



Mainstreaming Urban Nature-Based Solutions

Work with investment cycles

Integrating nature-based solutions into building developments and renovations expands the functionality of that infrastructure and reduces costs by drawing on existing budgets. One approach is to identify strategic partners for large green infrastructure projects, as Rooftop Revolution in the Netherlands did with housing corporations planning roof renovations. Roofing firms may also opt to work with homeowners associations to increase the scale of the green roof investment. Water utilities provide a similar opportunity in the UK, where there is increased investment in sustainable drainage systems and flexibility in the financing of infrastructure investments. Public infrastructure providers can require greening or water management in agreements with developers. The Swedish Transport Administration developed guidelines that articulate the integration of ecosystem services into transportation investments.



Municipal investment in urban infrastructure in Sweden offers a substantial opportunity for synergies and cost savings through multi-functional infrastructure that delivers on climate adaptation, mitigation, and ecosystem services. The government articulated that urban greenery and ecosystem services must be integrated into the planning, building and administration of Swedish cities by 2025. Significant investment in transportation, public housing, culture, and recreation flows through local governments, supported by revenue from taxes. Green streetscapes can be pursued through transportation budgets, for example, rather than environmental protection budgets. Overcoming the perceived conflict between policies that promote dense urban infrastructure and policies on urban greening will help unlock public infrastructure investment for nature-based solutions.



Mainstreaming Nature Based Solutions

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.