



IUCN NATURE-BASED RECOVERY INITIATIVE

Background

March 2021



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OVERVIEW

IUCN NATURE-BASED RECOVERY INITIATIVE

Biodiversity, the variety of living nature that sustains life on Earth, is declining at rates never experienced before in human history. The planet has been suffering record temperatures affecting ecosystems and the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. Natural catastrophes are becoming more frequent and more intense with overwhelming effects on human lives and high economic costs. Adding to all these, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused more than two and a half million deaths around the world (March 2021), compromised health care systems and brought nations to a halt, but has also destroyed economies and jobs, has exacerbated poverty and ultimately evidenced our broken relationship with nature.

Governments have already taken strong measures to cushion the impacts of the pandemic, amounting to an astounding \$16.7 trillion globally according to recent estimates. It is expected that much more will be further invested in pandemic recovery packages over the next years. The current situation thus represents an enormous opportunity and a critical need to direct recovery investments towards societies that do not rely on a relentless demand and use of natural resources such as fossil-fuels for growth, but which gradually but steadily, build back better and greener.



OUR AMBITION



The decisions that will be taken now regarding how the world will recover from the current pandemic will impact our future for decades to come. We must do everything in our reach to shift our societies, economies, production and consumption patterns to a development model that invests and also integrates nature at its core and thus ensures a sustainable future for all.

Nevertheless, initial analyses demonstrate that so far, the balance between spending which is concretely directed to nature (green investments) and other investments is not favourable in terms of the support towards positive environmental outcomes. For example, the economic response from G20 countries to the COVID-19 crisis seems to be set to reinforce negative environmental trends rather than to use economic stimulus to enhance nature and tackle environmental degradation and climate change.

By capitalizing on IUCN's strengths and engaging with our Members over the course of 2021, IUCN will advocate for recovery investments to be effectively directed to nature and nature-based solutions.



Photo: Satellite Earth Art / Getty

Concretely, IUCN's ambition through this initiative is twofold:

PREVENT HARM



Photo: Photography by Mangiwau / Getty

Economic investment post-COVID does no (additional) harm to nature and livelihoods

INVEST IN NATURE



Photo: Cavale 1738 / unsplash

At least, 10% of overall recovery investment is directed to nature and also provides value to nature

