

29 October 2010 Last updated at 11:38 GMT

Nature talks heading for success, delegates say

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News, Nagoya

UN talks on a new deal aimed at protecting nature and equitably sharing in its benefits seem to be on course for a positive conclusion.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meeting has seen intensive diplomacy as delegates tried to iron out their remaining differences.

The Japanese hosts in particular have been desperate for a successful end.

Western nations have given ground on the thorniest issue - the equitable sharing of natural genetic resources.

But final resolution has not been reached on other outstanding points, such as how much of the Earth's lands and oceans should be placed under protection.

There is some convergence around the targets of 17% of the planet's land surface by 2020, and 10% of the oceans.

These are regarded by conservation groups as very weak - 13% of land is already protected, while the target for the seas is already 10%.

The other outstanding issue has been money, with Brazil and its allies arguing that by 2020, \$200bn (£125bn) per year should be made available for biodiversity conservation.

A deal has been reached under which developed countries will agree to have a plan to raise such sums in place by 2012, when Brazil will host the second Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.



Delicate coral reefs, rich in different types of marine life, are among the areas most under threat

Guide to biodiversity



Biodiversity is the term used to describe the incredible variety of life that has evolved on our planet over billions of years. So far 1.75m present day species have been recorded, but there maybe as many as 13m in total.

Poor countries have insisted that they cannot be expected to ramp up their own spending on conservation massively given the other demands on their budgets.

"The forest and the other biological resources we have serve the general interests of the global environment," said Johansen Voker from Liberia's Environmental Protection Agency.

"So we expect assistance to be able to effectively conserve our environment for the common good of the world community."

The sums might appear astronomical - particularly when you recall that governments are already committed to raising \$100bn per year for climate change by 2020 - but French Ecology Minister Chantal Jouanno said it was not impossible.

"If you think that to solve the prob of biodiversity only public funds can be sufficient, it's just a dream, because the amounts necessary are so huge," she told BBC News.

"It needs to be private funds too - and not only voluntary private funds but... binding funds [from business]."

"You are making profits from the use of biodiversity; so it's logical and it's legitimate that those profits return to biodiversity."

'More than words'

The genetic resources issue, known as Access and Benefit-sharing (ABS), kept delegates working through Thursday night, with their ministers picking up the baton on Friday morning for an intense round of diplomacy.

The ABS protocol is intended to ensure that developing countries receive recompense when products are made from genetic material of organisms from their territory - known as Access and Benefit-sharing (ABS).

Hugo Schally, EU lead negotiator on the issue, outlined why the wording mattered so much.

"These words are not just words, they mean differences in economic circumstances," he told BBC News.

"What material does this protocol actually apply to? That means in terms of research-based industry, in terms of... economic exchanges - they're literally worth billions of dollars or euros or pounds, or whatever you want."

In essence, developing nations demanded that the agreement cover anything made from this genetic material - technically known as "derivatives" - whereas western nations, where the world's pharmaceutical giants are principally based, wanted a far smaller scope.

After Japan produced a version of text giving the developing world much of what it wanted, the EU and its allies conceded on most of the major points.

EU leaders had told African and Asian countries it was the best deal they could ever hope to get.

If the final loose ends are tied up, Japan looks set to emerge with credit having steered the tough negotiations through its final hours.

"What the Japanese government really wants to do here is to get agreement so they can be proud of the Nagoya CBD," said Wakao Hanaoka, oceans campaigner with Greenpeace Japan.

"What is really needed, since the Japanese government has just started its role of chairing the CBD until 2012, is to keep doing what they have promised to international society."

This meant, he suggested, taking effective conservation in the marine environment - including backing cuts in fisheries for threatened but lucrative fish such as bluefin tuna.