



Cities Commit to Climate and Nature

Cities are home to over 55% of the world's population and continue to expand. Urban consumption, production and lifestyles place increasing pressure on ecosystems, contributing to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. Home to 80% of global GDP, cities are responsible for 70% of CO₂ emissions and 75% of natural resource consumption. However, when planned well with ambitious sustainability policies, cities can reduce their impacts, meet human needs more efficiently and find synergies between urban development, climate action and nature conservation.

The climate crisis affects people and nature worldwide: from droughts, fires, flooding and heat waves caused by extreme weather to coral reef destruction due to ocean acidification. Impacts will worsen as global temperatures continue to rise. Climate change and biodiversity loss especially impact vulnerable urban populations, many who live in informal settlements. Ensuring cities are resilient is essential. Cities are places of challenge and change, but also places where new ideas emerge and take root, including a more integrated understanding of how cities are part of a natural landscape. One method to integrate nature within cities and peri-urban areas surrounding cities is the concept of nature-based solutions (NbS) to achieve human and ecological benefits, synergistically improving wellbeing and biodiversity.

Urban Nature-based Solutions at the Heart of Cities

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) define NbS as “actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human wellbeing and biodiversity benefits.” According to WWF, NbS should be designed to address clear societal challenges identified with and for beneficiaries: food security, climate change, water security, human health, disaster risk, natural and economic development, whilst protecting nature through monitoring of robust indicators.

NbS at the landscape level can play a significant role in a nation's climate mitigation and adaptation policies, enabling the enhancement of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to ratchet up climate ambition to stay well below 1.5 °C of global warming. In cities, NbS can support sustainable urban development, climate targets and efforts to protect urban biodiversity. NbS improve urban resilience and livability because integrating nature into cities improves health and wellbeing, reduces extreme weather impacts, mitigates the urban heat island effect, filters air, recharges water and provides multiple job opportunities, including low skilled jobs and planning professionals. Urban and peri-urban NbS have shown their efficiency and effectiveness in cities around the world, in developed and developing countries, in mega-cities and small towns, in agricultural, forestry and coastal zones.

WWF Asks

Local Governments to:

- Underscore in policy and planning the need for a landscape-level vision involving a diverse portfolio of NbS actors and actions, including urban actors when cities are integrated within a landscape.
- Balance economic return-on-investment with broader societal benefits, such as health and air quality, climate adaptation and mitigation, job creation and livelihoods, water access and security, food system resilience and biodiversity conservation, to understand the full value of investing in NbS.
- Recognize nature's multiple benefits for sustainable urban policy, planning and management (e.g. education, health, climate action, employment and environmental conservation) including by:
 - raising [awareness of nature's values](#), including by building school curricula and working with local communities to develop and manage NbS, while ensuring [equitable access](#) to urban green spaces, especially in marginalized communities, including local jobs to maintain NbS;
 - encouraging [green infrastructure plans](#) that deliver multiple benefits, including on climate resilience, for example by establishing a [connected network](#) of socio-ecological corridors in and around a city to protect and restore ecosystem health and support community integration, or creating sustainably-managed protected areas to conserve natural heritage;

- adopting planning and building codes that mitigate urban heat using natural cooling solutions (e.g. via green roofs, permeable pavements, street trees);
- discouraging urban sprawl, and its high demands on natural resources and land use in urban and peri-urban areas, while being mindful to not overly [densify urban areas of high biodiversity value](#);
- adopting [mobility solutions](#) that prioritize walking, cycling and public transport to free land for urban nature, facilitating local economic growth and quality of life in greener communities;
- encouraging sustainable urban and peri-urban food systems that support agricultural practices that restore soil health, enhance biodiversity and contribute to sustainable jobs and livelihoods.
- Support and sign global and regional initiatives and guidance on best practice, such as: the [Singapore Cities' Biodiversity Index](#) to evaluate and monitor biodiversity and support the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework implementation; the [CitiesWithNature](#) platform for cities to share urban nature actions and commitments; [C40's Nature Declaration](#), the [Edinburgh Declaration](#) and the [Leaders' Pledge for Nature](#) to demonstrate commitment to achieve the vision of [Living in Harmony with Nature by 2050](#) to reverse biodiversity loss and adopt science-based targets on climate and nature.

National and Regional Governments to:

- Recognize local governments' unique role and capacities, empowering them to act through appropriate legal frameworks, capacity and sufficient funding to foster the rollout of urban NbS.
- Support local dialogue, networking and capacity building, while including local governments in national decision-making on climate change and biodiversity target setting and delivery.
- Develop or incorporate data gathering methodologies and develop tools to mainstream urban NbS, including by learning from leading cities and setting best practice standards and connect urban NbS tools to similar tools to address climate change.
- Adopt the [Singapore Index on Cities' Biodiversity](#) or like standard to evaluate and monitor local biodiversity efforts implement the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
- Recognize areas conserved by [indigenous people and local communities](#), encouraging local government collaboration as appropriate, and include innovative management techniques with [environmental and social safeguards](#) in national conservation goals to ensure integrated and inclusive natural area management.
- Recognize urban nature's role in NDCs, National Adaptation Plans and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans in global climate and biodiversity commitments.

International Institutions to:

- Create structures that assist local governments to access public, private and blended finance, and assist them in developing fundable projects, and creating [conditions and scalable financial instruments](#) that work for NbS investment and maintenance.
- Encourage the use of integrated tools, such as [spatial finance](#), to provide investors with accurate information and a holistic, long-term value of local green and sustainable infrastructure projects.
- Foster project upscaling by identifying revenue streams for potential investors and highlighting [bankable solutions](#) with positive financial returns for communities and investors.
- Promote a green, just and integrated recovery to tackle the public health, climate, nature and economic crisis by building back better with nature and ensuring those spaces are accessible to all.
- Support research on [NbS benefits in cities](#) and local communities, including for urban resilience.

WWF Cities

WWF Cities is an area of collective action and innovation within WWF's Global Climate & Energy Practice, engaging local governments and urban stakeholders to support climate action and its linkages to nature conservation. Our flagship, the One Planet City Challenge (OPCC) was created in 2011 to highlight the power of cities to advance international climate and sustainability agendas, with over 650 cities participating to date. The OPCC supports cities to align to 1.5 °C while fostering co-benefits, including on nature conservation, urban food systems, and on equitable and healthier cities.

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