A UNION OF MEMBERS



**STATE AND
GOVERNMENT
AGENCY
MEMBERS**



**NGO AND
INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES'
ORGANISATION
MEMBERS**

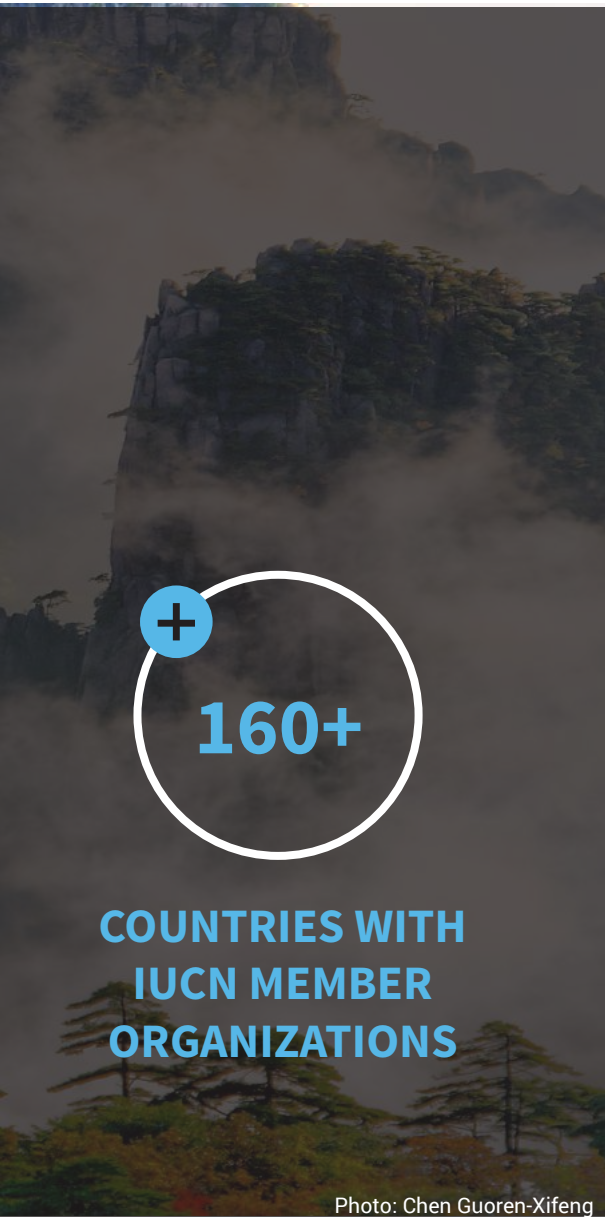


**EXPERTS
IN SIX
COMMISSIONS**

70 YEARS OF VISION AND IMPACT



IUCN works with governments, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations and international organizations, academia, companies, researchers around the world to ensure that policy decisions taken are informed by the best science, knowledge, and experience. IUCN supports the development of laws, policy and best-practice that foster sustainable



+

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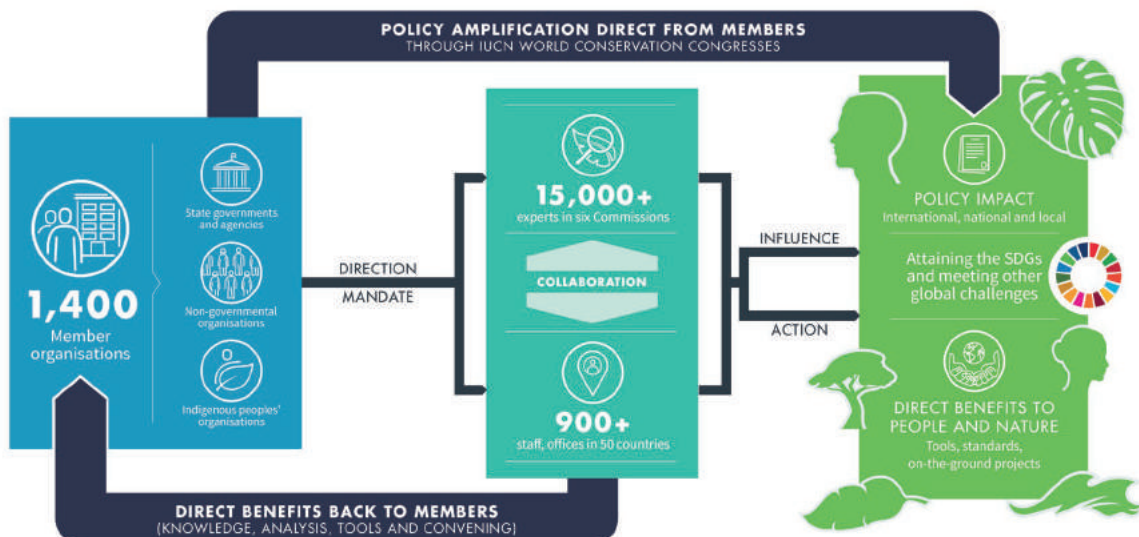
COUNTRIES WITH IUCN MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Photo: Chen Guoren-Xifeng

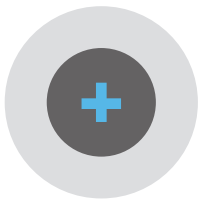
development and contribute to human well-being and improved livelihoods. The Union is a leading provider of biodiversity knowledge, tools and standards used to influence policy and guide action on the ground.

IUCN's Membership - with governments, non-governmental organizations and indigenous peoples' organizations sitting side-by-side - facilitates engagement with various actors at all levels of society. IUCN's distributed Secretariat and six expert [Commissions](#) are undoubtedly an additional, trusted asset when it gets to a broad scope of relevant thematic, technical and scientific expertise both at the local and field level as well as at the global and regional policy levels.

The eleven IUCN operational regions, represented by the IUCN Regional Offices, constitute not only a key entry point to liaise and work with our Members and Commission experts in each of the regions, but will also be called upon to contribute to this initiative with their ample knowledge and practical experience in the implementation of projects on the ground.

