, but reflect weak alignment between biodiversity priorities and national budgetary and fiscal systems.

The SBI NBSAP review notes that while more than half of reviewed NBSAPs include some reference to biodiversity finance, only 16 of the NBSAPs reviewed include specific costing, gap analyses, or cost estimates (CBD NBSAP Analysis). This limits the ability of biodiversity priorities to compete effectively within national budget processes or inform medium-term expenditure frameworks.

The CARICOM assessment characterizes financing capacity gaps as systemically binding, identifying "inadequate level of funding" as a "very high impact" constraint while emphasizing the multi-faceted challenge of both mobilizing additional resources and using existing resources more effectively (CARICOM Report).

The SANBI TSCC capacity needs assessment illustrates what stronger alignment could look like in practice, referencing mechanisms such as biodiversity or green budget-tagging within public financial management systems and national systems for tracking biodiversity-related public expenditure (SANBI Report). However, the assessment notes that such approaches remain rare, highlighting a persistent gap between emerging good practice and mainstream implementation.

4.4 Accountability, oversight, and justice mechanisms are not yet embedded as delivery infrastructure

Finally, evidence indicates that accountability, oversight, and justice mechanisms related to biodiversity implementation remain uneven and weakly institutionalized. While monitoring and reporting systems are increasingly present, their effectiveness depends on whether they are linked to institutional mandates, oversight bodies, and corrective action.

The SBI review of updated NBSAPs finds that although many Parties report the existence of monitoring arrangements, effectiveness varies considerably depending on whether roles, responsibilities, and follow-up mechanisms are clearly defined (CBD NBSAP Analysis). Where monitoring functions primarily serve reporting obligations, their contribution to implementation learning and accountability is limited.

Regional assessments reinforce this finding. The CARICOM report notes that biodiversity-related information is often collected in an ad hoc manner and retrofitted for reporting, rather than generated through structured systems designed to support oversight and decision-making (CARICOM Report). SANBI further highlights that accountability depends not only on data availability, but on systems that consolidate, synthesize, and make information accessible to decision-makers and stakeholders (SANBI

Report). Without coherent accountability and oversight frameworks — including grievance mechanisms and safeguards — implementation risks becoming fragmented, opaque, and disconnected from rights-based and justice considerations.

Summary of enabling policy capacity gaps and opportunities for change and acceleration

Across data sources, a consistent pattern emerges: while biodiversity ambition has increased, the political, institutional, financial, and accountability conditions required to sustain and deliver that ambition often remain weakly aligned with the scale of ambition of the KMGFB. In many countries, enabling environments have not yet caught up with the level of commitment articulated in updated NBSAPs and national targets. Key enabling environment capacity gaps include:

- Political commitment to biodiversity is uneven beyond technical agencies and not consistently embedded in high-level political agendas.
- Institutional mandates for NBSAP implementation are often unclear, fragmented, or insufficiently empowered to influence sectoral decisions.
- Biodiversity priorities are weakly integrated into national budgeting processes, fiscal frameworks, and public financial management systems.
- Implementation remains heavily dependent on external and project-based finance, limiting predictability and scale.
- Accountability, oversight, and justice mechanisms related to biodiversity are incomplete or weakly institutionalized.

Together, these gaps make implementation vulnerable to political, fiscal, and institutional change. Even where plans and technical capacity exist, weak mandates, unstable financing, and limited accountability undermine the ability to sustain progress and act at scale. Aligning political commitment, institutional authority, financing, and accountability can transform biodiversity action from time-bound projects into durable national systems. Strengthening the enabling environment requires targeted support to:

CAPACITY GAP 5: Insufficient capacity for systemic transformation hinders the scale and pace of change required

What this capacity gap means

While many countries are undertaking important biodiversity actions through projects, pilots, and sector-specific initiatives, national systems are often not structured to support systemic transformation at the scale and pace required by the Global Biodiversity Framework. Biodiversity action remains largely incremental, project-based, and time-bound, rather than embedded within core economic, institutional, and governance systems.

This capacity gap reflects three interrelated challenges. First, successful biodiversity approaches are rarely scaled or institutionalized. Pilot projects and innovative tools demonstrate proof of concept, but mechanisms to embed these successes within national policies, budgets, and institutions remain weak, limiting learning, replication, and national ownership. Second, biodiversity remains insufficiently integrated into economic and development decision-making frameworks, where it is often treated as an environmental externality rather than as essential infrastructure for development. Third, institutional cultures and narratives have not yet shifted to support transformation, with persistent silos, short planning horizons, and development narratives that frame biodiversity as a constraint rather than an asset. Together, these challenges constrain the transition from incremental action to systemic change.

