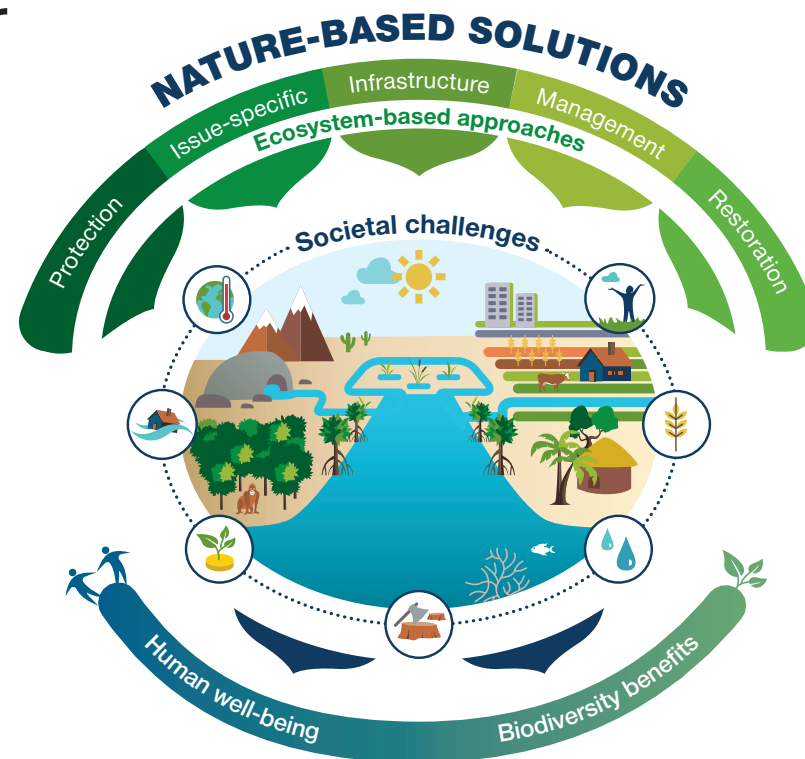




IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™

A user-friendly framework for assessing, implementing, and monitoring scalable, high-integrity NbS

Second Edition



INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE



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IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

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IUCN is pleased to acknowledge the support of its Framework Partners who provide core funding: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark; Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland; Government of France and the French Development Agency (AFD); Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea; Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg; the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad); and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

This publication has been made possible in part by funding from the Government of France and the French Development Agency (AFD).

Published by: IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

Copyright: © 2020, 2026 IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

Recommended citation: IUCN (2026). *IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™. A user-friendly framework for assessing, implementing, and monitoring scalable, high-integrity NbS. Second Edition.* IUCN.

ISBN (PDF): 978-2-8317-2392-1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2305/KKSO4573>

Layout and infographics: Efrat Bronstein/Studio Eshkat

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Acknowledgements

IUCN is profoundly grateful to and acknowledges the dedication and efforts of the hundreds of scientists and practitioners who have contributed to the development and testing, and update processes of the First Edition of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) since 2018. These experts have participated in meetings, workshops, and interviews, and completed public and expert questionnaires to provide feedback that helped shape this Second Edition of the IUCN Global Standard for NbS. To all we extend our sincerest appreciation.

We especially thank Chantal Van Ham, Chrissy Grant, and Weihua Xu, who undertook thorough peer reviews of this Second Edition. We also thank Diwata Hunziker for her diligent copy-editing and Efrat Bronstein for the layout design and infographics of this document.

We gratefully acknowledge the Government of France and the French Development Agency (AFD) for their support of the Second Edition of the IUCN Global Standard for NbS.