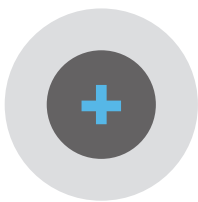


REINFORCING THE CASE FOR NATURE



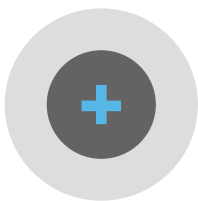
ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND STABILITY

Jobs and economic gains
Avoided losses



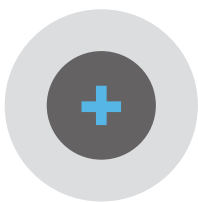
COMMUNITY HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

Reduced vulnerability
Improved health
Increased food and water security



CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY BENEFITS

Carbon sinks and stores
Climate adaptation
Healthy, recovering ecosystems



BUILD THE FOUNDATION FOR REACHING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Ecosystem services maintained
Enhanced opportunities
New connections and integration

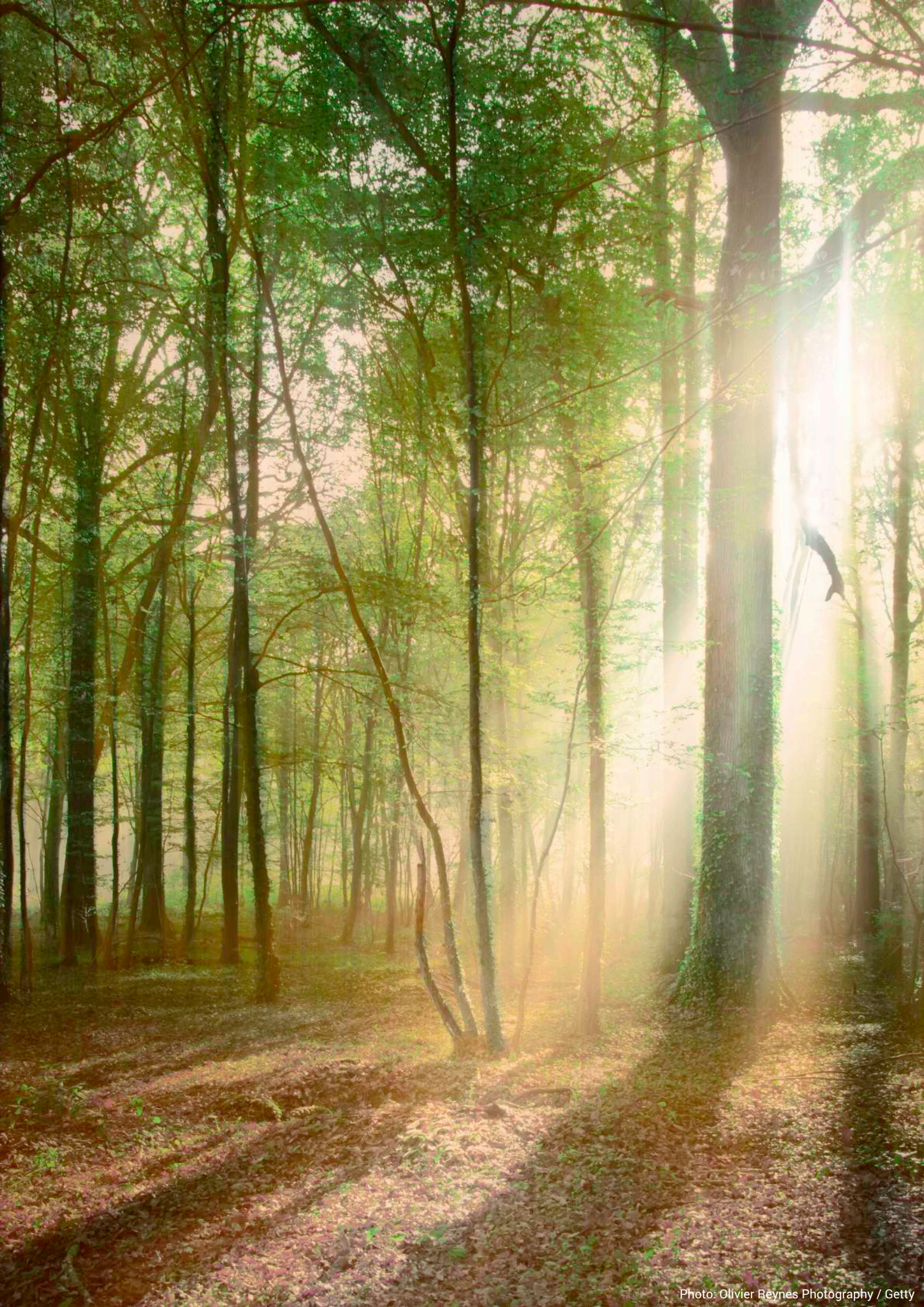




Photo: © Jean van der Meer

STATUS AND ROLE OF NATURE IN RECOVERY PACKAGES

Governments have rightly put people first and focused on the immediate implications of the COVID-19 crisis – providing daily allowances to keep families and communities afloat and helping health care workers on the frontline. Specifically, they have sought to secure employment, provide cash benefits to workers, households and the unemployed, and supply liquidity to businesses across the economy.

Many governments have included green recovery measures in their crisis recovery packages – for example through grants, loans and tax reliefs directed towards green transport, circular economy and clean energy research, development and deployment. They also include new funding and programmes to create jobs and stimulate economic activity through ecosystem restoration, ecotourism, and forest conservation for example.

However, we know from deeper analyses of these stimulus plans that biodiversity and much of nature have been forgotten. Most of the foreseen investments only focus on reducing carbon emissions, which is particularly dangerous when the crisis of biodiversity loss is so closely intertwined with the climate change crisis, and when ignoring one means that we risk failing to solve both.

We also know that recovery investments can simultaneously address the COVID-19 crisis – by improving public health, job security and fiscal stability – and also enhance environmental sustainability by investing in nature and Nature-based Solutions at scale.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR RECOVERY



