

DSI: The Cali Fund still a work in progress ahead of COP17

Par Denis MESHAKA

Publié le 23/10/2026

Last July, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity continued their negotiations on the implementation of the multilateral mechanism for the sharing of benefits arising from DSI, of which the Cali Fund is the main financial instrument. The discussions resulted in a recommendation ahead of COP17, to be held in late October in Yerevan (Armenia). The crucial issue of defining DSI was not on the agenda. Talks are therefore continuing without any clarity on exactly what they are addressing, which suggests that their conclusions will be applied in a piecemeal manner.



The use of digital sequencing information (DSI) remains a subject of international debate. The sharing of benefits derived from this DSI and its use by companies has begun to be regulated since

COP15 in 2022. However, the signatory countries to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) do not seem to be able to agree on other issues, such as the definition of DSI, or the conditions governing access to or use of such data.

Meanwhile, the sequencing of living organisms continues, as do companies' claims for patents relating to DSI. All of this is taking place without free, prior and informed consent or any alternative mechanism, in particular through a '*material transfer agreement*', where the origin of the DSI used has been lost. These practices also disregard other obligations arising from the CBD and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), such as the sharing of benefits. They thus amount to the misappropriation of knowledge and biological resources developed by farmers, indigenous and local communities, and biodiversity-rich countries.

The prospect of a COP17 in limbo

The seventh session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI-7) of the CBD was held in late August 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya. The meetings of this body focus on the implementation and follow-up to decisions taken at previous COPs. COP16, for instance, requested that SBI-7 examine certain issues and make recommendations to the seventeenth Conference of the Parties (COP17), which is due to take place in late October in Yerevan, Armenia. This biennial conference follows on from COP15 (2022), which introduced the principle of the multilateral mechanism for the sharing of benefits arising from the use of DSIs, subsequently structured by COP16 (2024) with the proposal to establish the Cali Fundⁱ. According to the CBD and the Nagoya Protocol, this fund is intended to receive contributions from users of DSI in accordance with the principles of access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising therefrom.

However, the SBI-7 meeting in Nairobi was unable to reach a consensus on certain elements of the recommendations to COP17 concerning the multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism and the Cali Fund. Several issues have therefore been referred to COP17, during which States will face a tough challenge in dealing with industry. The latter continues to use IPRs in breach of international agreements and is generally hostile to the principle of mandatory contributions to the Cali Fundⁱⁱ. COP17 will no doubt face significant difficulties in reaching a consensus conclusion and, in the best-case scenario, will make progress on the main areas of work ahead of the next meeting of States in 2028.

Making the mechanism multilateral operational

At the SBI meeting, three key areas were examined with the aim of making the multilateral mechanism for sharing benefits arising from DSI operational, the implementation modalities for which were adopted at COP16 in Cali in 2024ⁱⁱⁱ. Following this review, SBI-7 issued a document containing recommendations for COP17^{iv}.

Regarding the '*exploration*' of '*additional modalities*' agreed at COP16, SBI-7 noted significant differences of opinion amongst States. For example, they were unable to agree on how to design additional modalities for contributions to the Cali Fund, particularly regarding the scope of goods and services that might be taken into account. Not explicitly defined by COP16, these '*products and services*' could be those whose design, development or production has benefited from the use of DSI. Another point of uncertainty is whether this would apply only to products directly linked to DSIs, or also to those that benefit from them indirectly. Nor was any agreement reached on the criteria for determining financial contributions to the Cali Fund, particularly regarding the choice of a proportionate mechanism for entities that make limited use of DSIs or are just beginning to do so. This is a significant issue, as multinational companies - which were not directly involved in the SBI-

7 discussions - wish to take this opportunity to call for, amongst other things, a reduction in the level of contributions.

On the subject of tools - notably databases containing DSIs - or possible models for the management of and access to DSIs, SBI-7 considered that there was a common objective to make DSIs ‘ *public and accessible [...] in a transparent and accountable manner* ’. There appears to be a consensus on the use of metadata (information describing a dataset) and on the development of best practices to improve the accessibility, transparency and accountability of databases. An agreement has yet to be reached on the content and characteristics of this metadata, in particular interoperability (communication and exchange of data without access restrictions), the geographical origin of the biological organisms that enabled their identification (essential information for combating biopiracy), information relating to rights and authorisations, and procedures for documenting consent, etc.

A third topic concerned the evaluation of the effectiveness of the multilateral mechanism, including the Cali Fund. In accordance with Decision 16/2 of COP16, this effectiveness is to be assessed at COP18 in 2028. A draft of a complex evaluation method, which has not yet been finalised, was nevertheless published by SBI-7^{[v](#)}.

SBI-7 therefore provided an opportunity to structure the issues to be addressed rather than to provide definitive answers. The SBI thus refers to a potential ‘ *informal session* ’ prior to COP17 to make progress on a number of points.

