



Mainstreaming Urban Nature-Based Solutions

Target areas of low land value

Certain forms of nature-based solutions, such as those integrated with streets and buildings and small (or 'pocket') parks, are suited to urban space with lower land value. Local governments often have limited capacity to develop green-blue infrastructure and can face difficulties in finding, creating, and funding nature-based solutions, which are often dependent on subsidies and partnerships. Since nature-based solutions often compete with other land uses that offer a higher monetary return, targeting areas of low land value can be cost effective. For example, nature-based solutions can be integrated in the city as 'green' attached to 'grey' buildings and infrastructure, to facilitate a lower land use opportunity cost. In low-income areas of densely populated cities, in particular, small vacant lots and other plots of land that face less competition from other uses can be an opportunity to greatly expand access to urban nature.



In Hamburg, steep competition for plots of land due to private ownership or land earmarked for housing development creates a challenge for new green areas. The growing density of the city fuelled a strategy of expanding green roofs, and identifying alternative locations for urban nature. Building on biodiversity offsetting regulation that has been mandatory in Germany since the 1970s, Hamburg developed an accounting system for urban nature that incentivises real estate developers to create or enhance natural areas in other parts of the city. While hampered by implementation delays and offsets sometimes landing at the city outskirts, competition for urban space has driven a focus on quality over quantity of urban nature, for example maintaining urban parks.



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.