IUCN defines [nature-based solutions](#) (NbS) as “actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.”

If delivered appropriately, NbS can significantly contribute to addressing multiple societal challenges. Investment in NbS that helps safeguard and maintain ecosystems is vital for food and water supplies, protects against natural disasters and provides goods and services key to human well-being and economic development.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS OFFER SMART AND COST- EFFECTIVE INVESTMENTS

TO MEET URGENT GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Nature-based Solutions have the potential to provide up to 37% of the climate change mitigation needed by 2030 to stabilize warming to below 2 °C ¹. They can also reduce the negative effects of the climate crisis on people and nature by decreasing the impact of disasters and providing resilience to communities. Mangroves alone, if healthy and sustainably managed, could reduce annual flooding for more than 18 million people globally² averting flood damage totalling up to US\$ 57 billion in China, India, Mexico, US and Viet Nam each year ³. NbS can also contribute to tackle biodiversity loss, for example through forest landscape restoration.



There are numerous additional examples that point out at how NbS are effective and their application has resulted in concrete benefits. IUCN has documented several case studies⁴, including:

⊕ In Senegal the world's largest mangrove reforestation project led investors to generate half a million tonnes of carbon offsets over its 30-year lifetime. In addition, the delta now protects arable land from salt contamination, rice paddies are restored, and fish stocks replenished by up to 18,000 additional tonnes per year.

⊕ In greater Manchester, an estimated £150million/year is saved in healthcare costs related to improved mental health and physical benefits thanks to nature-based solutions such as access to green spaces and tree planting activities.

⊕ Under the Bonn Challenge, governments and businesses aim to restore 350 million hectares of deforested and degraded landscapes with the potential to generate US\$ 9 trillion in ecosystem services through improved soils, increased freshwater flows, and other benefits.

