The Role of Agriculture in the Post-2020 GBF

Upscaling Nature-based Solutions (NBS) in agriculture can contribute to preserving this natural capital and maintain productive soils, farms and landscapes.

This brief highlights areas of significant convergence between the agriculture and conservation sectors, relevant to current international negotiations. It identifies where appropriate targets and indicators can contribute to land health and to increased alignment of agriculture and conservation within the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF).

Sustainably managed agricultural lands can make a major contribution to conserving 30% of the planet’s land area by 2030 (Target 3: “30 x 30”)

Progress towards sustainable agriculture (Target 10) must be measured against trends in areas under agroecological, regenerative and other recognised nature-positive approaches

Farmers and food system actors should be rewarded for their contributions to achieving these biodiversity targets

Build convergence

IPBES global assessments and the IPCC special report on land have highlighted agriculture as one of the most important drivers of biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation. On the other hand, agriculture closely depends on nature for climate regulation, fertile soil, clean water, pollination, pest control, and many other services. Preserving these services will be critical to feed a future population of 10 billion people in 2050 and ensure adequate nutrition for 780 million people that are currently food insecure.

Forty percent of all land is currently used by agriculture globally. IUCN observes that in many countries there are significant areas within agriculture landscape that could be recognised as Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and contribute to achieving the 30 x 30 target.

Greater effort should be placed on identifying and recognising the important conservation values of these areas in sites that meet the definition of OECMs. This will enable their protection, and avoid their being converted into unsustainable production systems.
Progress towards sustainable agriculture (Target 10) must be measured against trends in areas under agroecological, regenerative and other recognised nature-positive approaches

Aiming for agroecological and regenerative farming systems sets a higher ambition than "sustainable agriculture" in terms of the efficient use of inputs, reduced pollution and diversified and nutritious diets.

The post-2020 GBF should contain targets and indicators relevant for different UN Rio Conventions and inspiring to mainstream agriculture actors. These indicators may include land cover, land productivity, carbon stocks, resilience of production systems (e.g. against drought or floods), improved input use, livestock and mixed systems management.

Farmers and food system actors should be rewarded for their contributions to achieving these biodiversity targets

The post-2020 GBF must be an opportunity to encourage national dialogues on sustainability policies in agriculture, to incentivise the adoption of NBS by farmers and monitor their impact on land health. National cross-sectoral dialogues, with farmers at the centre, will be critical to build mutual understanding and trust and define national roadmaps with specific targets, policies and monitoring systems.

For further information, download the IUCN 2020 report Common Ground: restoring land health for sustainable agriculture (IUCN, 2020)

IUCN’s TOOLS

IUCN is developing a Land Health Index to monitor the positive outcomes of agroecological approaches in agricultural landscapes. This index builds on indicators defined at soil, farm, landscape and national levels.

IUCN is also developing an Agriculture Project Design and Assessment Tool, inspired by the IUCN global standard for Nature-based Solutions, which will guide agriculture actors in upscaling NBS.

Additional Information

IUCN Common ground report
Common ground | IUCN Library System

Sustainable Agriculture and Land Health Initiative: https://www.iucn.org/about/senior-management/director-general/iucn-strategic-initiatives/sustainable-agriculture-and-land-health-initiative

IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions: https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.08.en

Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) metric: iucn.org/resources/conservation-tools/species-threat-abatement-and-restoration-star-metric