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From local evidence to global action: Measuring progress for biodiversity

Britta Hackenberg has learned not to be intimidated by the feeling that something might be beyond her. Throughout her career, she has found herself stepping into unfamiliar territory – often because someone else believed she was ready before she did. Her response has usually been the same: sit down, learn, and give it a try.

One such moment came in 2022, at a negotiating meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Geneva, where governments were working towards a new global biodiversity framework. When one of the Namibian negotiators fell ill, she was asked to step in. She knew little about the world of international negotiations and still remembers thinking: "I felt as useful as the furniture in the room. So, I decided: either I learn and find my way through this, or this is the last meeting like this I will attend." Instead of backing away, she sat down and learned what she needed to know. Then she walked into the negotiations – soon to become deeply involved in supporting the negotiations on the monitoring framework for the GBF as well as the technical fine tuning of its indicators as a member of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Indicators.

A few years earlier, Britta had already found herself navigating the complexity of international biodiversity policy, at the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP13 in Cancún, Mexico, in 2016. Looking back, Britta sees a thread running through these experiences: people who trusted her, mentors who gave her guidance, and a willingness to keep going even when she did not yet have all the answers. That willingness has taken her from practical conservation work into national biodiversity planning and international policy. And along the way, it led her to a deceptively simple question: "Against which goals and how are we actually measuring ourselves?"

Making progress measurable

A national biodiversity strategy can set out what a country wants to achieve. But without monitoring, it is difficult to know whether those ambitions are becoming reality – what is working, where progress is falling short and where action needs to change. Monitoring has therefore become increasingly important in biodiversity policy. Under the

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Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, countries agreed on a Monitoring Framework with standardised indicators to track progress towards global biodiversity targets, alongside indicators that reflect national circumstances. Together, these provide evidence for countries to assess progress under their biodiversity strategies while contributing to a comparable picture of collective progress. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), GIZ supports countries in adapting their monitoring systems to the new framework and strengthening their ability to track progress under their national biodiversity strategies. The project Strengthening National Implementation of Global Biodiversity Targets works across eight countries: Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Laos, Madagascar, Namibia and Peru. The aim is to turn a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) from a static planning document into a tool that helps governments learn, adapt and make decisions based on evidence.

Whether existing systems needed to be improved, new connections created or capacities strengthened – the approach differed in each of the eight countries. In Madagascar, for example, indicators from the revised NBSAP are being integrated into the ministry's planning and monitoring system and linked to the environmental information system used for reporting under the Rio Conventions. In Indonesia, the project supported the creation of the country's first sub-national biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism in East Kalimantan, connecting biodiversity and action-plan data from government agencies, NGOs and local communities with monitoring at district, provincial and national level.

In Colombia, the project supported a network that connects existing community-based biodiversity monitoring initiatives in the Amazon, helping communities and organisations exchange knowledge and strengthen the use of locally generated information.

In Namibia, GIZ supported the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) to develop the country's monitoring framework for its updated NBSAP. This is where Britta was asked to step in. She agreed: "From my studies and my early work, I already knew the basic principles of monitoring. Over the years, I deepened that knowledge internationally." That international experience enabled Britta to facilitate an exchange between countries working on biodiversity monitoring. In October 2025, at the University of the Andes, participants from Colombia, El Salvador, Brazil, Peru and Namibia shared experiences and explored how different approaches to NBSAP monitoring could be adapted to national contexts. The exchange highlighted common challenges and the value of collaboration, networking and learning from one another. It also informed the work in Namibia: Britta led stakeholders through three rounds of consultation, integrating Namibia's existing community-based monitoring system into the framework, while identifying additional process indicators to track progress towards full reporting capacity. Alongside this, Namibia's new Multilateral Environmental Agreements Tracking Platform brings together environmental data and indicators across biodiversity, land degradation and climate, including information linked to the NBSAP.

When data leads to action

Namibia's monitoring work also offers powerful examples of how biodiversity information can lead to action. Take the albatrosses: monitoring revealed that around 30,000 seabirds were being killed each year because of fishing activities in Namibian waters. The evidence helped make the issue visible and supported changes in fishing practices. Today, annual seabird mortality has been reduced by 98 per cent across the longline fleet.

For Britta, this is what monitoring makes possible: seeing what is happening, understanding whether something is working, changing course where necessary – and then measuring again. A country needs to know whether its conservation measures are achieving their intended results, where gaps remain and where resources or approaches need to be adjusted. Effective monitoring and reporting form part of the broader system of planning, monitoring, reporting and review established under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to strengthen accountability and transparency.

This is also the thread running through Britta's own career. Time and time again, she has stepped into the unknown, aware of how much she still had to learn. Each time, she sat down, deepened her knowledge and found her way forward. What began as a personal way of dealing with unfamiliar challenges has become part of how she works: looking at the evidence, learning from it and using it to shape what comes next. The woman who once stood unexpectedly at a microphone in Geneva has since helped shape the systems that make it possible to ask, with evidence: "Are we getting where we said we wanted to go?" In biodiversity conservation, knowing the answer is the first step towards knowing what to do next.

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