ENSURING EFFECTIVE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

- Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are actions to **address societal challenges** through the protection, sustainable management and restoration of ecosystems, benefiting both biodiversity and human well-being.
- Until now, there has been **no agreed framework or standard** as to what constitutes an effective NbS.
- **Misunderstanding and misuse** of NbS have led to applications that cause harm to biodiversity and communities and threaten to erode stakeholders’ trust in the approach.
- The **IUCN Global Standard for NbS** is a tool to help governments, communities, business and NGOs implement strong, effective NbS projects that are ambitious in scale and sustainable, prevent misuse and safeguard people and planet.

**What is the issue?**

Nature-based Solutions are actions addressing key societal challenges through the protection, sustainable management and restoration of both natural and modified ecosystems, benefiting both biodiversity and human well-being. NbS have significant, but currently underutilised potential to help address global challenges such as climate change, human health, food and water security, natural disasters and biodiversity loss. An IUCN report found that NbS projects were not large enough in scale, that the NbS approach was insufficiently integrated into policy, and that more collaborative NbS projects were needed for increased efficiency (Cohen-Shacham, 2019).

If delivered appropriately, NbS can significantly contribute to addressing multiple societal challenges. For example, NbS have the potential to supply up to 37% of our climate change mitigation needs (Griscom et al., 2017). They can also reduce the negative effects of the climate crisis on people and nature by decreasing the impact of disasters and providing resilience to communities. Mangroves alone, if healthy and sustainably managed, could reduce annual flooding for more than 18 million people globally (Beck et al., 2018), averting flood damage totalling up to US$ 57 billion in China, India, Mexico, US and Viet Nam each year (Reguero et al., 2018). NbS can also help address biodiversity loss, for example through forest landscape restoration.

Governments, communities, business and NGOs are increasingly embracing the NbS approach. For instance, two-thirds of the governments supporting the Paris Agreement included NbS actions in their national climate plans.

However, until now, there has been a lack of clear parameters defining NbS and a common framework. Such a framework is essential in order to increase the scale and impact of the NbS approach, to prevent unanticipated negative outcomes or misuse, and help funding agencies, policy makers and other stakeholders assess the effectiveness of interventions.

**Why is this important?**

Increased demand and use of NbS has led to cases of misuse of the NbS concept, where even good intentions can result in harm to nature and people. In the worst-case scenarios, misuse runs the risk of damaging biodiversity, eroding the nature that we depend upon for services such as clean water and food.
For example, a tree-planting climate mitigation project using just one non-native species could create poor soils, ultimately degrading biodiversity and making it more costly or impossible to sustain the forest in the future. Similarly, restoring a mangrove forest to reduce the risk of storm damage could be doomed from the start if upstream and downstream processes are not considered. Lack of consideration of water use can lead to restored ecosystems using too much water, creating pressure on local communities. Failure to take into account social and economic factors has meant that even seemingly successful pilot applications of NbS have ultimately not been sustainable outside of the timeframe of a project.

Implementers of NbS can use the Global Standard, its user guide and self-assessment tool to consistently design effective NbS projects that are ambitious in scale and sustainability, creating a shared language for stakeholders and facilitating innovative partnerships. Donors and financers can invest in NbS with the Global Standard as a benchmark minimising risks and providing increased security. All user groups across the public and private sectors can also further engage with the governance structure of the Global Standard, which connects stakeholders worldwide and ensures via feedback that the Global Standard is used for its full potential to mainstream NbS.

With involvement across sectors, the Standard will enable Nature-based Solutions to be implemented worldwide, contributing their full potential to addressing societal challenges.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, visit the IUCN NbS Standard webpage, and consult the following references: