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Blog

Fauna, Flora...and Funga: The Case for the Protection of Fungi Under National and International Law

April 27, 2021

Climate Litigation AcceleratorClimate Change

Fungi are the Earth's connective tissue and are crucial for human health and well-being. Yet, they have largely been ignored in international and national environmental law and policy. International negotiations this year provide an opportunity to fix this.

By César Rodríguez-Garavito and Jacqueline Gallant

After a year of postponed meetings and conferences, the international community is back on track and poised to meet several times this year to tackle urgent environmental threats. In May, states will negotiate the Post-2020 Global Framework on Biodiversity, which will guide state biodiversity efforts for years to come. In September, the global community will consider means to strengthen the global food system at the UN Food Systems Summit. And in November, the climate crisis will again be the subject of global consideration at COP26 in Glasgow.

Problem-solving strategies - including those deployed to address environmental threats - aren't fully effective unless they cover all of the key components of the given issue. This much is obvious. And yet, in the past, these types of international governance convenings - international and national environmental law generally - have ignored a crucial player: fungi.

Life on Earth depends on fungi. The vast majority of plants, for example, depend on symbiotic fungi to obtain the nutrients they need and ward off disease; indeed, plants never would have migrated onto land if not for their partnership with fungi. Fungi are also essential for fixing carbon and vital nutrients into the soil, thus providing a service that entire ecosystems depend upon to function. Humans rely on fungi for food, medicines, and spiritual practices. Indeed, many of the transformational advances in healthcare achieved in the past two centuries relied on fungi: penicillin, for example, comes from fungi. Many future advances in medicine - for treating cancers, viruses, and mental illnesses - are similarly likely to come from fungi. Yet despite their utmost importance, fungi are usually ignored in both international and national environmental protections."

Thank you!