

Overcoming the governance challenges of taking NbS to scale

Key messages from NbS Digital Dialogues Panel 6

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[You can watch the recording of the session on YouTube.](#)

SUMMARY

1. NbS should be incorporated into and aligned across national policies, such as Nationally Determined Contributions and COVID-recovery plans, as well as international policies such as the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework.
2. We need international coalitions of parties willing to commit to ambitious NbS targets; ambition should be prioritised over involvement of the maximum number of parties.
3. Communication and collaboration at all levels must be enhanced to scale up NbS governance – this includes between public and private sectors, stakeholders and decision makers, practitioners and the private sector, government sectors, and between local, national and international levels of governance.
4. We need to value natural ecosystems for their existence and quality, not simply the services they provide. This should include national censuses of the condition of natural assets and monitoring how they change over time.
5. We must prioritise areas for NbS implementation based on the state of natural assets, the ecosystem services they can provide, and the effects of such implementation on local communities.
6. NbS targets and policies must be informed by science as well as local and indigenous knowledge, and must meet social and environmental safeguards.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has exposed the lack of resilience of our governance systems and made the need for change clearer than ever. As the climate and biodiversity crises progress, we are at a critical juncture where the choices we make now will shape the choices that are available to us for the future. Nature-based solutions will play an important role in addressing the challenges society currently faces, and governments are increasingly looking to incorporate them into policies for COVID recovery, as well as for meeting other social, environmental and economic goals. It is therefore a crucial time for the NbS community to help inform how NbS can be effectively governed and scaled up. In this session we compared the successes and challenges of NbS governance across three countries - Bangladesh, Peru, and the UK - and drew together key action points for improving NbS governance internationally.



KEY MESSAGES

1. International agreements and action

- NbS provide an opportunity to link the goals of the UNFCCC and CBD. Whilst NbS are already a central part of the climate change agenda at COP26, they have yet to be integrated into the biodiversity agenda at COP15. Yet, NbS can simultaneously provide benefits for the climate and biodiversity; understanding this synergy makes NbS an attractive proposition for decision makers.
- The UNFCCC and CBD have failed to generate progress at the speed or scale needed to address the climate and biodiversity crises. One reason for this is the intrinsic difficulty of achieving ambitious agreements between all countries in the UN. Attempting to forge strong agreements between all parties could stall progress further. Therefore, two actions are suggested:
 - Implementation of NbS should be between coalitions of the willing; we don't have time to wait until everyone is on board.
 - We should create coalitions for action, rather than focusing on agreements.
- Inclusion of NbS in the heart of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) can facilitate synergies between the CBD and UNFCCC:
 - Incorporating NbS in NDCs can provide benefits for all government sectors.
 - A multi-level approach to designing NDCs can help each sector (e.g. Energy, agriculture, environment) achieve their own priorities through NbS.
- In order to scale up NbS, they need to be integrated into the legislation of major economic decisions, especially in post-COVID recovery.

2. National policy frameworks to enable NbS

- National policy can help to promote implementation of sustainable NbS. For example, in England, new legislation is being introduced post-Brexit, which should create a better enabling policy environment for NbS:

Environment Bill:

- Biodiversity Net-gain law - this requires damage to biodiversity caused by development projects to be 'offset' by recreating a net gain of biodiversity in that type of habitat within the local area, or purchasing credits to create biodiverse habitat elsewhere.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be established to map the value of habitat in a given area, map proposals for creating or improving habitats, and agree priorities for nature's recovery.

Agricultural Bill:

- Includes the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS): this will shift publicly funded subsidies from activities damaging nature to those that benefit nature, such as nature restoration and nature-friendly farming.
- Innovative incentives for behavioural change can promote a nature-positive recovery
 - E.g. applying a charge to water utilities that is proportional to the area of hard surface within a property area can internalise the cost of impermeable surfaces leading to drain overflow; this encourages water customers to increase vegetation cover and install sustainable urban drainage systems on their land.
 - This demonstrates that the right policy environment can provide opportunity for co-funding and blended finance.
- Many countries have declared a climate emergency, but some have declared a planetary emergency, which recognises both the climate and biodiversity crises. In Bangladesh:
 - This means that tackling both of these crises is a priority for the government, making NbS more attractive since they address multiple challenges simultaneously.
 - The national government is on board with implementing NbS at scale, so they require clear options ready for funding and implementation.

- A national NbS network has been formed, comprising over 100 academics, NGOs and researchers from a variety of sectors, and representatives from local communities. The NbS network aims to provide the information the government needs to implement successful sustainable NbS.

3. Achieving cooperation between groups

The drivers of climate change and biodiversity loss act across borders and the consequences affect all of us. Hence, to address these collective problems, we need effective cooperation between nations and groups of stakeholders and decision makers.

There are some exceptional examples of international cooperation:

- Greta Thunberg sparked the Fridays for Future movement, which has gained participants in every country. This shows the power of (social) media for mobilising action, and the response to the movement has demonstrated the power of youth action. The NbS community could learn from this movement, to combine voices from across the globe.
- Mandates from international climate change agreements facilitated the formation of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (<https://unfccc.int/LCIPP-FWG>) which helps bring the traditional knowledge and the views of local and indigenous communities to the table in international climate meetings.