Why this capacity gap matters

The KMGBF explicitly calls for transformative change across economic, social, and institutional systems, not incremental improvement at the margins. Targets related to area-based conservation, restoration, sustainable use, finance, and incentives cannot be achieved through isolated projects or short-term interventions alone; they require structural shifts in how countries think about nature and development.

Without the capacity to scale successful approaches and institutionalize change, progress remains fragile and reversible. Pilot projects may demonstrate innovation, but their impact is limited if they are not embedded within national policies, regulatory frameworks, budget processes, and delivery systems. This perpetuates cycles of project initiation without durable systemic impact.

The absence of biodiversity from economic and development decision-making frameworks further compounds this risk. When the value of nature is not reflected in fiscal planning, public investment decisions, and economic policy, biodiversity objectives are consistently outcompeted by short-term growth priorities. This embeds biodiversity loss within economic systems rather than addressing it as a structural policy failure.

Institutional culture and narrative are equally decisive. Siloed institutions, risk-averse practices, and short-term performance incentives limit the ability to manage complex, cross-sectoral challenges. At the same time, narratives that frame biodiversity as a trade-off rather than a development asset constrain political space for reform and weaken public and private support for transformation.

This capacity gap therefore directly affects whether countries can shift development trajectories onto nature-positive pathways and sustain progress beyond individual political or funding cycles. If unaddressed, even well-designed NBSAPs risk delivering incremental gains that fall short of the systemic change required to achieve the Framework.

What the evidence shows

Across regions and income groups, available evidence points to a consistent pattern: while countries are undertaking biodiversity actions and piloting innovative approaches, national systems are not yet configured to support systemic transformation at the scale and pace required by the Global Biodiversity Framework. The gap manifests not as a lack of activity, but as limited capacity to convert projects into systems, pilots into policies, and ambition into durable institutional change. Four interrelated systemic capacity gaps emerge across data sources.

5.1 Successful approaches are rarely scaled or institutionalized

Multiple assessments indicate that biodiversity action remains predominantly project-based, with weak mechanisms for institutionalizing successful models within national systems.

The CARICOM regional capacity assessment highlights a recurring pattern in which project outputs are delivered, presented to governments, and then effectively stalled. As the report notes, once projects conclude, "the results were presented to the Government, and that was most often the end of it," with limited follow-up or integration into national systems (CARICOM Report). This is compounded by the absence of sustained domestic financing, as "there is no provision of funds for any follow-up actions in the national budget," constraining continuity beyond donor-supported cycles (CARICOM Report).

The assessment further observes that where implementation responsibility shifts to civil society or external actors after project completion, long-term monitoring, accountability, and institutional learning become difficult to sustain, reinforcing fragmentation and weakening national ownership.

Evidence from the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment echoes this pattern, with countries explicitly identifying "difficulties in upscaling pilot projects" as a recurring constraint (NBSAP AP Capacity Report). Together, these findings point to a persistent scaling gap: countries often have the capacity to innovate, but lack the institutional, financial, and policy mechanisms needed to replicate, adapt, and embed what works.

5.2 Biodiversity remains weakly integrated into economic and development decision-making

Despite growing recognition of the links between biodiversity, resilience, and development, evidence suggests that biodiversity continues to sit at the margins of economic and fiscal decision-making frameworks.

The SANBI Technical and Scientific Cooperation Centre capacity assessment provides a critical insight into the nature of this gap. It notes that ecosystem accounting and valuation efforts often focus on exchange or market values, "rather than welfare values," which encompass broader social, cultural, and non-market benefits (SANBI Report). This limits the ability of governments to reflect biodiversity's full contribution to wellbeing, livelihoods, and long-term economic stability in policy decisions.

At the same time, SANBI's assessment identifies what more advanced, transformation-oriented capacity could look like, including the ability to estimate the contribution of biodiversity-related sectors to GDP and to conduct nature-related risk and dependency analyses of the macroeconomy (SANBI Report). The uneven uptake of such approaches across countries indicates that many national systems lack the

analytical tools and institutional capacity required to reposition biodiversity as essential development infrastructure rather than an environmental externality.