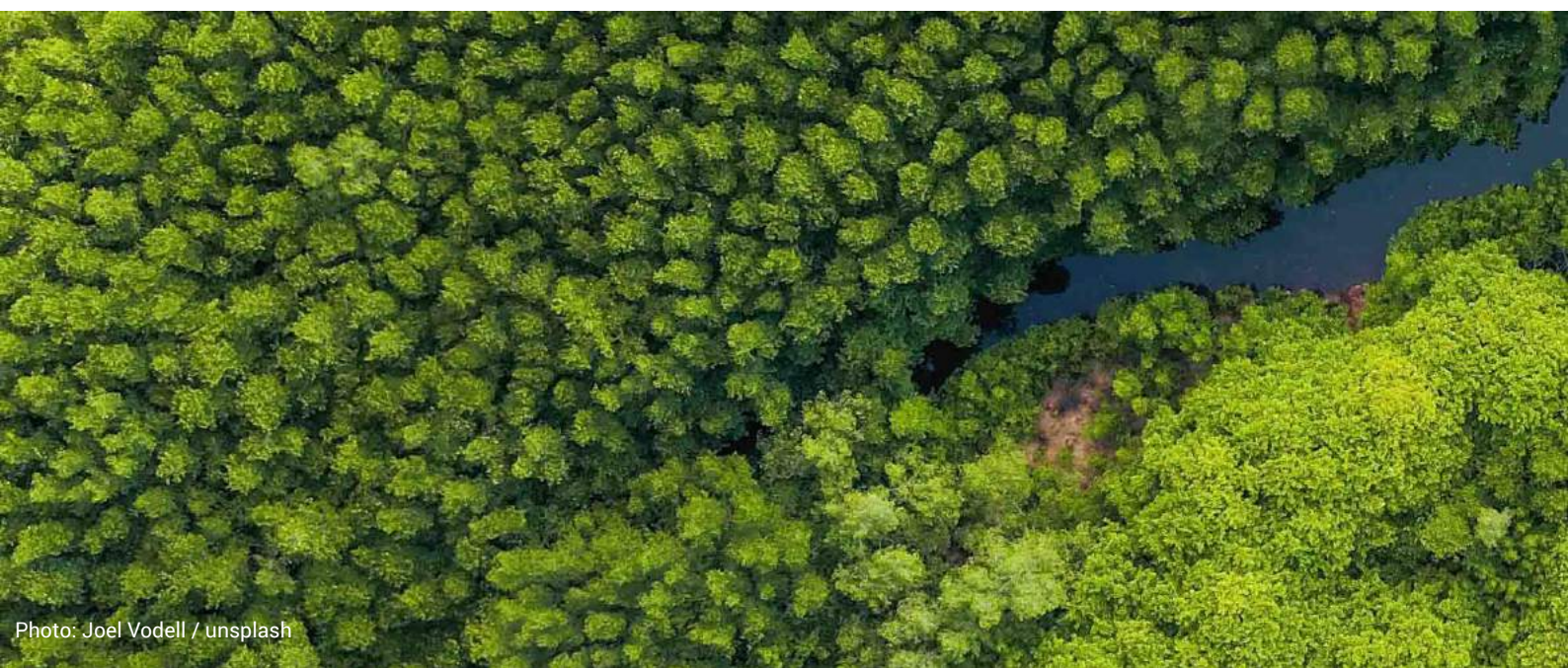
⊕ The Great Green Wall initiative⁵ aims to restore 100 million hectares of land along the southernmost border of the Sahara Desert and stop the Sahara Desert advancement thus providing food security for 20 million people, creating 350,000 jobs and sequestering 250 million tonnes of carbon by 2030. Between 2007 and 2018, approximately 18 million hectares of land were restored, more than 350,000 jobs were created, and around US\$90 million were generated through the initiative's activities.

INVESTMENTS IN NbS, INCLUDING PROTECTING AND RESTORING PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS (PCAS), CAN FOSTER LONG- TERM HEALTH, ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND BIODIVERSITY BENEFITS, AS WELL AS PROMOTE JOB CREATION

Well-managed protected areas can advance social development agendas, including fair employment, sustainable food production and safe drinking water access. Importantly, a comprehensive and effective network of PCAs supports efforts to maintain ecosystem services and facilitate NbS. IUCN's priorities are centred on a dramatic increase in the area and effectiveness of protected and conserved areas on land, sea and freshwater. These areas should be located