A Cali Fund that’s just for show?

The aim of the Cali Fund is to collect a portion of the revenue generated by the use of DSIs derived from biological resources found, very often, in the ‘ *Global South* ’^{[vi](#)}, and predominantly exploited by industries in the ‘ *Global North* ’. However, this fund remains largely ignored by these companies, which still contest the terms adopted in 2024 in Cali^{[vii](#)}.

The entities using DSIs, and expected to contribute accordingly to the Cali Fund, are primarily industrial players in the biotechnology, pharmaceutical, agri-food and cosmetics sectors^{[viii](#)}, which meet at least two of the following three criteria:

- \$20 million in assets,
- \$50 million in turnover,
- an average profit of \$5 million over the previous three years.

The level of the proposed contributions – which, it should be noted, are voluntary – is 0.1 per cent of turnover or 1 per cent of profits. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) relating to the Cali Fund was signed in February 2025. One of its main aims is to organise the collection of contributions by the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO) and to ensure their financial management^{[ix](#)}. Whilst this is a necessary arrangement, its binding nature remains in question, as companies have as yet only made two token payments.

SBI-7 therefore makes recommendations aimed at making contributions to the Cali Fund more predictable and at strengthening its operations. In particular, SBI-7 calls on COP17 to ‘ *urge* ’ or ‘ *invite* ’ the Parties, and other governments, relevant organisations and stakeholders, including the private sector, to establish participatory activities and partnerships aimed at encouraging private-sector engagement and contributions to the fund, as well as the sharing of non-monetary benefits.

Not only does this request sound like wishful thinking, but it does not stipulate a minimum level of contribution, nor does it require annual contributions or any other binding provision for the intended contributors. This reluctance is particularly evident in the European Union's position, which welcomes the contributions already made to the Fund. This stance is all the more surprising given that, to date, only two British companies have contributed to the Cali Fund, totalling \$6,000^x... a sum virtually negligible compared with the amounts theoretically recoverable! However, the EU argued that time was needed to test the Fund's arrangements, evaluate them and examine any potential challenges during COP17. The EU adds that it has taken note of the calls for contributions to the Cali Fund and has called for a collective effort to provide it with resources. It has also reiterated its commitment to supporting the effective and transparent implementation of the fund's mechanism.

In a press release dated 12 October, the Council of the European Union set out its position on the Cali Fund and acknowledged that current contributions are insufficient. However, it merely encouraged companies to contribute, without imposing any new binding financial obligations or setting specific targets. At the same time, it adopted a firm stance against the tracking of DSI, for which it wishes to preserve open access for research and innovation. In short, the EU clearly defends the principle of benefit-sharing and the maintenance of open access to DSI, but remains more than cautious and offers only minimal incentives when it comes to actually securing funding for the Cali Fund.

Potential contributions from the private sector to the Cali Fund

A study by the London School of Economics (LSE) published in June 2026 provides estimates of potential revenue and outlines the allocation dynamics of the Cali Fund^{xi}. According to Agata Makowska-Curran, the author of this study, particularly substantial sums could be achieved, regardless of the contribution scenarios. *'In a scenario of full voluntary participation, the annual contributions would amount to 3.6 billion US dollars US, spread across 21,690 companies [spanning 100 countries] eligible companies from seven sectors [those listed in Decision 16/2 of COP16] relying on digital genetic data'*, explains the PhD student. She continues: *'Based on more realistic assumptions regarding voluntary participation, this estimate falls to 929 million dollars, reflecting differences across sectors in terms of reputational risk, the use of genetic data and the willingness to participate in voluntary programmes.'*

In the full participation scenario, the contributions projected by Agata Makowska-Curran's model are heavily concentrated in the pharmaceutical and information services sectors, including 'artificial intelligence' (see Annex 1 to Decision 16/2), which account for approximately 51 per cent of the contributions. In a 'central scenario' scenario, the pharmaceutical sector alone accounts for nearly 49.6 per cent of contributions. The top 100 companies account for 27.6 per cent of contributions in the 'full participation' scenario. The Cali Fund's overall revenue would therefore depend primarily on the participation of pharmaceutical companies. For the other sectors – biotechnology and animal and plant breeding – the annual contributions would be 565 and 391 million dollars respectively (Figure 24, p. 44 of the study).

The study confirms that the effectiveness of the Cali Fund is also subject to structural uncertainty regarding the actual level of contributions. On the one hand, the actual contribution from companies is not guaranteed, as it is currently based on a voluntary system. On the other hand, the rule of '1 per cent of profits / 0.1 per cent of turnover' rule produces different effects depending on companies' profit margins. These rules governing contributions and the allocation criteria may, however, still be subject to revision at COP17. The study also shows that the fund's design choices are not neutral from the perspective of resource allocation. They influence both the level and

stability of expected revenue, as well as its distribution across sectors, companies and beneficiary countries.