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Acronyms

AI	Artificial intelligence	KMGBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
CBA	Cost-benefit analysis	KPIs	Key performance indicators
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
CEA	Cost-effectiveness analysis	NbS	Nature-based Solutions
ESMS	Environmental and Social Management System	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent	SBTN	Science Based Targets Network
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ENACT	Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for an Accelerated Climate Transformation	SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound
ESG	Environmental, social, and governance	TCFD	Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures
iNbS	IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions online platform	TNFD	Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services	UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
ISC	International Standard Committee	UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
ISEAL	International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
		WCC	World Conservation Congress of IUCN

Document history

The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™	
Edition	2.0
Source language	English
Responsible Unit	Nature-based Solution Management Hub
Updated by	IUCN Nature-based Solutions Team; IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management; Core Working Group on IUCN NbS Global Standard update
Subject (Taxonomy)	Nature-based Solutions; Standard; Management Effectiveness; High-integrity Solutions; Credible Recognition
Date approved	19.05.25
Approved by	IUCN Council
Objective	To provide guidance and a global framework for the design, verification, and scaling up of Nature-based Solutions. The Standard includes globally consistent criteria and indicators, which are supported by the Principles for Nature-based Solutions, to measure the strength of interventions.
Is part of	IUCN Nature-based Solutions Group
Conforms to	IUCN Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) & ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice*
Related documents	IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solution – First Edition
Distribution	iNbS Platform

Document history		Current Second Edition
Version	Release date	Summary of changes
1.4	19.05.2025	Revised following the endorsement of the updated criteria and indicators by the IUCN Council
1.3	01.05.2025	Revised following the ISC meeting (29 April 2025)
1.2	25.04.2025	Shared with International Standard Committee (ISC)
1.1	15.04.2025	Shared with Core Working Group (CWG)

*ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems

IUCN is committed to align the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems (ISEAL Code), a globally recognised framework defining practices for effective and credible sustainability systems. The Second Edition of the IUCN Global Standard was informed by the feedback and suggestions received following a 60-day consultation process conducted according to Clause 6.5 of the ISEAL Code V1.0, 2023.

The next update of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ may occur in four or five years. Minor revisions may occur earlier, when needed and as approved by the International Standard Committee (ISC), the overarching authority that ensures the oversight and safeguarding of the Global Standard for NbS based on the ISEAL Code.



Photo: Pengbin Wang

Preamble

Nature-based Solutions (NbS)

IUCN defines Nature-based Solutions 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” (IUCN, Members’ Assembly, 2016, p. 1) (Figure 1). This definition was adopted at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress in accordance with [Resolution 6.069 \(WCC-2016-Res-069\)](#).

The [United Nations Environment Assembly \(UNEA\) Resolution 5/5](#) defines Nature-based Solutions as “actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits” (UNEP, 2022, p. 1)



Figure 1 Definitions of Nature-based Solutions

Sources: IUCN Members’ Assembly (2016, p. 1); UNEP (2022, p. 2).

(Figure 1). This definition was adopted by UNEA in March 2022, along with Resolution 5/5 on “Nature-based solutions for supporting development” and 14 other resolutions, to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNEP/CBD, 2022).

