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GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY PARTNERSHIP CONCEPT NOTE

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

This information document was submitted by the Secretariat in addition to the meeting document “Ecological Connectivity” COP15/Doc.28.2.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY

Partnership Concept Note

I. Why ecological connectivity?

Ecological connectivity is a vital conservation priority. Its importance is reflected in major scientific assessments and global policy commitments, including the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment (2019)[1], the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)[2], the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration[3], the Agreement under the UN Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)[4] and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Ecological connectivity underpins a landscape and seascape approach for achieving the multiple goals of environmental, social, and economic priorities. A sound understanding and set of tools to address ecological connectivity is essential for conservation at broader scales and sustainability of key economic sectors, including agriculture, infrastructure, extractive industries, fishing, shipping, urban development and others that both impact and are supported by well-functioning ecosystems and the services they provide.

A key definition of ecological connectivity adopted under CMS refers to the unimpeded movement of species, connection of habitats without hinderance and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth[5]. Ecological connectivity is essential for migratory species throughout their lifecycles, which rely on specific networks of important habitats, areas between such habitats that connect them, and dynamic and diverse ecosystem processes. Ecological connectivity also plays a major role in addressing effective biodiversity conservation, restoration and climate change adaptation and mitigation across terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems. The interconnections between social and ecological systems are also a critical component of ecological connectivity for instance, for promoting sustainable land use.

Measures to deliver connectivity are crucial at the local, national, transboundary, regional and global levels. In 2021, the UN General Assembly for the first time adopted a resolution on transboundary cooperation that stressed "*the need for international and transboundary cooperation at all appropriate levels…on the enhancement of connectivity between ecosystems and cooperation in order to maintain healthy and intact ecosystems and habitats, which are needed to conserve biodiversity and to ensure that nature can continue to provide ecosystem services to people*"[6]. In 2022, the KMGBF was adopted, recognising the fundamental importance of ecological connectivity for healthy ecosystems and species, including in Target 2 on restoration, Target 3 on area-based measures, and Target 12 on

1 The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment.
2 The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted by CBD COP15 through Decision 15/4: https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf.
3 The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration Strategy: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/31813/ERDStrat.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
4 Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. Certified true copy: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2023/06/20230620%2004-28%20PM/Ch_XXI_10.pdf.
5 CMS Resolution 14.16 on Ecological Connectivity : https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_cop14_res.14.16_ecological-connectivity_e.pdf.
6 UNGA Resolution 75/271 entitled "Nature knows no borders: transboundary cooperation – a key factor for biodiversity conservation, restoration and sustainable use": https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/271.

urban landscapes. In 2023, the BBNJ Agreement was adopted for conservation of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction that includes "ecological connectivity" among the indicative criteria for identifying marine projected areas in the high seas[7].

Transboundary cooperation on connectivity is one effective means for addressing the seascape and landscape approach and the KMGBF targets, through the establishment of transboundary protected and conserved areas, or efforts related to habitats as part of multi-country migration routes. Furthermore, emphasis on ecological connectivity is an innovative way for many multilateral environmental agreements – including CMS, CBD, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – to achieve their individual and joint objectives in a more comprehensive, efficient, and effective manner to stop fragmentation, reverse biodiversity loss, and increase resilience to climate change.

CMS COP14 reaffirmed CMS's strong mandate on ecological connectivity, designating it as a central element of numerous resolutions, decisions, programmes of work, action plans and other instruments. It is also a core element of the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024 – 2032 given its essential role for the conservation of migratory species.

Therefore, significant action is needed to advance and achieve global commitments and national and local priorities for ecological connectivity. While there are numerous efforts already taking place, there is an urgent need to align goals and implementation by filling important gaps in data and technical knowledge, strengthening policy measures and application of tools and scaling up capacity, actions and practical experience.

II. A global partnership

A new **Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity (GPEC)** will enable collaboration through a multistakeholder network of partners that facilitate the capacity, plans and actions needed to maintain, enhance and restore ecological connectivity. It will foster knowledge and information exchange, analyse and fill gaps, develop coherent and effective approaches, provide technical and policy support, identify priorities, and mobilize funding and activities on the ground. It will also help partners in implementing and achieving their respective mandates and activities on ecological connectivity.

7 Annex I, Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. Certified true copy: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2023/06/20230620%2004-28%20PM/Ch_XXI_10.pdf.

