



Mainstreaming Urban Nature-Based Solutions

Create Intermediaries

Efforts to mainstream nature-based solutions face challenges in coordinating action across siloed government departments and dispersed authority for governing urban land and infrastructure. Establishing intermediaries that work within and across public and private bodies can enhance coordination between government departments and serve as platforms for innovation. Intermediaries reduce the risks for actors who are not accustomed to working with nature-based solutions, create clarity over responsibilities, and facilitate opportunities for capacity building. The Building Agenda (Bouwagenda) programme in the Netherlands is experimenting with an ‘unburdening’ arrangement to reduce the costs that homeowners face in pursuing sustainability measures. In this model, an intermediary coordinates between energy suppliers, project developers, and funders to offer sustainability solutions sold through a single contact point..



To enhance coordination between departments that deliver on the city’s climate change plans, including those working on environment, planning, mobility, and infrastructure, Barcelona established an **urban ecology municipal directorate** to develop city-wide policies and projects on urban sustainability. The directorate enhances exchange of critical information, for example databases from the Institute of Informatics. In this context, Barcelona is experimenting with ‘superblocks’ where roads are replaced with green infrastructure, playgrounds and benches, bike lanes, and bus networks, which has enhanced the city’s mobility structure. Although the project is not without resistance, the approach shows how an intermediary body can increase investment in urban nature.



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Promising Pathways for Sustainability Goals



Climate Change

With the race to reach 'net zero' targets and build back resilience, nature-based solutions are increasingly seen as a critical tool for responding to climate change. Whether by cooling cities and reducing energy demand or providing new ways of managing flooding, nature-based solutions are gaining support globally. We identify four pathways through which mainstreaming is taking place: recognising their potential as a climate solution; investing to reduce climate risk; integrating climate action with other sustainability goals; and learning through practical experience on the ground.

Biodiversity

As the world seeks to develop a transformative agenda for biodiversity over the next decade, we explore how mainstreaming nature-based solutions can enable cities to conserve, restore and thrive with nature. Four pathways are identified based on regulating for 'no net loss' of biodiversity, developing co-governance arrangements for public-private finance, integrating biodiversity with existing sustainability priorities, and integrating biodiversity into urban development and the built environment.

Social Inclusion

Nature-based solutions such as new parks, rooftop gardens, and tree-lined streets play an important role in improving wellbeing and enhancing community spaces. However, the potential for gentrification and displacement of lower income groups means that these solutions must actively foster social inclusion and tackle inequalities. We identify three pathways that strengthen social inclusion: broadening community participation, securing genuine political commitment and policies that support social inclusion, and pursuing social inclusion measures as a way of achieving health and wellbeing.

Economic Regeneration

Nature-based solutions can create economic regeneration through increasing economic activity and employment and by improving the quality of life. Nature-based solutions both directly contribute to economic vitality and well-being, and leverage new forms of economic activity in cities that generate opportunities. Mainstreaming for economic regeneration takes place through developing partnerships for investment, increasing our knowledge of their economic value, seizing opportunities emerging from other sustainability initiatives, and stimulating market demand for nature-based solutions.

Sustainable Development Goals

To achieve the SDGs, urban development must prepare for growing populations while also creating sustainable and inclusive cities. Nature-based solutions can address a range of sustainability goals from climate resilience to health to economic development. For example, green space provides cooling, reduces pollutants, and encourages physical activity. Pathways that engage urban nature-based solutions to address SDGs include: involving diverse actors, strengthening local engagement, addressing multiple sustainability objectives simultaneously, establishing institutional arrangements that integrate sustainable development, and monitoring and assessing sustainable urban transformation.