

High-Level Political Forum 2026

UN Headquarters, New York, 6 – 15 JULY 2026

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), will convene in July at the UN in New York under the theme “Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for a sustainable future for all.” IUCN will focus its engagement on three of the SDGs 6, 7 and 11, that will be under review this year: SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy and SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities

Key messages



SYNERGIES

Taking place ahead of the three Rio COPs in 2026 there should be a coherent commitment to continue to build concrete operational linkages across the Rio Conventions, promoting and strengthening relationships with other conventions as well as with Agenda 2030, and international organisations, institutions and agencies.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



NATURE POSITIVE ENERGY TRANSITION

For SDG7, the HLPF should provide a clear pathway for a nature positive and just transition to sustainable energy systems ensuring that all energy solutions deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity and are shaped through meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and all stakeholders.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



WATER GOVERNANCE

HLPF and the review of SDG6 is a key stepping stone to the UN Water Conference and should send a strong political message on a broad commitment to an intergovernmental process aiming at closing the global water governance gap.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



BIODIVERSITY IN URBAN PLANNING

For SDG11 the HLPF should empower cities to lead a nature positive future by integrating biodiversity into urban planning, strengthening local decision making, reconnecting people with nature, and driving ecologically informed, transparent and accountable development

Introduction

The planet faces a series of interlinked crises, including biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, pollution, the inequitable, illegal and unsustainable use of natural resources, poor governance, war and conflict, and increasing health risks. Unless addressed in a comprehensive, synergistic, ambitious and timely manner, they will undermine the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Climate change is estimated to push up to 130 million people into extreme poverty by 2030 (World Bank, 2020), and adversely impact food production and security (IPCC, 2023). Meanwhile, it is estimated that 1.2 billion people, or 30% of the population across tropical countries, are highly dependent on nature for their basic needs (Fedele, 2021). Taken together, the intensifying environmental crises facing the world today are putting increasing pressure on livelihoods, jobs, food and water security, inequality, and economic growth.

These trends notwithstanding, there is reason to be optimistic. Despite the challenges in the multilateral system, Member States have proven that they can come together and adopt critical global policy frameworks, as we saw with the High Seas Treaty recently entering into force. Further, there is overwhelming evidence that conservation works, and delivers a range of benefits, but needs to be scaled up.

Indeed, achieving existing commitments under multilateral environmental agreements and policy frameworks is critical for ensuring sustainable development and a healthy and prosperous future for current and future generations. Synergistic approaches will yield better outcomes for these goals (IPBES, 2024), and there is a great deal of momentum to identify and scale such approaches. We therefore need to commit to building concrete operational linkages across these instruments, promoting and strengthening relationships with other conventions as well as Agenda 2030, and international organisations, institutions and agencies.

Collective progress on water, energy, and cities are critical in their own right, in addition to being necessary for the achievement of the other Goals. What follows are concrete proposals for Member States to consider in their review of SDGs 6, 7, and 11.

SDG6: Clean water and sanitation

The global water cycle is under unprecedented pressure from climate change, over-extraction, pollution and ecosystem degradation, with accelerating impacts on people, economies and nature. The world is off track to achieve SDG6, while water insecurity is emerging as a systemic risk to food security, energy systems, biodiversity, human

health and political stability. The HLPF should serve as a critical stepping stone to the 2026 UN Water Conference to ensure the conference results in the following outcomes:

- **Governance:** The establishment of an intergovernmental process on water, potentially leading to a Global Framework for Water, to provide shared principles, sustained political momentum, multi-stakeholder implementation mechanisms, and dedicated public and private finance. Such a process should be inclusive, multi-sectoral and designed to secure a sustainable, equitable and water-secure future for people and planet.
- **Cooperation:** Strengthening transboundary water cooperation must be a central outcome of the conference. With over 275 shared river basins and aquifers worldwide, cooperation on transboundary waters is a foundation for regional stability, peace and resilience. IUCN urges a strong call for accession to and implementation of the 1992 Water Convention and the 1997 Watercourses Convention, alongside the creation of a dedicated fund for transboundary basins to accelerate implementation, close capacity gaps and support long-term, inclusive cooperation.
- **Integration:** Water must be recognised as an organising principle for sustainable development, such that water, climate and biodiversity policy is integrated by 2030. This requires scaling up water-outcome-focused NbS, positioning freshwater ecosystems as natural infrastructure, and strengthening science-policy interfaces and data sharing.
- **Data & Science:** Establishing science-policy platforms, common data standards and open information exchange will enable evidence-based decision-making, support cooperation across borders and sectors, and ensure that investments deliver resilience for ecosystems, economies and communities alike.