This partnership approach is important because work on ecological connectivity is already taking place in many countries, and through the activities of numerous international, national, technical and policy organizations. These include a scientific working group on connectivity under the Convention on Migratory Species; the IUCN Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group under the World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN WCPA-CCSG); the Wildlife Connect Initiative of WWF, IUCN WCPA-CCSG, Center for Large Landscape Conservation (CLLC), and CMS and work by a variety of organizations on planning, zoning, mapping, and conservation. Additionally, IPBES recently agreed to undertake a methodological assessment on the topics of spatial planning and ecological connectivity. Work related to strategic and environmental impact assessments and addressing environmental and social safeguards of financial and development institutions are also directly relevant for ecological connectivity.

The Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity will be a multi-stakeholder partnership that will provide a collaborative network for knowledge and information exchange, analyse and fill gaps, develop coherent and effective approaches, provide technical and policy support, identify priorities and mobilize funding and activities on the ground.

IV. Activities and areas of work

The overarching objective of the Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity is to ensure that connectivity is maintained, enhanced and restored by addressing related challenges, promoting informed actions and decisions based on the best available knowledge, latest science and technology, and improving the effectiveness and coherence of implemented conservation measures. Reaching this goal will encompass a diverse array of activities spanning various areas of work:

- **DATA, RESEARCH and MONITORING**: The partnership will prioritize the integration of scientific data and research to inform effective conservation measures through improved science, mapping, analysis, and measurement of ecological connectivity.

  Effective measures and actions for ecological connectivity need to be grounded in good data. There are significant gaps that need to be addressed related to identification of basic connectivity processes in yet unmapped or under-researched areas, important habitats, terrestrial, inland water and coastal and marine areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and existing and emerging threats. In support, the partnership will provide a platform for building and maintaining a database on connectivity to collect, organize and provide relevant data and promote data sharing. This platform will build on, rather than duplicate, existing efforts such as mapping by the International Coalition on Biodiversity Corridors in Africa, the World Database of Ecological Corridors, and the Global Initiative on Ungulate Migration.

  Advancing more consistent and replicable guidance, methods, and tools will also be supported by the partnership. This will include ongoing monitoring of scientific developments, dissemination and sharing of information, and providing applicable guidance and principles on emerging experience and practice.

  Enhanced monitoring and evaluation is also necessary for measuring progress towards meeting ecological connectivity conservation goals. More application of existing and innovative indicators, metrics, and methodologies, as well as comprehensive management and monitoring plans and practices will be supported by the partnership as key to supporting iterative learning and ongoing adaptive management to enhance effectiveness.

- **POLICY and LEGISLATION:** The partnership aims to support evidence-based decision-making by facilitating the assessment and improvement of policies and legislation. This will enable the development of more targeted policies, laws, and resources for addressing ecological connectivity in line with global targets and national priorities. It will also promote inclusive and effective governance, community participation and stakeholder involvement, including the private sector, and effective policies and management addressing land- and sea-use change.

  It will also seek the further integration of ecological connectivity in relevant global and national policy instruments, including assisting countries to prepare and operationalize National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to achieve the KMGBF and other relevant agreements. Additionally, the partnership will lead engagement in global policy discussions to elevate ecological connectivity as a focal issue to address climate change, desertification, and restoration.

- **UPTAKE and IMPLEMENTATION**: A key objective of the partnership is to promote the effective implementation of connectivity conservation on the ground. This involves promoting and implementing specific projects, initiatives and activities that translate the partnership's strategies and objectives into tangible actions.

  To this end, the partnership will facilitate the operation and development of a wide range of projects aimed at identifying, assessing, prioritizing, planning, and measuring connectivity, including the active design, governance, and management of ecological corridors and networks with considerations emphasized in integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning. It will support the establishment of well-connected protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMS) for structural and functional connectivity. To scale up these efforts, the partnership also intends to generate case studies and models of existing and emerging initiatives, facilitate project funding, and support and streamline access to financial resources for the realization of impactful projects.

  The partnership will engage with key decision-makers and actors to advance capacity and implementation. This includes national and subnational governments, the private sector, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and nongovernmental organizations.

- **AWARENESS RAISING and OUTREACH:** The partnership will engage in raising awareness and disseminating information to increase public understanding of ecological connectivity. This will include building support among a greater diversity of policymakers, the private sector and donors, and encouraging practical and behavioural changes. Such activities will be developing and implementing campaigns, designing and disseminating communication materials such as best practices and success stories, and organising collaborative workshops or other events.

