

Enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions through Nature-Based Solutions and Resource Efficiency

“Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement remain our only option for a durable recovery.”

UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen

COVID-19 presents challenges to achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Recovery from the pandemic requires rethinking the way in which we generate wealth, and shifting our relationship with nature. Nature-based solutions are an innovative way of minimizing fallout from the crisis; and ecosystem services are critical to preventing future economic impacts from climate change and future pandemics. There are many opportunities to restore and repair ecological infrastructure. Research shows that for every dollar spent on nature restoration, at least US\$9 of economic benefits can be expected (Strategy of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration).

COVID-19, Nationally Determined Contributions and Nature-Based Solutions

NDCs are at the heart of the Paris Agreement and embody efforts by each country to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. COVID-19 has disrupted the process of countries enhancing their NDCs and submitting more ambitious contributions on the road to the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26), now postponed to 2021. Recovery plans from the pandemic, however, offer opportunities for climate action on energy and resource efficiency.

Energy and resource efficiency can help us produce using less raw material and water and contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Nature-based solutions provide benefits for communities to recover from COVID-19.

They support more resilient and sustainable societies and economies in the long term. *Green infrastructure*—forests, wetlands, and mangroves for example—can perform better and at lower cost than *grey infrastructure* for services like flood management, water purification and storage and irrigation. Finally, energy, resource efficiency and nature-based solutions can support and create jobs, especially in rural and vulnerable communities.

Nature offers 33 per cent of the solution to climate change as it has the potential to deliver 12GT of mitigation. Putting nature into the recovery also offers *shovel-ready* solutions, as employment schemes such as the [National Rural Employment Guarantee Act](#) in India and the Civilian Conservation Corps in the United States in the 1930s have demonstrated.

The UN Climate Action Summit in 2019 brought unprecedented political attention to nature-based solutions to address climate change, with more than 70 countries endorsing a manifesto on these solutions. A global, multi-sectoral movement is taking shape. Within the nature-based solutions agenda, forests are the most advanced. Climate action and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires robust, fit-for-purpose institutional mechanisms to ensure that policies, technologies and finance come together to deliver climate and development outcomes. UN-REDD—the largest UN inter-agency climate programme working with more than 60 countries—is well positioned to support increased ambition and implementation.

UNEP's Response

UNEP can identify and provide guidance on economic sectors with the highest potential for resource efficiency, climate mitigation and adaptation, and how to harness climate benefits from nature-based solutions and use resources more efficiently to help countries transition to greener, more inclusive economies. UNEP is also working to develop a strong signal on finance and investment to enable countries to meet their climate commitments. We are coordinating with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) on the Climate Promise initiative as follows:

- a. **Country-level engagement on the climate and COVID-19:** Identifying a sub-set of countries to strengthen and accelerate UNEP/UNDP support. This would include higher emitters with ongoing work by UNEP/UNDP on energy, adaptation and resilience, and the [Partnership for Action on Green Economy](#). Potential countries include: Argentina, Indonesia, South Africa, Ghana, Thailand, and India. Work with [UN-REDD](#) is also ongoing to enhance NDCs through forests in another 20 countries. The engagement would contribute to the outcomes of the climate strategy developed by EOSG.
 - **UNEP can help countries target high carbon and resource intensive sectors** using the [SCP Hotspots Analysis Tool](#) in recovery plans that are job-rich and connect across climate, nature and resource efficiency, including buildings and construction; tourism; food and agriculture systems; and forests restoration. This includes analyses to help countries visualize recovery pathways that drive towards meeting NDCs and the 2030 agenda.
- b. **Strengthening political advocacy and engagement on climate and COVID-19:** This could include high-level government engagement to emphasize that investing in climate action is a smart response to COVID-19 and that NDCs can be a blueprint for recovery. We could explore how this could feed into socio-economic assessments.
 - **UNEP and partners such as UNDP will develop and demonstrate co-benefits** of nature-based solutions commonly employed for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and assemble evidence to help quantify their magnitude.

- c. **Addressing the decline in ecosystem services:** Climate change creates additional stresses on land, exacerbating existing risks to livelihoods, biodiversity, human and ecosystem health, infrastructure, and food systems. Investments should thus connect the biodiversity and climate agendas early on in the planning cycle. It also requires that nature-based solutions, the restoration agenda, and biodiversity safeguards for climate action are part of NDCs.
 - **Working with investors and Ministries of Finance to shift investments towards nature based and climate neutral strategies**, including global platforms such as the [Net Zero Asset Alliance](#) and the [Green Fiscal Policy Network](#), offering training on green fiscal policy options, and repurposing fossil fuel and agricultural subsidies to help create fiscal space to deal with debt and finance recovery plans.
 - **UNEP is forging a movement to support countries on nature-based solutions** to scale up ambition, action and participation in the next 18 months, across the key climate and nature related milestones in 2020-2021 (UNGA/Biodiversity Summit, IUCN Congress, UNEA-5, CBD COP15, UNFCCC COP26, etc.). It will continue to amplify ambitions and actions in 2021 and beyond. The magnitude of the crisis demands speed, scale and flexibility. It will also involve working with international actors (UN and others) to create agents of change at the country level.

Way Forward

UNEP is committed to using its expertise, global platforms and networks to support countries in meeting their climate commitments, using COVID-19 response packages to invest in nature-based solutions and resource efficiency.

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