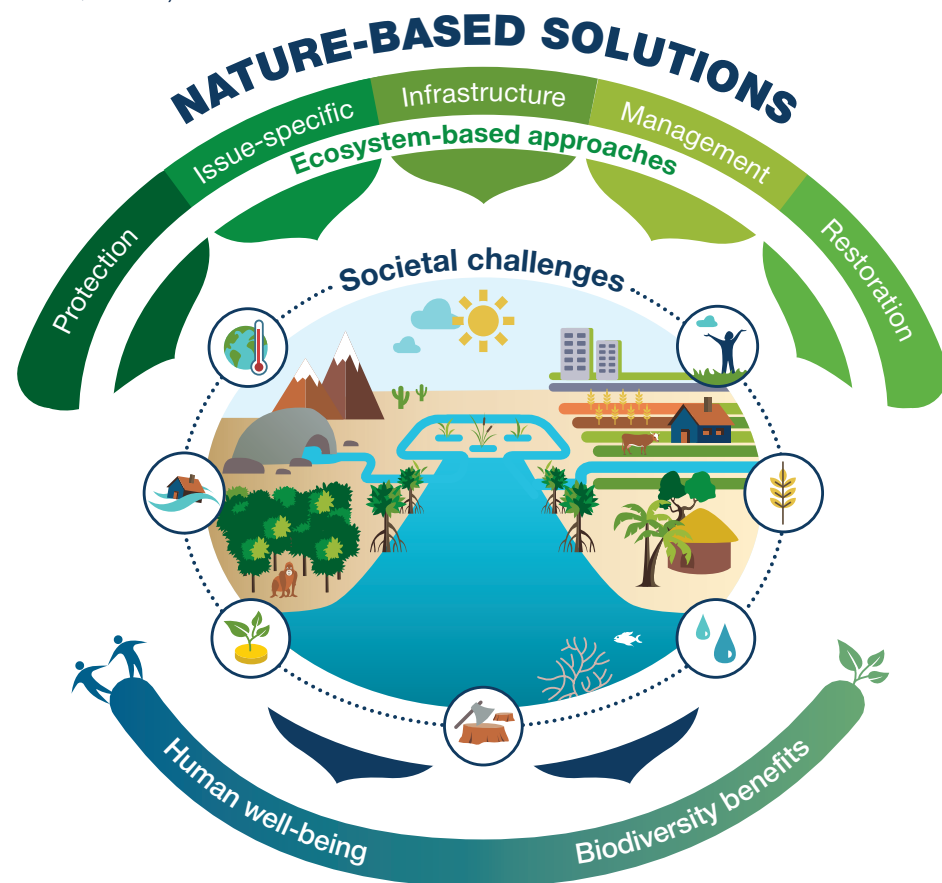


Figure 2 Conceptual framework of Nature-based Solutions
Sources: Cohen-Shacham et al. (2016); IUCN (2020).

NbS can be considered as an umbrella concept covering a whole range of ecosystem-based approaches, all of which address societal challenges (Cohen-Shacham et al., 2016) (Figures 2 and 3). As NbS use natural processes to address these challenges, they are inherently dynamic and require adaptive management, ongoing iterative learning, and targeted monitoring to support future adjustments and expansion amid future climate uncertainties.

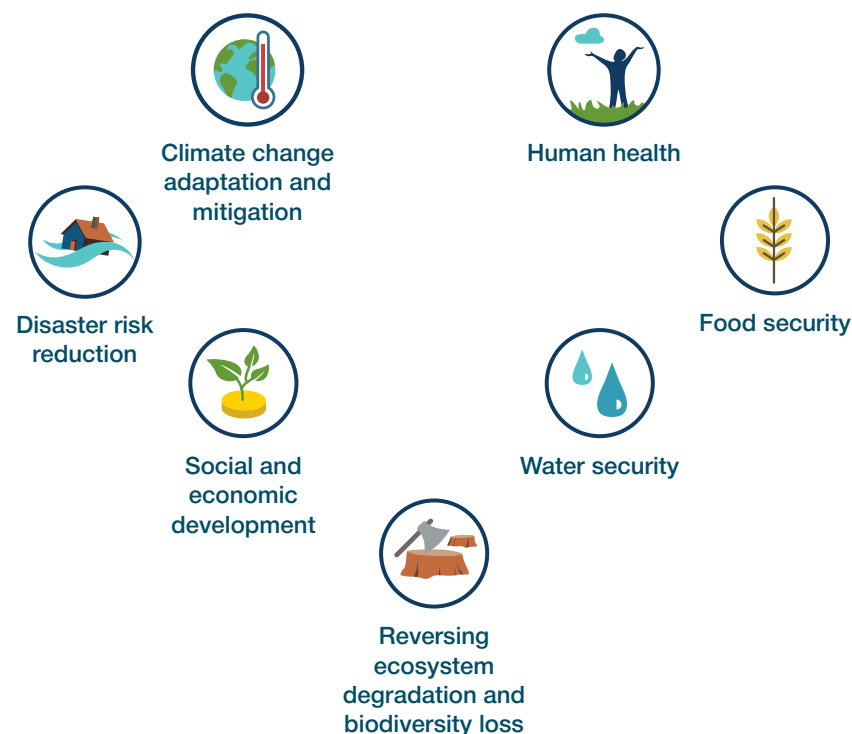


Figure 3 Main societal challenges
Sources: IUCN Members' Assembly (2016); IUCN (2020).

Societal challenges

Societal challenges can be defined as “complex, multi-level, multi-dimensional problems impacting ecosystems, biodiversity and human well-being that require concerted efforts by various actors to be successfully addressed” (Voegtlin et al., 2021, p. 1). Societal challenges could include, among others, climate change, disaster risk, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, unsustainable resource use, and pollution, as well as ensuring food security, water security, human health, and social and economic development (EC, 2021; IUCN, Members’ Assembly, 2016 & 2020; UNDRR, 2020; UNEP, 2022) (Figure 3).

