

Is biodiversity treaty a snag to conservation research?

Aerial view of Peruvian Amazon, taken in 2011. | Photo Credit: [Getty Images/iStockphoto](#)

It's a case of a "cure that kills": an international conservation treaty is hampering conservation research, claim scientists.

In a communication published on June 28 in the journal *Science*, an international team of scientists — including professors at India's Kerala Agricultural University and Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) — say that the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD, of which India is signatory too) is hindering biodiversity research and preventing international collaborations due to regulations that have risen due to its implementation.

The [CBD](#) is aimed at conserving biological diversity, sustainably using biological components and fair and equitable sharing of benefits (with local or indigenous communities) that may arise out of the utilisation of genetic resources. The latter was delineated in the Nagoya Protocol, which came into effect in 2014. But this has generated "unintended consequences" for research; due to national-level legislations instituted by countries under the CBD, obtaining field permits for access to specimens for non-commercial research has become increasingly difficult, write the authors.

Seed Treaty

They suggest that the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture or the "Seed Treaty", which ensures worldwide public accessibility of genetic resources of essential food and fodder, could be used as a model for exchange of biological materials for non-commercial research. Another solution may be to add an explicit treaty or annex in the CBD to promote and facilitate biodiversity research, conservation, and international collaboration, said co-author of the policy critique, Dr. Priyadarsanan Dharma Rajan (ATREE).

More than 170 scientists from 35 countries are co-signatory to the document and Dr. Jeyaraney Kathirithamby, University of Oxford, U.K, who studies tiny insect parasites, is one among them.

"It is almost impossible to collect [specimens for research] in South America now," she wrote in an email. "We bring back material for analysis and have always had a policy for [specimen] vouchers to be placed here and also in the country it was collected. But now it is difficult to get permission."

However, we should not see regulation as restriction, said a source in India's National Biodiversity Authority (which primarily implements provisions of access and benefit sharing of India's biological resources). Under government-approved international collaborative projects, material can be exchanged freely; there are also "facilitative processes" to send specimens for taxonomic identification to other countries, the source added.

India is one of the 196 countries that has committed to the CBD and ratified it in February 1994.

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