



Nature-based Solutions: Opportunities and Challenges for Scaling Up

Summary – October 2022

About this summary

This document summarises a paper produced by UNEP synthesising the current state of knowledge and key actions to translate Nature-based Solutions (NbS) commitments into action. The full report, *Nature-based Solutions: Opportunities and Challenges for Scaling Up* (ISBN: 978-92-807-3966-4), can be found here: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/nature-based-solutions-opportunities-and-challenges-scaling>

Box 1: What are NbS?

In 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) delivered a [multilaterally agreed definition of NbS](#), which states:

“nature-based solutions are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits.”

What are NbS and why are they important?

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) involve working with the natural world to address a range of social, economic and environmental challenges. To understand the concept of NbS, it helps to distinguish three different elements:

- 1) NbS involve working with different types of ecosystems, from forests to wetlands and from farmlands to urban ecosystems.
- 2) NbS work with ecosystems in three main ways: ecosystem conservation, restoration and management.
- 3) NbS are solution-oriented. They address a range of social, economic, and environmental challenges including inequality, unemployment, disaster risk, land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss.

NbS are central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and tackling the three global crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution. They can deliver multiple benefits for people and the environment. Some challenges, such as climate change mitigation, cannot be fully addressed without NbS playing a part. Growing recognition of the value of NbS is reflected in international declarations and initiatives, national strategies and policies, and public sector statements. NbS also increasingly feature in private sector commitments and investments. At the same time, there remain important issues and concerns to address. For example, ensuring that the design and implementation of NbS maintain environmental integrity and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

Turning commitments and expressions of support into action and realizing the full potential of NbS will require:

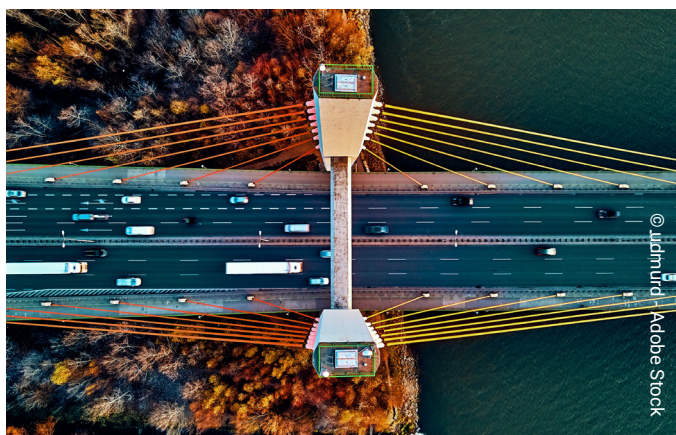
- Developing a common understanding of NbS and the benefits they can bring.
- Fully and transparently addressing concerns and questions about the integrity of NbS.
- Understanding the potential synergies and trade-offs associated with NbS.
- Substantially scaling up deployment and implementation of these solutions.

What can we do to scale up NbS?

There are four main things that need to be done to help address concerns and scale up the use of NbS. These are:

- Build a common understanding of NbS.
- Adopt integrated approaches to implementation.
- Apply appropriate safeguards.
- Strengthen locally-led action.

These four actions should take account of the specific economic, social and environmental context in which they are being applied.



1. Build a common understanding of NbS

The [UNEA definition of NbS](#) is an important first step to building a common understanding of NbS. Other actions that can contribute to this goal include:

- Actively support and participate in the intergovernmental consultations on NbS requested by the UNEA resolution on NbS.
- Strengthen cross-sectoral and stakeholder engagement on NbS at the national level.
- Share knowledge and understanding of best practice for NbS. Some examples of platforms that help to do this are found in Box 2.

Box 2: Examples of tools and platforms for NbS

[OPPLA](#), an EU repository that brings together information on natural capital, ecosystem services and NbS.

[PANORAMA – Solutions for a Healthy Planet](#), an online platform of examples of “replicable solutions” across a range of conservation and sustainable development topics, now comprising more than 1,100 solutions.