COP17 remains significant, despite everything

The SBI-7 meeting made progress on the mechanism for sharing the benefits arising from the use of DSI, but has therefore left several key decisions to be taken at COP17. COP17 will be responsible for taking decisions on a number of issues that have been discussed but not resolved, either at SBI-7 or during various meetings and ‘ *intersessional* ’ held since COP16 in Cali.

On the financial front, COP17 will have to decide on the profile of contributors (particularly in the private sector), the additional arrangements mentioned above, and the rules governing contributions. It will be unable to avoid discussing the effectiveness of the multilateral mechanism – even though it will only have an incomplete methodological proposal at its disposal – particularly the current virtual absence of corporate contributions to the Cali Fund. The governance of the Cali Fund, the drafting of operational documents and the role of the steering committee and the secretariat will also need to be addressed. Other sensitive issues, such as the allocation of resources and determining the origin of the biological organisms that enabled the identification of DSIs, will also be on the agenda.

It should be noted that these issues, which concern the sharing of benefits arising from the use of DSI, extend beyond the scope of the CBD alone, as they also relate to the Tirpaa, which has its own multilateral system for access and benefit-sharing. The extension to DSIs of the obligations arising from the CBD and/or the Tirpaa, including the benefit-sharing mechanisms of the Nagoya Protocol, therefore raises important questions regarding the coordination between international regimes, particularly in the field of plant breeding (but also the BBNJ for marine biodiversity, the WHO for health, etc.^{xii}), where physical genetic resources and genomic data are closely linked.

i Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), [‘Guide to the Cali Fund’](#).

ii Eric Meunier, [‘Multinational companies want the DSIs and the money from the DSIs’](#), *Inf’OGM*, 5 May 2026.

iii CBD, 16th Conference of the Parties, [‘Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on 1 November 2024’ \(Decision 16/02\)](#), 1st November 2024.

iv CBD, 7thth meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI-7), Digital sequencing information on genetic resources, [‘Recommendation adopted by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation on 12 august 2026’](#), 12 August 2026.

v CBD, 7thth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-7), Digital sequencing information on genetic resources, [‘Methodology for reviewing the effectiveness of the multilateral mechanism for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of digital sequencing information on genetic resources, including the Cali Fund’](#), 16 June 2026.

vi The concept of the ‘Global North/Global South’ refers more to a historical and economic structuring of power relations than to a legal categorisation. Countries that can be considered part of the ‘Global North’, with strong technological and scientific capacity, are: the United States, the European Union, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Countries that can be considered part of the ‘Global South’ and are rich in biodiversity include: Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, China, India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Some hybrid countries combine high biodiversity with technological and scientific prowess: China, India, Brazil and South Africa, as well

as the United States.

[vii](#) Denis Meshaka, '[The Cali Fund: one year on, the promise is fading](#)', *Inf'OGM*, 30 April 2026.
Eric Meunier, '[Multinational companies want the DSIs and the money from the DSIs](#)', *Inf'OGM*, 5 May 2026.

[viii](#) According to Decision 16/2, the sectors or sub-sectors likely to benefit directly or indirectly from the use of digital sequencing information on genetic resources include:

- (a) pharmaceuticals;
- (b) nutraceuticals (food and health supplements);
- (c) cosmetics;
- (d) plant and animal breeding;
- (e) biotechnology;
- f) laboratory equipment associated with sequencing and the use of digital sequencing information on genetic resources, including reagents and supplies;
- g) information, scientific and technical services relating to digital sequencing information on genetic resources, including artificial intelligence.

[ix](#) Agreement signed between the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the CBD.

[x](#) Office of the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund, '[The Cali Fund](#)'.

[xi](#) Agata Makowska-Curran, London School of Economics, '[From global biodiversity commitments to local action: revenue potential and allocation dynamics of the Cali Fund](#)', June 2026.

[xii](#) Denis Meshaka, '[The Cali Fund: one year on, the promise is fading](#)' *Inf'OGM*, 30 April 2026.

We need your support!

For over 25 years, Inf'OGM has been producing information – available free of charge to everyone – on the artificial manipulation and appropriation of living organisms (GMOs, NTGs, biotechnology, patents, etc.).

The fact that a large proportion of public funding for the press is monopolised by a handful of media groups reinforces the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few businessmen. This concentration undermines the quality of information and democratic debate, which require a plurality of viewpoints.

In this context, the [alternative press outlets](#) such as Inf'OGM, which receive no advertising revenue and disseminate information free of charge, need you – our readers – to continue to exist! Because, even when freely accessible, information comes at a cost.

Supporting Inf'OGM means working towards reliable, independent information on GMOs, biotechnology and seeds that is accessible to everyone.

[I support Inf'OGM](#)