Societal challenges are often interdependent and can manifest at all levels, from local to global (IPBES, 2024). For example, the impacts of climate change on urban areas in regions with increasing

population growth and low economic performance might heighten the vulnerability to ill-health (poor physical or mental conditions) related to, for instance, floods, droughts, forest fires, heat exposure, and malnutrition.

NbS have been recognised for their role in managing natural resources and enhancing ecosystem functions, reducing habitat loss, and increasing the provision of ecosystem services. Today, NbS are formally considered capable of addressing a wide array of societal challenges beyond climate change (through mitigation and adaptation) and the reversal of biodiversity loss, to include social and economic related challenges, such as urban development, poverty eradication, inequality and unemployment, sustainable consumption, and production (Dunlop et al., 2024).

Nature-based Solutions contributing to Global Goals

Delivering NbS directly contributes to the following globally agreed goals (Figures 4 and 5):

- **The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

There is enough scientific evidence at present underscoring the critical role of NbS in achieving sustainable development goals

(Bertram & Griswold, 2024). For example, NbS can reduce vulnerability to climate change, particularly in the global South (Woroniecki et al., 2023). They can enhance social-ecological community resilience by engaging local communities and respecting local values (Turner et al., 2022), and bring economic benefits, such as job creation and economic resilience, and increase resilience to economic shocks (Chausson et al., 2024; Gueye & Atallah, 2024).

- **The Rio Conventions**

The Rio Conventions arose from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, establishing a general framework for coordinating intergovernmental efforts in pursuit of shared environmental objectives. The Rio Conventions address interdependent issues, that are intrinsically linked and have interrelated objectives: the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD) addresses the loss of biodiversity; the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification](#) (UNCCD) deals with desertification, drought, and soil degradation; and the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) addresses global climate change.

NbS are addressed in the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (KMGBF) of the CBD, particularly in its mission for the period up to 2030, towards the 2050 vision, when the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its 16th meeting decided:

To take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving and sustainably using biodiversity and by ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources, while providing the necessary means of implementation. (UNEP/CBD, 2022, p. 8.)

Specifically, Goal A (protect and restore) and Goal B (prosper with nature), and Targets 8 (climate change) and 11 (nature's contributions to people), emphasise the role of NbS in minimising the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, while restoring, maintaining, and enhancing nature's contributions to people, including ecosystems' functions and services (UNEP/CBD, 2022). Since then, NbS have become an important element in the CBD, including through explicit references in several decisions of COP-16.¹

The UNFCCC and the 2015 Paris Agreement recognise the crucial role of NbS in tackling climate change and encourages their implementation, while emphasising the need for careful planning, robust social and environmental safeguards, and increased financial support to ensure NbS effectiveness and sustainability (UNFCCC, 2024, pp. 2–21). The 2022 [Sharm-El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda](#) and the [Implementation Plan](#), launched at the COP-27, call for collaboration and investments in NbS for their mitigation and adaptation action and the ability to deliver the integrity of natural ecosystems for climate, water, food, health, and other biodiversity life supporting roles, while ensuring relevant social and environmental safeguards.

The UNCCD recognises the role of NbS in building resilience in areas expected to face the greatest increased risks of climate-driven floods and drought (Decision 8) (UNCCD, 2022, pp. 20–21).² Its next COP-16 called for the acceleration and scaling up of NbS implementation, to tackle land degradation related issues (Decision 8) (UNCCD, 2024, pp. 25–27).

1 See Decisions 16/17, 16/19, 16/20, 16/22, 16/31, 16/33, and 16/34. For more information about the decisions of CBD COP-16, see: <https://www.cbd.int/decisions/cop?m=cop-16>.

2 See Decision 8/COP.15. For more information about the decisions of UNCCD COP-15, see: <https://www.unccd.int/convention/cop-decisions>.

Without a doubt, NbS can facilitate harmonising related issues across the three Rio Conventions, thus helping countries and organisations optimise resource use and avoid duplication of efforts, ultimately leading to more effective conservation, restoration, and climate adaptation and mitigation measures.