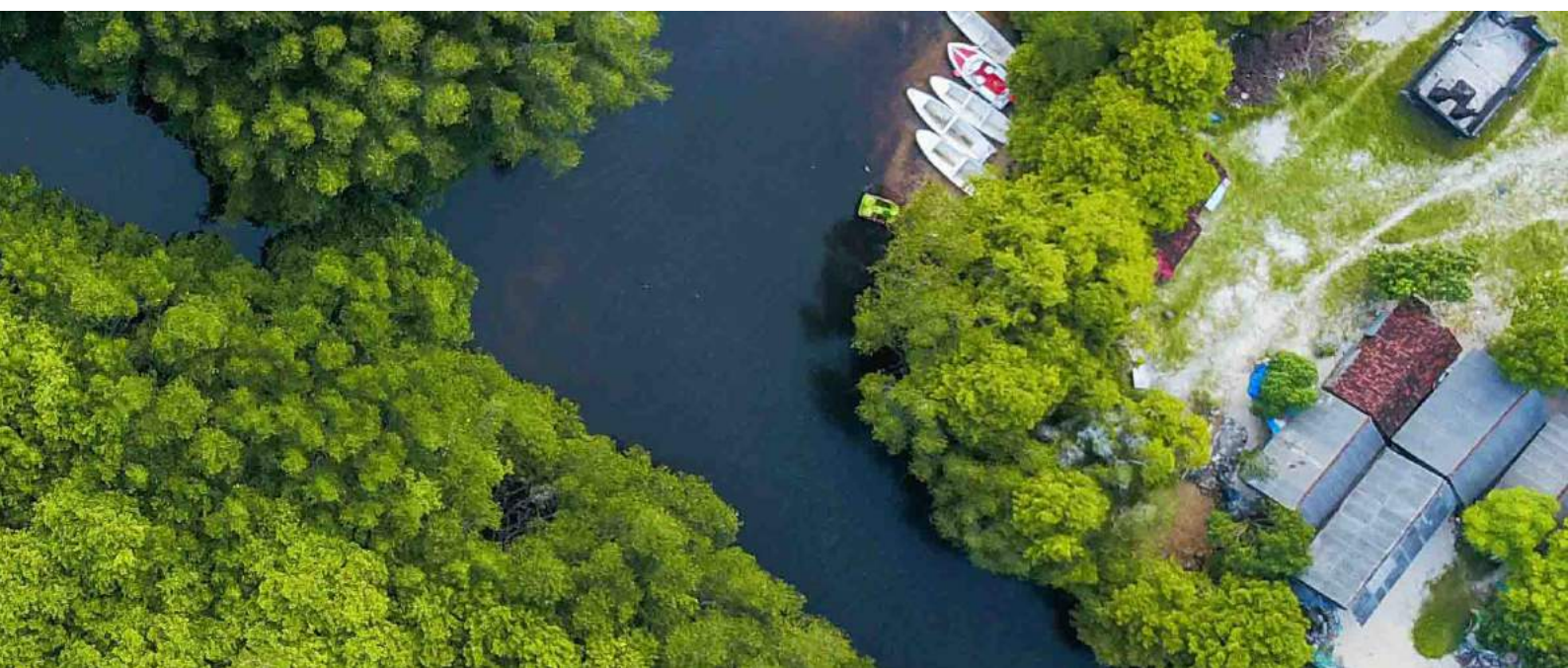
in areas of importance for biodiversity, such as Key Biodiversity Areas, and areas where there are critical ecosystem services such as an overlap between carbon density and high biodiversity values. [The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#), the [Red List of Ecosystems](#), the [World Database on Protected Areas](#), and the [World Database on Key Biodiversity Areas](#) provide essential tools to guide conservation investments for a green, nature-based recovery.

IUCN has observed that increased demand for NbS has led to cases of misuse of the concept, and that even good intentions can result in harm to nature and people. For example, a tree-planting project using just one non-native species could result in poor soil biodiversity, ultimately making it more costly or impossible to sustain a diverse forest in the future. Failure to consider social and economic factors has meant that even seemingly successful pilot applications of NbS have ultimately



not been sustainable. Worse, weak or mislabelled NbS projects can water down the case for the NbS approach – de-incentivising its use, eroding public confidence and misdirecting efforts.