  A dedicated website will be established to organize and convey information related to ecological connectivity and its application and existing gaps, as well as cover the operational aspects and functioning of the partnership. It will be a central hub to ensure easy access to resources, updates and information about the partnership's progress.

V. Phased implementation and Finance

The Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity was launched at the Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP 14), held in Uzbekistan from 12 to 17 February 2024.

The envisioned implementation phases for establishment will be further considered during further consultation and discussion with partners and other entities. Below is an outline of the proposed phased implementation, over a time period of three years:

Phase 1: Assessment, planning and organization

- Assess needs, priorities, existing challenges and gaps in the implementation of ecological connectivity globally, to better identify the areas where the partnership can intervene and target efforts in close consultation with governments, partners and other relevant entities.
- Develop a comprehensive partnership agreement among core partners to set the organizational structure for effective collaboration, and define the partnership modus operandi, assigned responsibilities and objectives.
- Finalize a strategic plan for interventions and activities outlining objectives and areas of work for Phases 2 and 3.

Phase 2: Initial implementation

- Initiate priority activities supported through early funding.
- Mobilize additional resources for implementation, securing funds by engaging with partners, donors and other entities, and exploring grant opportunities to support the various areas of focus.
- Organize meetings, webinars, workshops and other related activities to support awareness and engagement.

Phase 3: Effective operationalization, execution and global impact

- Implement key activities and actions identified within areas of focus.
- Scale up or replicate successful projects, initiatives and activities and assess and integrate lessons learned and refined approaches into ongoing work.
- Continue to identify new opportunities and areas of work for actions and measures.
- Develop a strategy to ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- Elevate the importance of ecological connectivity at global level to the point that it is effectively promoted and integrated into various relevant international policy processes and fora (i.e. UNCCD, UNFCCC, SDGs implementation, UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, BBNJ Agreement, etc.) showcasing an impactful contribution.

VI. Finance

The Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity will seek to mobilize funding to support implementation of priority actions, e.g., mobilizing funding for countries to address ecological connectivity at the national and multi-state levels. A relatively small amount of funding will also be needed to support the coordination and operationalization of the partnership itself. Funding mechanisms that can support the partnership should allow for a multifaceted approach to financial support that includes:

- **Direct funding for the partnership from governments, specific organizations and potentially the private sector.** Direct funding for the partnership will provide a foundation for ongoing strategic and operational activities.
- **Engagement with institutions for project-specific funds.** The partnership will monitor, exchange information and collaborate to mobilize funds and grant opportunities that support specific projects, initiatives.
- **Facilitating access to funds for governments and other actors.** The partnership will facilitate information and access regarding opportunities for governments and stakeholders interested in implementing activities on the ground and can foster connections and help develop proposals to streamline the process of obtaining financial support.
- **Establish a structured financing strategy to ensure long-term financial sustainability.** This could include a dedicated financial mechanism or support through global institutions.
- **Promote private sector conservation investments that advance ecological connectivity across terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems.**

Examples of potential donors and relevant financial institutions include specific environmental funds, international financial institutions, development banks, trusts and foundations, UN entities, governments and private sector entities.

VII. Partners and Governance:

The Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity is proposed to be a global initiative initially comprised of core partners from relevant organizations and institutions that will serve as a coordinating umbrella.

It is envisioned that many other entities can contribute to the objectives of the partnership, e.g., academic or research organizations.

Partners will be categorized based on their roles and contributions:

- **Steering Committee:** Core partners who are leading organizations involved in shaping the strategic directions of the partnership and facilitating the initial and ongoing implementation of its objectives.
- **Collaborative Partners:** Organizations, institutions or initiatives responsible for executing, managing or supporting specific areas of work, contributing to project implementation, shaping policies and sharing knowledge and technical expertise.

Governance: The governance structure of the Partnership will involve:

- **Steering Committee:** Members of the Steering Committee will communicate and meet regularly to decide and oversee the strategic directions and functioning of the partnership.
- **Secretariat / Dedicated Staff:** A small, dedicated secretariat will manage the initiative, possibly working under a core partner. In addition, dedicated staff among all partners will be identified as focal points.
- **Working Groups:** Specialized groups can be established to carry on work on specific thematic areas or projects.
- **Forum/events for all partners:** Online and in-person meetings or events open to all partners and wider participation can be designed to explore additional issues, discuss key points or celebrate success stories.
- **Additional meetings of partners may also be convened.**