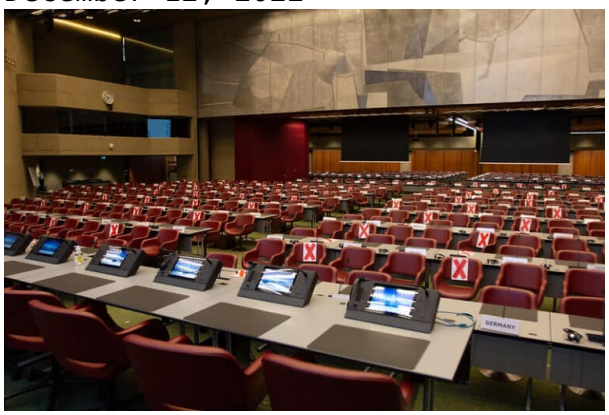
CBD COP15 needs to reinforce precaution against geoengineering to protect biodiversity and communities

December 12, 2022



No to climate geoengineering! Open call to CBD Parties and CBD Secretariat

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) took a groundbreaking decision by addressing geoengineering and its potential impacts on biodiversity and people early on. In a laudable example of foresight and precaution, the CBD has made highly relevant global consensus decisions on geoengineering at several COP and SBSTTA meetings since 2008.[1] To underpin these decisions, it has produced broadly peer reviewed technical scientific reports on ocean fertilization,(TS 45) and on the potential impacts of geoengineering on biodiversity and related regulatory matters (TS 66).

By consensus of all Parties and based on the precautionary approach, COP10 (decision X/33 (w), called for a moratorium on the deployment of geoengineering activities until a set of conditions were met, including that a transparent multilateral global governance mechanism is in place, that no transboundary harm would occur and that there is an adequate scientific basis to justify these proposals, taking into account the risk geoengineering activities pose to biodiversity and related social and cultural impacts.[2] The decision made an exception for small scale scientific research studies in controlled settings for the purposes of gathering scientific data and only after a thorough prior assessment of the potential impacts on the environment.

None of the conditions expressed in the CBD decisions are in place. The precautionary calls from CBD are as important as ever and even more relevant in light of a growing number of risky geoengineering proposals and attempted / ongoing field experiments that threaten biodiversity, the environment, and the rights, territories and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

Furthermore, prior to the recent UNFCCC COP27, members of the Supervisory Body of the Article 6.4 mechanism, who are tasked with developing the rules to govern a new carbon market regime under the Paris Agreement, put forward recommendations on removals that included large scale land and marine-based geoengineering technologies (such as large scale bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), direct air capture (DAC), ocean fertilization, ocean alkalinization) as sources of carbon credits or offsets. These recommendations were not adopted but sent back to the Body for further discussions. If adopted, they would create a commercial base for a

race to develop these risky proposals.[3]

The London Convention/London Protocol against ocean dumping established a precautionary governance framework for marine geoengineering in 2013, and placed ocean fertilization into an annex of marine technologies that should not be deployed. The LC recently decided to look into several additional marine geoengineering technologies due to potential "adverse impacts on the marine environment" (enhancing ocean alkalinity, the use of biomass for carbon sequestration such as macroalgae cultivation and artificial upwelling, and solar geoengineering techniques such as marine cloud brightening and deploying microbubbles/reflective particles/materials). It also reaffirmed that past LC/LP resolutions on ocean fertilization and on marine geoengineering more broadly apply to all LC Contracting Parties.[4] In its geoengineering decisions, CBD COPs clearly stated that the work of the London Convention/London Protocol should be acknowledged.[5]

This year, a group of over 370 scientists from 54 countries issued a call demanding a "Solar Geoengineering Non-Use Agreement" stating "Solar geoengineering deployment at planetary scale cannot be fairly and effectively governed in the current system of international institutions. It also poses unacceptable risk if ever implemented as part of future climate policy. A strong political message from governments, the United Nations and civil society is urgently needed". https://www.solargeoeng.org/

Why CBD needs to reinforce precaution and monitoring

Below are some examples of recent geoengineering activities.