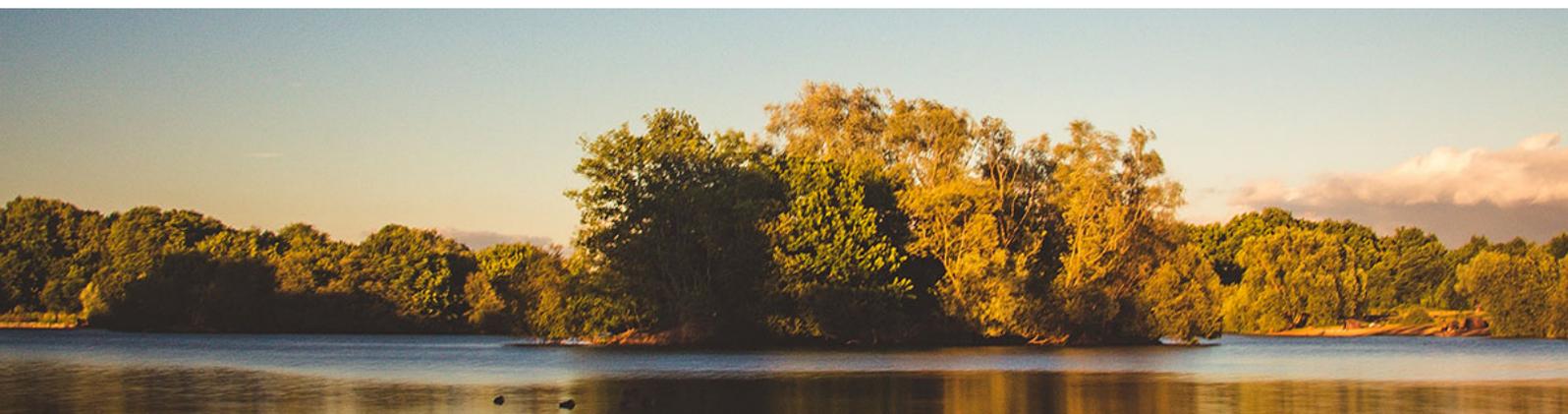
Global solidarity between the groups practicing NbS will be a force to be reckoned with. How can we bring together the necessary stakeholders, including local communities working on NbS, as well as the forestry, fishing and agriculture sectors?

- We need frameworks that enable:
 - Conversations between different groups of stakeholders and decision makers.
 - Inclusion of a representative diversity of stakeholders during NbS planning.
 - Integration of NbS management between international, national and local levels.
- We need to go beyond localised projects:
 - Without a step-change in approach, localised projects will not add up to meet the scale of the challenges we face.

- We need cooperation between the public and private sectors:
 - These sectors are inextricably linked, and for NbS to be taken to scale, we need to have both the incentives and knowledge to implement successful NbS.
 - The public and private sectors are open to guidance - the ball is now in the NbS community's court to demonstrate in a practical, tangible sense of what successful, sustainable NbS are, and how to implement them. This is especially needed in countries where the NbS concept and/or terminology has come into use recently.
- We need to create platforms for dialogues between different types of stakeholders:
 - Cooperation between government sectors: NbS are relevant for all government sectors; the key to creating synergistic actions and policies between sectors is to have a space for them to communicate amongst themselves. This will enable them to use NbS to meet their own objectives, whilst collaborating with other sectors to meet national climate and biodiversity targets.
 - Cooperation between NbS practitioners and the private sector: as companies realise that their assets are dependent on the state of the climate and biosphere, and are hence increasingly at risk, they have motivation to shift to investing in NbS. To do this, they need to be able to work with groups which have the knowledge and means to implement successful NbS.
- Conferences provide a platform for interaction between the scientific and decision-making communities
 - It is imperative that scientists present information in a manner such that decision makers can transform this information into action; this requires decision makers communicating to scientists what information they need, and scientists to act on this information and use language and framings which are relevant to decision makers.
 - E.g. The Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) Climate Adaptation Summit on 25th January 2021, is an upcoming conference where NbS will be a major topic - this is an opportunity to embed NbS into national planning, leading to action.

4. Valuing natural ecosystems

- Natural capital is the stock of renewable and non-renewable natural resources (i.e. natural assets) that combine to yield a flow of benefits for people.
- Measuring the value of natural assets is vital for the governance of NbS, as it allows us to track progress and measure their success. Therefore, how we measure natural capital is also a key management decision.
- The way we currently measure natural capital is not fit for purpose:
 - Natural capital is currently measured by the value of services derived from natural ecosystems, following the UN's System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) international standard, which drastically under-values natural capital.
 - As natural assets become increasingly scarce, their relative value increases, despite being further degraded (due to anthropogenic processes such as pollution, GHG emissions and habitat destruction).
- By not valuing nature in its own right, we are not accounting for the deterioration in condition of natural assets. As ecosystems are degraded, the ecosystem services they deliver are eroded, and so, perversely, their value as measured by the SEEA standard decreases.
 - Instead, we need a census of natural assets and their conditions, so we can monitor the change in condition and stock of these assets over time.
 - This would help inform allocation of resources for NbS, highlighting which ecosystems need to be managed and which can be left to their own devices.
- We need to focus on the natural assets and what it costs to protect and preserve them, not just the value of ecosystem services, which is context-dependent (depending on local priorities and social values).



NbS in COVID-19 recovery strategies

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted how failing to preserve Earth's ecosystems can lead to catastrophic consequences globally. However, the realisation that our governance and economic systems are vulnerable to the consequences of the climate and biodiversity crises means that policymakers are increasingly open to alternative governance models

- The NbS community must be ready with rigorously planned options for the sustainable use of nature, to be taken up when there is political will.
- "Only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around." - Milton Friedman. Hence, we need to ensure suitable ideas are 'lying around'.

NbS offer a paradigm shift from conservation to scale up action towards addressing social and environmental goals together. But to increase uptake of NbS into policy, we need to:

- Demonstrate to decision makers what NbS are in a practical sense.
- Bring awareness to the benefits of nature in our daily lives.

With coordinated action within the NbS community, we can use the opportunity of partial economic restructuring after the pandemic, and the upcoming COP15 & 26, to lock NbS into long-term government planning.

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