For more, see IUCN Resolutions:

- [8.018](#) *Advancing and tracking global river conservation to meet biodiversity and climate goals*
- [8.021](#) *For an international framework for the preservation of watershed heads and the strengthening of their resilience in a changing climate*
- [8.023](#) *Prioritising wetlands conservation and restoration to tackle the dual climate and biodiversity crises*

- [7.015](#) *Cooperation on transboundary fresh waters to ensure ecosystem conservation, climate resilience and sustainable development*

SDG7: Affordable and clean energy

To meet the 1.5°C target, the world requires three times more installed renewable energy capacity by 2030, and an annual doubling of the global rate of energy efficiency improvements. This means a rapid scale-up of both renewable energy generation capacity and efficient transmission grids. This massive rollout carries significant risks for landscapes and seascapes, including greatly expanded mining operations for essential raw materials. Here is, therefore, an urgent need for the world to move towards a just energy transition to net zero that is both nature- and people-positive that is democratic, respectful of planetary boundaries, and aligned with the protection of biodiversity and human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as those of local communities.

This requires the formation of new coalitions to align technological advancements in renewable energy generation and distribution with ambitious global environmental and social goals, and to build capacity among actors in the energy industry on nature-positive screening while generating new tools and standards.

At HLPF 2026, IUCN encourages member states to join its efforts to:

- Recognize the need to incorporate principles of climate justice, redistribution and resource sovereignty at the core of the energy transition.
- Promote sustainable and equitable energy and mineral consumption and governance that comply with human rights commitments, as well as circular economy approaches with biodiversity at their centre, to enhance resource efficiency and reduce waste, with the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other stakeholders.
- Promote the implementation of the collective goals agreed as part of the first global stocktake under the Paris Agreement, including transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner and enhancing efforts towards halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030.
- Promote uptake of disclosure frameworks for companies to report on their nature impacts and dependencies, and the development and implementation of science-based targets for climate and nature.

For more, see IUCN Resolutions:

- [8.042](#) *Addressing the climate and biodiversity crises through fossil fuel supply-side measures and a just transition*
- [8.045](#) *Reducing the impacts of forest biomass energy on climate and biodiversity*
- [8.047](#) *Promotion of strategic and spatial planning of electric grids to minimise impacts on nature*
- [8.103](#) *Safeguarding biodiversity and human rights in energy transition mineral governance*

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities

With cities' demands on natural resources extending far beyond their boundaries, rapid urbanisation is placing mounting pressure on nature. While urbanisation has historically had negative impacts on biodiversity, its future carries promises of renewal – an opportunity to reimagine the built environment and, by extension, our very civilisation. This will require more collective action, with cities networking with each other and with regional authorities, exchanging ideas, approaches, tools and new knowledge.

This will require, for example, protecting and developing peri-urban forests, establishing green spaces and building proactive coalitions and alliances with local government structures and authorities to ensure that biodiversity considerations are mainstreamed into urban planning and decision-making, and as well as inter-city networks that can exchange innovative ideas, approaches, and tools.

Collectively, this can support nature-positive planning and help to establish ambitious but realistic biodiversity-related targets and monitoring frameworks. Concretely, [PANORAMA Cities](#) is one such pathway to share knowledge and best practices, while the [IUCN Urban Nature Indexes](#) is a tool that allows cities to understand their impacts on nature, set science-based targets for improvement, and monitor progress.

More broadly, NbS can help cities to realise this opportunity. Cities and subnational governments can lead the way in upscaling the implementation of NbS and increase the capacity of urban areas to adapt to the effects of climate change, while addressing challenges around youth employment, gender equality, water cycle management and flooding control, disaster risk reduction.

Our recent publication, [Catalysing biodiversity on buildings](#), focused on integration of nature and biodiversity into the building scale, through the measures implemented within the individual building structure. This scale includes green roofs and walls, measures to safeguard wildlife against building hazards like reflective surfaces,

and special resources such as nesting boxes and refuge for pollinators. The focus on the building scale is intended to highlight measures that include living architecture (green roofs and walls), prioritisation of native species, and wild-life-friendly building approaches.

At HLPF 2026, member states should commit to:

- Reinforce the role of nature in the planning and management of urban areas, and the role of accessible urban areas in planning and managing conservation programmes.
- Support cities to understand their impacts and reliance on nature and to become leaders in environmental decision-making
- Make efforts to reconnect people and nature, including through education and awareness raising, profiling biodiversity in cultural events, and

increasing citizens' understanding and sense of agency in advancing sustainable outcomes.

- Improve research and the sharing of knowledge on the impacts of different types of construction, materials and products on species and their habitats, as well as on developments adapted to those species dependent on buildings.

For more, see IUCN Resolutions:

- [8.099](#) *Integrating the preservation and recovery of wildlife and plant species into the creation and restoration of buildings*
- [8.102](#) *Reinforcing and developing urban and peri-urban forests in line with the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions*
- [5.049](#) *Redesigning future cities and related urban zones with protected area: cities, return to nature.*

The 2026 HLPF presents a pivotal opportunity to not only honour and fulfil commitments on water governance, a nature-positive energy transition, and integrating biodiversity into urban planning but, more critically, to galvanize the political will necessary to confront the interconnected crises that jeopardize the realization of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It is a chance to turn ambition into action, forging the path toward a sustainable and resilient future for all.



PHOTO: JONAS ERIKSSON / UNSPLASH

For more information, please contact:

Sofie Sandstrom Jaffe
Permanent Observer of IUCN to the UN
sofie.jaffe@iucn.org

Tommaso Demozzi
Biodiversity Policy Officer
tommaso.demozzi@iucn.org