Some CBD parties like Australia and the UK have conducted open-air solar and marine geoengineering experiments. They have not reported these experiments to the London Convention /London Protocol, or any other UN body that has made precautionary calls against marine geoengineering deployment. Some experiments were conducted in the ocean near Australia, and others were announced for the Arabian Sea, Hawaii, and India, among other locations.[6]

A solar geoengineering field experiment (to test technical equipment) was announced in 2021 by Harvard University in Kiruna, Sweden, but suspended following Indigenous and civil society protests led by the Saami Council.[7]

The US-based Arctic Ice Project (former Ice911) conducted solar geoengineering experiments over Indigenous territories in Alaska, and plan to expand their work in Alaska to include experiments in the Himalaya and Norway. This project has also been met with rejection by Indigenous peoples.[8]

Both the solar geoengineering field experiment in Sweden and the Arctic Ice Project in northern Alaska failed to have meaningful consultation with the Indigenous peoples under the standards of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) that are recognized under international human rights law.

Large scale monoculture of algae cultivation with potentially huge negative impacts on biodiversity and the livelihoods of small seaweed cultivators are planned for several countries including Canada, Philippines, Indonesia, India,[9] and other countries in Europe, Africa[10] and Latin America[11]

What the CBD should do

All CBD parties should affirm precaution and prevent geoengineering from harming biodiversity, the environment, the climate, the rights of Indigenous peoples and the human rights of local communities by recalling decisions 9/16 on ocean fertilization and X/33 on geoengineering in the discussions on marine biodiversity and on climate change at COP 15 and beyond

COP15 must ensure that geoengineering (including large scale technological interventions that might be referred to as "Nature Based Solutions") are explicitly excluded from the Global Biodiversity Framework.

The CBD Secretariat should proactively reach out to all other UN bodies discussing geoengineering to inform them about relevant CBD decisions and to highlight the need for a precautionary approach.

In line with COP decision XI/20, paragraph 9, the COP must mandate the CBD Secretariat to require all CBD parties to report, on a regular basis, on any geoengineering initiative taken in and / or by their countries and report measures undertaken in accordance with paragraph 8(w) of decision X/33. The CBD secretariat should compile reported measures from the parties and bring them to the attention of the Conference of the Parties.

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[1] See detailed information of all decisions and publications at CBD website on climate-related geoengineering and biodiversity: https://www.cbd.int/climate/geoengineering/

[2] Decision X/33 text includes (w) Ensure, in line and consistent with decision IX/16 C, on ocean fertilization and biodiversity and climate change, in the absence of science based, global, transparent and effective control and regulatory mechanisms for geo-engineering, and in accordance with the precautionary approach and Article 14 of the Convention, that no climate-related geo-engineering activities** that may affect biodiversity take place, until there is an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities and appropriate consideration of the associated risks for the environment and biodiversity and associated social, economic and cultural impacts, with the exception of small scale scientific research studies that would be conducted in a controlled setting in accordance with Article 3 of the Convention, and only if they are justified by the need to gather specific scientific data and are subject to a thorough prior assessment of the potential impacts on the environment. https://www.cbd.int/climate/geoengineering/

[3] Geoengineering Monitor, 2022, UNFCCC Article 6.4: No to legitimizing geoengineering and land-based offsets https://tinyurl.com/293b2cff and

ETC group, 2022, False Solutions Alert: Geoengineering in climate negotiations, https://tinyurl.com/yf7ca6yz

[4] International Maritime Organization, 2022, Marine geoengineering techniques – potential impacts, https://tinyurl.com/sakkrmyu

[5] Convention on Biological Diversity, 2017, Climate-related Geoengineering and Biodiversity, https://tinyurl.com/4j8ux3y5

[6] Geoengineering Monitor, 2022, Quarterly Review I (part 3): marine geoengineering – ongoing and planned open-ocean trials and recent developments in research, https://tinyurl.com/uxr4tr66

[7] Geoengineering Monitor, 2022, Support Alaska Native Delegation to Stop Arctic Ice Project!, https://tinyurl.com/3kahy4h9
[8] Geoengineering Monitor, 2021, Widespread opposition to solar geoengineering halts test flight, https://tinyurl.com/yzzk25s8

[9] The Fish Site, India sets 9.7 million tonne seaweed target, https://tinyurl.com/y4rzyudm

[10] Journal of Applied Phycology, 2022, Seaweed farming in Africa: current status and future potential, https://tinyurl.com/33rdve44

[11] See Geoengineering Map: http://map.geoengineeringmonitor.org/ and

https://tinyurl.com/yb3k8ehh

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Signatories:

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Biofuelwatch, International
Centre for International Environmental Law
Corporate Accountability International
EcoNexus, International
Ecoropa, International
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GRAIN, International
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International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, International
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Eco Defenders Network, Nigeria
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