This finding is reinforced by the NBSAP AP Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment, where respondents cite a "lack of understanding of the links between biodiversity and other societal challenges" as a reported difficulty (NBSAP AP Capacity Report). This points not only to an information gap, but to a structural disconnect between biodiversity objectives and core development planning processes.

5.3 Institutional cultures and delivery models remain siloed and incremental

Evidence across assessments points to institutional configurations that are poorly aligned with the cross-sectoral, adaptive, and long-term nature of biodiversity transformation. Survey results from the NBSAP AP Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment show that implementation remains heavily concentrated within environment ministries, with limited engagement from planning, finance, and sectoral ministries. Respondents reported "limited involvement of industries and non-environmental ministries" (73%), challenges in mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors (67%), and difficulties translating national frameworks into regional and local action (62%) (NBSAP AP Capacity Report). The same assessment identifies "difficulties in upscaling pilot projects" as a recurring challenge, reinforcing the link between institutional silos and limited capacity for systemic change.

The CARICOM assessment provides a complementary systems perspective, noting that many biodiversity efforts remain "project-based and not continuous," resulting in persistent data gaps because monitoring and learning are not embedded as routine national or regional functions (CARICOM Report). Where monitoring, reporting, and data systems are tied to projects rather than institutionalized processes, feedback loops for learning and adaptation remain weak.

Together, these findings suggest that even where policies and plans exist, institutional cultures characterized by silos, short planning horizons, and limited mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration constrain the ability of countries to deliver transformation at scale.

5.4 Narratives framing biodiversity as a development asset remain unevenly embedded

While narrative change is less directly observable in technical assessments, multiple sources point to gaps in how biodiversity is framed and understood within broader policy and societal contexts. The NBSAP AP Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment identifies a "lack of understanding of the links between biodiversity and other societal challenges" as a reported difficulty (42%), signaling a narrative gap that affects political prioritization, cross-sector engagement, and public support for reform (NBSAP AP Capacity Report).

Similarly, the SBI review of updated NBSAPs notes that while progress has been made in adopting whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches over successive NBSAP cycles, gaps persist in mainstreaming, finance planning, and adoption of NBSAPs as binding national policy instruments (CBD NBSAP Analysis). This suggests that while narratives around biodiversity may be improving at the rhetorical level, they are not yet consistently translated into the institutional, economic, and political levers that drive decision-making.

Without stronger narratives that position biodiversity as foundational to development, resilience, and prosperity, political commitment risks remaining fragile and transformative reforms harder to sustain.

Summary of systemic transformation capacity gaps and opportunities for change and acceleration

Across data sources, a consistent pattern emerges: while countries are undertaking biodiversity actions and piloting innovative approaches, national systems are not yet configured to deliver systemic, nature-positive transformation at the scale and pace required by the Global Biodiversity Framework. The evidence highlights four interrelated systemic capacity gaps:

- Biodiversity action remains predominantly project-based, with limited mechanisms to scale, institutionalize, and sustain successful approaches within national systems.
- Biodiversity is weakly embedded in economic and development decision-making frameworks, limiting its influence on fiscal policy, public investment, and long-term development pathways.
- Institutional cultures and delivery models remain siloed and incremental, constraining cross-sectoral collaboration, adaptive learning, and whole-of-government implementation.
- Narratives framing biodiversity as a foundational asset for development, resilience, and prosperity are uneven, weakening political and societal support for transformative reform.

In practice, systemic transformation is enabled through concrete levers such as budget tagging, fiscal reform, regulatory mandates, and integration into national planning cycles.

Together, these gaps reinforce a pattern of incremental progress that falls short of the structural change envisioned by the KMGBF, limiting countries' ability to shift development trajectories onto durable, nature-positive pathways. Without deliberate efforts to redesign economic, institutional, and cultural systems, progress risks remaining fragmented and reversible. By contrast, investing in systemic transformation creates the conditions for durable, scalable, and nationally owned implementation.

Conclusion

The capacity gaps highlighted in this review have clear implications for how the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership designs and delivers its support. They show that countries need less stand-alone technical assistance and more help strengthening the national systems that turn plans into action. This includes supporting clear implementation pathways, improving coordination across government, embedding inclusion as part of delivery, linking biodiversity priorities to public finance and budgeting processes, and helping countries institutionalize and scale what works. Through its facilitators, matchmaking functions, and coordination with the Technical and Scientific Cooperation Support Centres, the Accelerator is well placed to provide this kind of targeted, demand-driven support.

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