



Mainstreaming Urban Nature-Based Solutions

Promote certification schemes

Nature-based solutions can be incorporated as key criteria of green certification schemes, in particular for buildings and infrastructure. Certification systems encourage developers and engineers to a higher quality of standards in sustainable building, and while not a legal requirement, they are increasingly used and preferred by investors. For example, one third of offices in Budapest now have a green certification. Two of the leading green certification frameworks, BREEAM and LEED, which measure sustainable supply chains of used materials and building performance, have the potential for greater inclusion of nature-based solutions. The WELL certification has a stronger focus on human happiness and productivity, assessing opportunities for interaction with nature in building design. Although it may be challenging to integrate nature into core requirements of certification schemes, they carry considerable institutional support and extensive industry expertise.



The Building with Nature certification program in the UK uses green infrastructure standards to ensure that the building of new homes also delivers for the natural world and allows people to live closer to nature. Under the scheme, developers can apply to have their development assessed and planners can apply to have their policy documents accredited, and awards are given out to incentivise the delivery of high quality green infrastructure. Developers choose to pursue the voluntary certification due to direction from local government, the competitive advantage of green certification, or to reduce the time and cost in the planning approval process. The program also serves as an opportunity to educate developers about the cost of not pursuing green infrastructure.



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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.