NbS are also recognised by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 as scalable and effective solutions to address interconnected and systemic risks, build resilience, and simultaneously provide human well-being, ecosystem services, and biodiversity benefits.



Figure 4 Nature-based Solutions support the delivery of Global Goals
Source: IUCN (2026).

From concept to operational framework: development of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™

The IUCN Resolution 069, adopted at the 2016 Hawai'i World Conservation Congress (IUCN Members' Assembly, 2016), presented the IUCN definition for NbS, as well as a list of eight principles for NbS to be considered in conjunction with the definition, written to help frame and understand NbS more in detail. The IUCN definitional framework for NbS was later complemented by a gap analysis and in-depth study on principles for ecosystem-based and ecosystem-related concepts (Cohen-Shacham et al., 2019). The NbS definition, eight principles, a gap analysis, and a two-year public consultation process were the bases for shaping and developing an operational framework for NbS.

The resulting IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ (hereafter IUCN Global Standard or Global Standard for NbS), First Edition, was launched in 2020, with a list of eight criteria and 28 indicators (IUCN, 2020), through Resolution 060 on the Promotion of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions (WCC-2020-Res-060) (Figure 5). The Global Standard for NbS is the best tool to address the mandate of the UNEA Resolution 5/5 on Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development (Cohen-Shacham et al. 2024).



