

Biodiversity/Bioprospecting

A broad international consensus has developed with respect to the need to protect and sustain biodiversity, defined as “the variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes of which they are part, including diversity within and between species and ecosystems.” Biodiversity is a prerequisite for the traditional medicine that much of the world relies on as well as many pharmaceutical products. Natural resources represent an important source of potential new drugs for patients, hence the preservation of biodiversity is essential in our efforts to cure diseases and save lives. Bioprospecting, or tapping into the vast molecular diversity occurring in nature to help create innovative new medicines, provides a complementary alternative to synthetic approaches to new drug development.

Novartis Position

Biodiversity represents an important source of potential new drugs to Novartis. In our quest to develop new therapies to cure diseases, we maintain a strong commitment not only to biodiversity, but also to basic principles of human rights and social justice. As such, our efforts at using natural sources for obtaining potential drugs or lead substances are conducted only in accordance with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and local regulations.

We accept the CBD provision whereby countries maintain sovereignty over their genetic resources and may limit access to them, and we support sharing the benefits deriving from future products in accordance with the principles of the Convention, while ensuring compliance with intellectual property law. Additionally, in our effort to drive CBD implementation and promote sustainable society development in less developed countries, we share know-how and the latest technologies with our local collaboration partners and help them build capacity, and we fully inform local authorities. Five bioprospecting projects within Novartis are ongoing: two in China (traditional Chinese medicine and strains of rare actinomycetes), one in Panama (plant extracts) and two with commercial suppliers of microorganisms.