The [IUCN Global Standard for NbS](#) launched in July 2020 is proposed to facilitate, incentivise and enable users to implement strong NbS projects. It provides clear parameters for defining NbS and a common framework to help benchmark progress. Such a framework is essential to increase the scale and impact of the NbS approach, prevent unanticipated negative outcomes or misuse, and help funding agencies, policy makers and other stakeholders assess the effectiveness of interventions. Alongside other tools mentioned above, the IUCN NbS Standard will support efforts in anchoring nature investments in recovery plans and beyond.



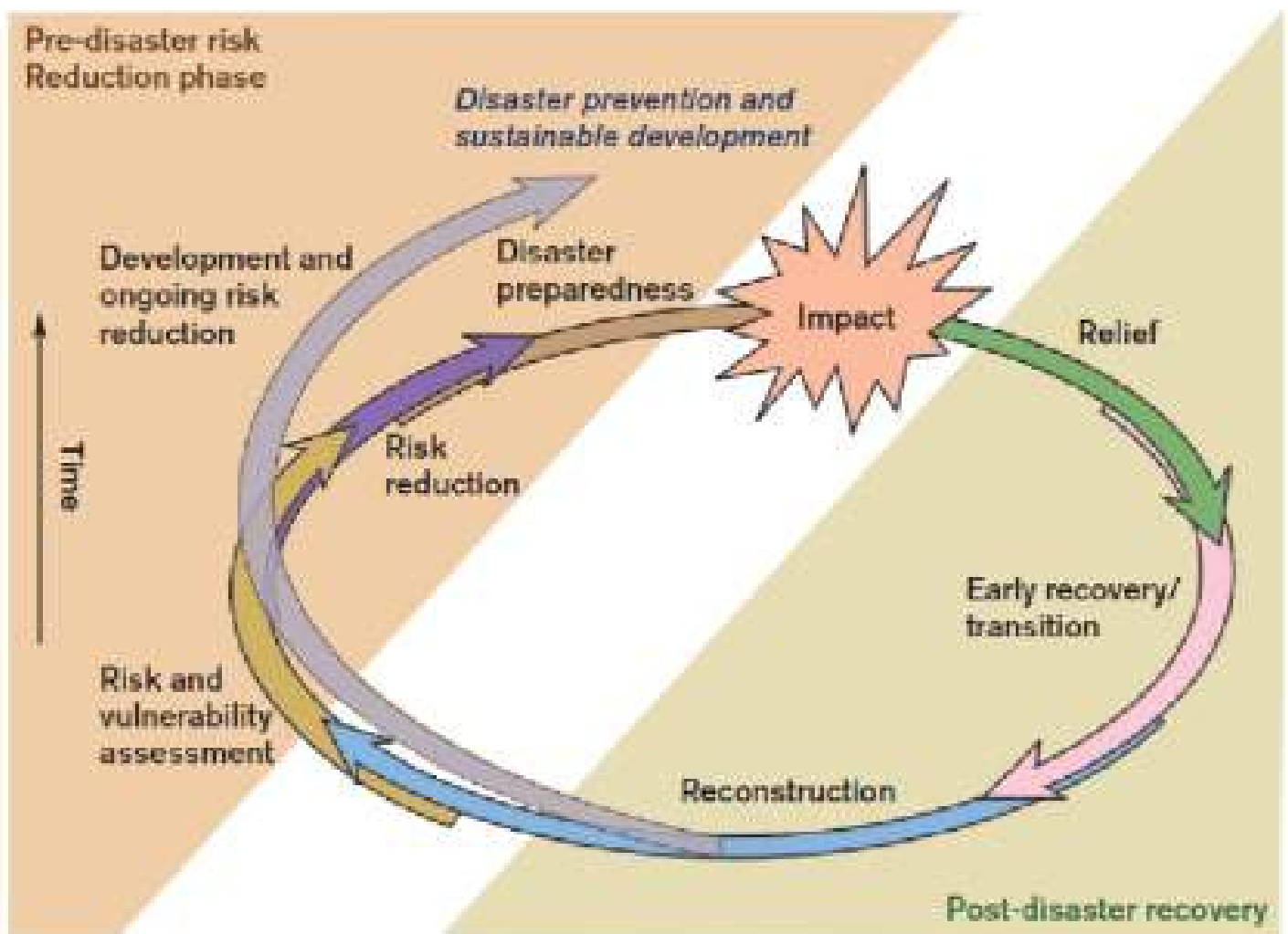


NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS – THE OPPORTUNITY OF A CRISIS