Photo: Emmanuelle Cohen-Shacham

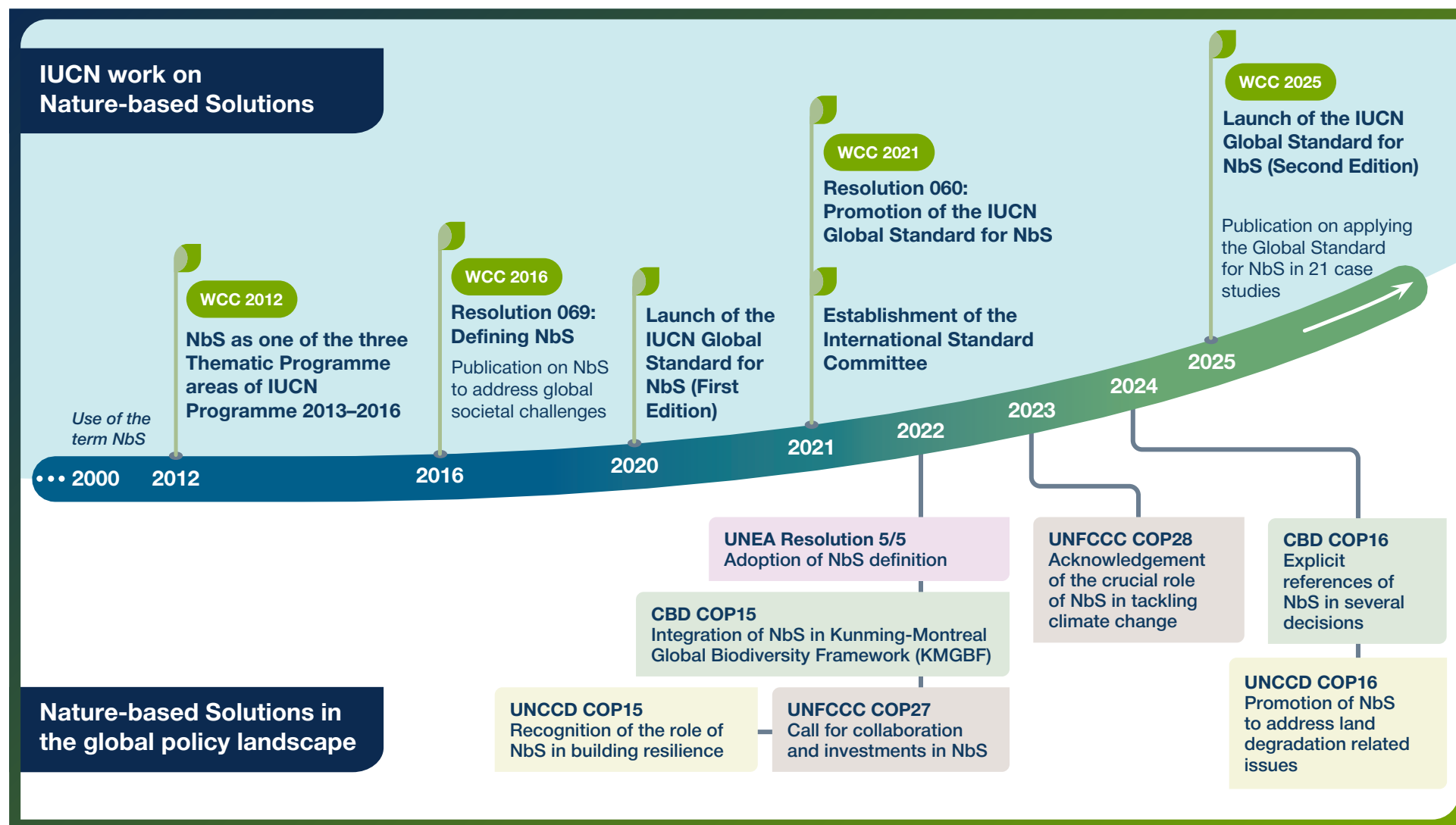


Figure 5 The evolution of the definitional and operational frameworks of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ and its relation to global policy landscape
Source: IUCN (2026).

The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™

Objectives

The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ provides a robust, evidence-based framework for the consistent and credible application of NbS across sectors and geographies. Structured as a systematic learning and quality assurance tool, the Global Standard for NbS ensures that NbS are applied effectively and sustainably, maximising their potential to address societal challenges, while delivering measurable benefits for people and nature.

The Global Standard for NbS provides an **operational framework** to:

- Guide the design and implementation of NbS, fostering continuous improvement to ensure they yield the outcomes desired;
- Identify or assess legitimate NbS interventions, while using a common set of criteria and indicators.

It provides a **quality assurance framework** to minimise risks, increase security for investment, and maximise the chance for success.

By assessing the level of adherence to the Global Standard for NbS, users can:

- Strengthen the effectiveness of their interventions and the delivery of the expected outcomes;
- Enhance the credibility of their interventions when speaking to decision-makers (i.e. policymakers, investors, and others);
- Promote engagement and communication across sectors, interventions and geographies;
- Inform and promote enabling conditions for NbS mainstreaming, innovation, and research.

Target audience and scope

The Global Standard for NbS is designed for use by stakeholders across diverse sectors, disciplines, and geographic regions, working in both natural and human-modified ecosystems. This includes national

governments, city and local governments, planners, businesses, donors, financial institutions, including development banks and non-profit organisations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

The Global Standard for NbS supports the application of NbS at varying scales – from localised interventions to landscape-level initiatives – highlighting the importance of inclusive, cross-sectoral collaboration for effective and sustainable outcomes.

Structure

The IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ is a process-oriented, globally applicable standard. It purposefully avoids a rigid normative framing with fixed, definitive thresholds of what NbS ought to achieve.

This Second Edition of the Global Standard for NbS includes eight criteria and 27 indicators (including one indicator to be applied as appropriate) (Figure 6):

- The criteria represent the essential elements needed for NbS design and implementation to be environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable. There is no hierarchy among the criteria: they share equal status, validity, and authority.
- The criteria are summarised here, following a logical and linkage-based flow, rather than their numerical sequence, to provide an integrated overview of how they relate to one another.
- The indicators offer specific means of assessing whether each criteria is fulfilled.

Criterion 1 ensures that NbS are designed to address societal challenges identified as priorities by those directly affected through transparent, inclusive, and participatory processes (Indicators 1.1 and

The Global Standard for NbS sets clear boundaries around what qualifies as an NbS, offering guidance to decision-makers to confidently select solutions that can be framed as NbS, to practitioners to identify opportunities for improving interventions to meet the definition and principles of NbS; and to policymakers to shape policies and regulations to mainstream NbS and ensure their long-term viability.

