

Survey shows strong support for The Global Biodiversity Standard goals

The results of the recent public consultation carried out on behalf of The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS) provided encouraging endorsement of the aims of TGBS and its approach to assessing biodiversity outcomes.

The consultation (or **TGBS Survey**), which took place in the month leading up to COP28, invited a wide range of potential stakeholders to consider a number of statements related to biodiversity or about features of TGBS and then to respond quantitatively, by indicating to what extent they agreed with each statement (on a scale of 0 to 10), and qualitatively by providing a written comment in relation to each statement.

Responses were received from individuals and organisations across Africa, North and South America, Asia, Australasia and Europe and included ecologists, conservationists, academic institutions, nature finance initiatives, governmental bodies, consultants and financial and non-financial firms.

A summary of the key findings of the survey are set out below. They will help to inform the next stages in the development of TGBS as we move to launch the standard at UN CBD COP-16 in October 2024.

An important focus of this work will be to engage with stakeholders in the nature finance ecosystem, particularly carbon markets. Confidence in tree planting and other nature-based carbon sequestration projects has been undermined in recent years for a variety of reasons including, in some cases, corruption. But the fundamental problem, as [Professor Thomas Crowther](#), former chief scientific adviser for the United Nations' Trillion Trees Campaign, highlighted in a [presentation at COP28](#) is that: *"The potential of newly created forests to draw down carbon is often overstated. They can be harmful to biodiversity."* This is of course also a core premise of TGBS. Our mission: to replace the *"any tree at minimal cost"* solution to climate change with a long-term, best practice approach that places biodiversity and the interests of local communities at its centre.

The TGBS method can thus help to provide assurance for carbon market projects and support the work of bodies such as The Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) whose recently published [Core Carbon Principles](#) aim to provide *"a global benchmark for high-integrity carbon credits"*. TGBS can also provide the means for measurement of biodiversity impacts under frameworks such as those developed by the Task Force on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and the Science-based Targets Network (SBTN).

Summary of responses to TGBS Survey Questions

[Note: if required the full set of TGBS Survey Questions can be viewed [here](#)]

- A. The TGBS Survey began with two introductory questions asking participants to comment on the importance of biodiversity to their organisation and their familiarity with the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Average scores of 8.7 out of 10 and 6.0 out of 10 respectively indicated that biodiversity was a major focus for most respondents and that a majority had at least some familiarity with the GBF.
- B. Respondents broadly agreed that biodiversity impacts of tree planting and other land management programmes are, in many cases, not being properly assessed. *“Experience tells me that this is very poor globally and not well understood in many countries where economic factors are more important than biodiversity”* and *“Industries and organizations look to fulfil their obligations for the lowest possible cost”*, were typical of the written comments submitted in response to TGBS Survey Question 3.
- C. There was clear agreement, reflected in an average score of 8.5 out of 10 for TGBS Survey Question 4, on the need for a new global standard to measure biodiversity outcomes effectively across geographies and types of ecosystem. *“Need one consistent, transparent, comparable system”* was how one respondent put it, though some cautioned that *“A single unit, score, or credit for biodiversity is unrealistic”* and that *“standardised may not be very useful to assess biodiversity impacts in highly specific ecosystems”*.

In fact the TGBS methodology is expressly designed to assess and then compare the biodiversity attributes of land management projects of different types across a wide range of ecosystems. Local biodiversity experts based at Regional Hubs with specific knowledge of local ecosystems are used to carry out assessments. A standardised result is produced by measuring biodiversity change on the project site against the biodiversity attributes of a suitably selected reference site. The TGBS assessment process is set out in great detail in the TGBS Manual which is now publicly available, and, it is hoped, should address concerns such as those quoted above.

- D. There was broad support for the idea that TGBS has the potential to play an important role in achieving the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and confidence that Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) and its partners have the credibility and expertise to achieve this (TGBS Survey Question 5). The average response of 7.6 out of 10 was skewed slightly to the downside by a number of participants offering a score of only 5 on the basis that they wished to see how TGBS works in practice before committing themselves more firmly.