NbS can support all stages of the crisis management cycle using the disaster risk management spiral for elaboration (RICS 2009; Figure). The theory is that if countries are doing effective disaster risk reduction (DRR), the loss and damage from each disaster reduces every time, which enables them to 'break out' of the event cycle and progress and spiral upwards towards disaster prevention and consequently sustainable development. This is the model used to promote



risk reduction measures as opposed to a continuous cycle of moving from one disaster (impact) to relief, recovery, reconstruction and back to another disaster or impact. Similarly, with COVID-19 – countries can be supported into sustainability transition by using NbS for response and relief, recovery, reforms and eventually green growth. NbS help address multiple challenges and are available in the near term.



INVEST IN NATURE-BASED RECOVERY



Photo: IUCN

IN A NUTSHELL

Throughout 2021, IUCN will be working alongside Members and partners to analyse a range of measures that stimulate economic activity, conserve nature and foster sustainable development. Guided by tools such as the IUCN Nature-based Solutions standard, this catalogue of nature-positive interventions, shall support the adoption and application of pandemic recovery measures that ensure a greener more sustainable future.

WE KNOW:

- + The economic impacts of the pandemic have been severe, with implications expected to continue over the next several years.
- + Almost all countries worldwide are

forecast to produce a lower level of output in 2020-24 than was predicted before the pandemic.

- + Economic losses due to the pandemic vary considerably across the globe.
- + While impacts vary across countries and sectors, unemployment has soared in developed and developing countries alike.
- + Global fiscal support to stimulate and recover economy reached \$14.8 trillion by December 2020. The passing of the U. S's \$1.9 trillion stimulus package raises the global total to \$16.7 trillion.

- + Stimulus packages involve a broad range of measures, including two main categories; budgetary spending and liquidity support. Health-sector spending as part of budgetary support is another common area.



+ As nature continues to deteriorate, society at large, including businesses, progressively runs more risk (risk which is not only reputational and legal – as more consumers and governments become aware of and act on nature loss, but also operational and financial – as direct inputs disappear and ecosystem services, on which businesses depend, stop functioning).⁶

WE WILL FURTHER EXPLORE:

+ Nature and biodiversity have been mostly neglected in stimulus packages, why is that and how can we change this?

+ The most relevant category for increasing the role of nature in recovery packages is in the non-health sector-related additional spending or forgone revenues; opportunities to re-direct other measures are limited.

+ Investments in nature and NbS as part of a “nature-based recovery” can positively influence economic recovery, including via job creation.

+ NbS typically create low-skill and fast-implementing jobs - Planting trees or restoring floodplains are labour-intensive tasks that are well suited to the public employment programs frequently contained within stimulus packages.

+ Investing in actions such as restoration does not only have the potential to generate both short-and longer-term jobs, but it can also generate additional benefits, such as financial and environmental benefits.

+ Debt relief and restructuring are high on the agenda and they offer opportunities to add considerations for nature conservation, especially in developing countries.

TIMELINE

KEY ENTRY POINTS FOR NATURE-BASED RECOVERY

Mar-Apr
2021

May-J
2021

Understanding NbS & recovery



Assessing financial investments



Engaging with Members & donors



*Most dates TBC

There are numerous opportunities for advancing nature-based recovery in 2021. These include IUCN meetings in preparation for and including the IUCN World Conservation Congress, G7 and G20 high-level political meetings, events that will influence global financial priorities and others addressing major global environmental governance processes linked to biodiversity and climate.



CONTACT

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 4. [About](#) - Nature-based Solutions | IUCN
 5. <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative>
 6. World Economic Forum, [Global Risks Report](#), 2021