[Nature-based Solutions Initiative website](#) shares information from “an interdisciplinary programme of research, education and policy advice” to help “enhance understanding of the potential of Nature-based Solutions to address multiple global challenges and support their sustainable implementation worldwide”.

[EbA Tools Navigator](#), an interactive database that provides information on more than 200 tools to support EbA planning and implementation.

UNEP’s [NbS Contributions Platform](#), set up to share inputs received following a global call for contributions to the Nature-based Solutions workstream for the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019.

[NetworkNature](#), a European Commission funded “resource for the nature-based solutions community” that aims to increase cooperation at various levels for greater NbS impact and reach.

2. Adopt integrated approaches to scale up NbS, combining policy, finance, and safeguard measures

Significant scaling up of NbS will require an integrated approach, in which NbS are embedded in policies with concrete targets, backed up by appropriate financial resources, and compliant with social and environmental safeguards and standards. To adopt integrated actions to scale up NbS, capacity building and action is required, including:

- Embedding NbS in a range of policies and programmes across sectors, including detailed targets and actions.
- Linking policies for NbS to financing strategies that secure and increase the funding available for NbS.
- Better integrating NbS into public budgets and facilitating the flow of private finance into NbS with appropriate policies and instruments.

3. Apply appropriate safeguards, standards, and guidelines for NbS

An important element in an integrated approach to scaling up NbS are measures to ensure that rights are respected, that NbS do not have unwanted social and environmental consequences and that they are sustainable over the long-term. There are different ways to achieve these aims, but currently most attention has been paid to the use of safeguards and standards (Box 3).

Box 3: What are safeguards and standards?

Safeguards are principles or measures that aim to protect someone or something from harm or damage. In the context of NbS, safeguards aim to prevent negative environmental, socio-economic and governance impacts and promote positive ones. Standards outline the requirements needed to meet a certain level of quality or achievement and can serve as a basis for assessing compliance or quality. Some of the key safeguarding issues for NbS include ensuring that the rights of IPLCs (including to land and natural resources) are respected, that people of all genders participate in the process and that all stakeholders have access to relevant information.

There are growing calls for safeguards and standards to guide NbS design and implementation. For example, the recent [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) mentions the need to ensure social and environmental safeguards in relation to natural climate sinks and reservoirs. The [UNEA resolution on NbS](#) specifically calls for the respect of social and environmental safeguards in line with the three “Rio conventions”, including safeguards for IPLCs. Recommendations for improving the application of safeguards, standards and guidelines for NbS include:

- Consistent and thorough application of safeguards and standards for NbS interventions, regardless of the source of financing.
- A comprehensive review of the standards and safeguards available.
- Robust monitoring of social and environmental outcomes.



*The Principles for locally-led Adaptation were proposed by the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) and developed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) through a consultative process. For more information, please visit https://files.wri.org/d8/s3fs-public/locally-led-adaptation-accelerating-action-and-support_0.pdf

4. Enable locally-led actions on NbS

In addition to developing integrated approaches linking policy, finance, technical advances and safeguards at international and national levels, the scaling up of NbS can also be facilitated at the local level. Local participation and knowledge are important for designing and delivering effective NbS. Evidence, particularly in the climate adaptation arena, shows that community-led actions are key to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of projects. For example, the Principles for locally-led Adaptation* are designed to empower local people and build their capacities for climate resilience. However, according to [research by the International Institute for Environment and Development \(IIED\)](#), less than 10% of global climate finance targets local action. It is even rarer for investments that reach this level to actually be “locally-led”. To enable local communities to effectively replicate and implement NbS, more straightforward access to funding and feasible timeframes for funding delivery are needed. Realizing the potential of locally-led NbS will require leadership by and co-design with IPLCs as well as finance and capacity building that specifically targets the local level. Specific steps to enable locally-led actions on NbS include:



- Recognize and protect rights to land, resources and decision-making.
- Establish and expand financial mechanisms to support locally-led NbS actions.
- Roll out targeted capacity building and support networks for locally-led NbS.

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