Respondents stressed the importance of engaging with other stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, policy makers, government agencies and corporates, in order to drive widespread adoption of TGBS. Others emphasized the importance of getting TGBS *“Embedded within other frameworks and standards,... [to] help to promote consistency of measurement”*

- E. The clearest consensus among participants in the survey, with an average response of 9 out of 10, was around the importance of including a Field Survey as part of a biodiversity impact assessment rather than relying purely on aerial surveillance (TGBS Survey Question 6). Carrying out a Field Survey in an efficient and cost-effective manner using local biodiversity experts in order to gather accurate data about the variety and abundance of species on the ground is a key feature of the TGBS method.

Typical comments included: *“Remote sensing is an excellent tool for these assessments, but there will always be a need for ground-truthing to at least some degree, especially for a reasonably accurate estimate of biodiversity”* and *“While remote sensing is an incredibly useful tool, it is too coarse to be an accurate representation of biodiversity. Field based verification is essential”*. However, some respondents expressed concern that field surveys could be costly and time-consuming. In fact the TGBS approach, which has been tested across more than 100 sites, is designed to be time efficient and cost-effective.

- F. TGBS Survey Question 7 asked about carbon markets. Respondents expressed concern about the biodiversity credentials of tree planting and other nature-based carbon sequestration projects. Responses included: *“We agree that many existing carbon projects have caused net harm rather than benefit through the use of monoculture, and that biodiversity should be prioritized in carbon projects”*.

But others recognised that while *“There is lots of improvement needed in the carbon credit marketthere are some very strong and impactful projects which demonstrate the VCM can be extremely effective. The key is taking what is working and replicating it”*.

There was general agreement that use of TGBS should, in principle, have a positive impact on carbon markets, particularly if carbon project developers *“can charge a premium for biodiversity co-benefits this will incentivize the use of frameworks such as the TGBS assessment... which in turn will increase the credibility of the carbon projects as a whole”*. Respondents also emphasized the importance of transparency and for the TGBS method to be robust and credible.

Many saw the potential *“positive economic benefits associated with nature positive biodiversity programs”* and the *“opportunity for biodiversity impacts to generate greater value for projects to make investing in them more worthwhile”*. However, one respondent cautioned that *“This strongly depends on land management type: In agroforestry, maintaining a biodiverse site with native tree species (flora and fauna)*

may provide less economic value". On the other hand, one corporate participant stressed that since, "Our raw ingredients are mostly agriculture based, biodiversity is critical to business survival".

Specifically, in relation to carbon sequestration projects, TGBS was seen *"as being a tool for value creation", and "biodiversity as essential to project success and [to] create holistic benefits for local communities"*. Perhaps the most unequivocal comment was the suggestion that *"Biodiversity should be measured and included in every carbon project, and payments for biodiversity services would create more opportunities for landowners to engage in those biodiversity procedures that have long term impact"*.

- G. TGBS Survey Question 8 asked whether public recognition of TGBS certification would provide an incentive for organisations to incorporate rare native species and other positive biodiversity practices into tree planting and other land management programmes such as mangrove restoration. The average response score of 8 out of 10 suggested strong agreement with this. However, the written feedback was more mixed. Concern was expressed that the upside from public recognition could be outweighed by the risk of the perception of greenwashing or by the additional costs and challenges of acquiring and managing rare native species.

- H. Regarding the cost of carrying out a TGBS assessment (TGBS Survey Question 9) there was, not surprisingly, strong support for *"Keeping costs as minimal as possible"* and having a differentiated pricing model based on geography, a user's ability to pay, and the size and complexity of a project site. Some advised that *"Governments should be paying, not individual applicants"* and that *"it should be free for low income countries"*. On the other hand, one respondent questioned whether *"it is correct to pay for example a Europe based Regional Hub more than a Latin America based Regional Hub, just for the sake of where they are, considering the same education and qualifications level"*. Another suggested that *"as it is now US\$20,000 seems a standard figure to charge projects in Kenya"*.

All of these factors will be considered as we develop the business model and pricing structure for TGBS in the coming months.

- I. A significant number of respondents indicated an interest in becoming a supporter or early adopter of TGBS. We are in the process of following up to explore how we might develop partnerships or other types of working relationships with these organisations.