



CITES COP 20

24 November – 5 December 2025

ACBA KEY MESSAGES

CITES COP 20 marks 50 years since the Convention first entered into force in 1975. At its core is the question of how wildlife trade will be managed in the future. This COP needs to focus on declining biodiversity and how this can be balanced with the real economic, development and socio-cultural needs of the African continent. Critically, we must remind ourselves that biodiversity is connected to water availability and quality, health, climate change, food systems and economics. These sectors are all interconnected, yet our solutions often remain siloed.

The Parties will consider 54 proposals that will impact over 200 animal species, either placing them on the Appendices for the first time, changing their listing from one Appendix to another, or clarifying the scope of their listing.

Addressing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and nature's decline is complex and requires a more holistic and coordinated approach. Understanding this complexity is key to making quality decisions at CITES COP 20. Today's solutions will not necessarily solve tomorrow's problems.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Understanding and addressing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and nature's decline are central to achieving sustainable outcomes for both people and nature. Some of the key indirect drivers of biodiversity loss include trade, markets, weak governance, unfit institutions, overconsumption, the separation of people from nature and the dominance over nature. These interconnected underlying causes must therefore be addressed in a coordinated and integrated manner. Breaking down silos and seeking linked solutions is critical. Focusing on a single intervention without considering its cascading effects can easily worsen the situation
2. Sustainable, safe and legal use of biodiversity is an important intervention for African countries because it lies at the core of both local and national economies. This aligns with Target 5 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). It also supports cultural and religious beliefs and sustains livelihoods. Sustainable use strongly reinforces conservation and benefit-sharing, as neither is viable without the other. Decisions that undermine sustainable use should therefore be opposed
3. Listing of species must be informed by context. In southern Africa, declining elephant habitats increase human-wildlife contact and conflict. Further, extreme pressure on remaining habitats due to high elephant densities leads to further degradation. CITES must avoid binary positions regarding species listings or outright trade bans. Context matters and the circumstances of each country must be considered.



4. Governments must ensure transparent, inclusive and accountable governance systems, supported by institutions that are fit for purpose and capable of regulating and enforcing sustainable and legal trade.
5. African governments must avoid accepting new obligations without corresponding financing and clear timelines for technical support. Any commitments by African countries must be matched by predictable, multi-year financing and technology transfer and must include localized funding to frontline communities.
6. CITES decisions are influenced by and implemented within the context of a global economic system that requires reform as it was never designed to serve the interests of developing countries, particularly those in Africa. The CITES convention needs to tackle the barriers to sustainable and legal trade in species that this presents.
7. Sustainable, safe and legal trade in wild species must priorities people-centered solutions that firmly uphold equity, land rights and other human rights. This requires curbing the influence of corporate actors and financial elites while redistributing power to rights holders whose livelihoods and wellbeing depend on sustainable, safe, and legal use of wild species.
8. For efficiency and to avoid siloed approaches and solutions, CITES must strengthen its collaboration with the Rio Conventions.