1.2). This aligns with a human rights-based approach, emphasising the ability of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other vulnerable groups in defining their own priorities. NbS should provide multiple co-benefits (Indicator 1.3), with one intervention ideally addressing several interconnected challenges. **Criterion 6** reinforces this element by requiring that social and environmental safeguards and associated corrective actions are established through transparent, inclusive, and participatory processes (Indicator 6.1), and made accessible to affected stakeholders and rights-holders and actively respected (Indicator 6.2), ensuring accountability, especially for those most at risk, such as Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and vulnerable groups. **Criterion 5** further promotes processes that are not only transparent, inclusive and participatory, but also gender-responsive, ensuring that women's voices and leadership are recognised and integrated throughout the NbS design, implementation, and monitoring phases (Indicator 5.3). Effective NbS should be grounded in equity, inclusivity, and respect for human rights, ensuring meaningful participation and shared benefits across all stakeholder groups. The design and implementation of NbS should also be evidence-based. Evidence can come from Indigenous, traditional, local, and scientific knowledge, through transparent, inclusive, and participatory processes involving people living and

having a stake in the targeted ecosystems (Indicators 5.1, 5.2, and 5.4).

Criterion 2 requires NbS to recognise and respond to the complexity and uncertainty that occur in the ecological, economic, social, and geopolitical systems within which they are designed and implemented, particularly in light of volatile political landscapes and evolving climate scenarios. The target area where the societal challenges are being addressed is often a part of a bigger system, be it ecological, economic or social. While intervention activities can be focused on the site scale, the robustness, applicability, and responsiveness of the solution should take into consideration the broader systems at play (Indicator 2.1). NbS should also seek synergies with relevant sectors and complementary actions, bridging knowledge and disciplines, while integrating appropriate technological and engineering innovations, such as remote sensing, artificial intelligence (AI), and nature-compatible infrastructure, to enhance design, implementation, monitoring, and scalability (Indicator 2.2). Given the dynamic nature of the ecological, economic, social, and geopolitical systems, NbS should integrate a risk-based approach to address the unintended, unforeseen or undesirable impacts the NbS may pose to the environment and society through safeguards and associated corrective actions (**Criterion 6**), as well as any risks that may affect its performance and sustainability, including those originating beyond the immediate intervention site (Indicator 2.3). Regular monitoring should be in place (**Criterion 7**) to detect new and changing risks and evaluate the response measures through continuous learning about system-wide processes (Indicator 7.2). NbS should adapt to detected systemic changes (Indicator 7.3), and safeguards and associated corrective measures should be periodically realigned to remain relevant (Indicator 6.3).

Criterion 3 recognises the fundamental role that biodiversity and ecosystems play in addressing societal challenges and supporting human well-being. NbS should avoid undermining the integrity of ecosystems (Indicator 3.4) and, instead, proactively seek to enhance their functionality, integrity, and connectivity and improve biodiversity (Indicators 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). NbS are not to be seen as replacements for, or alternatives to, traditional nature conservation efforts. Instead, NbS should be understood as a complementary approach that can enhance and support conservation outcomes, while addressing other societal challenges. In addition, NbS should not be used merely for offsetting purposes. Their role in compensating for emissions should be strictly limited to addressing only residual emissions that cannot be reduced through direct emission cuts and decarbonisation. Such use should be supported by robust accounting frameworks to prevent double counting and should adhere to strong social and environmental safeguards.

Criterion 4 requires NbS to be financially and economically feasible and viable. While recognising the inevitable tension between short-term costs and long-term gains, NbS need to be developed and implemented in a manner that is consistent with the temporal dynamics and complexity of ecosystems (Indicators 4.2 and 4.3). Moreover, in contexts where environmental degradation intersects with social tensions, NbS should be developed with a conflict-sensitive lens, acknowledging and addressing the risks that interventions may unintentionally exacerbate existing inequalities or disputes, particularly around access to land, resources, or cultural heritage. Respect for cultural diversity, customary governance systems, and inclusive stakeholder engagement is essential to avoid reinforcing grievances and to ensure that NbS contribute to social cohesion and long-term sustainability (Indicator 4.1).

Finally, **Criterion 8** requires NbS to build on existing local, national and regional social, economic and regulatory contexts, while contributing to the enhancement of the enabling conditions for their implementation, sustainability, and mainstreaming (Indicators 8.1

and 8.2). The true potential of NbS is realised through its long-term implementation. Embedding the concept and actions into policy or regulatory frameworks, as well as linking to national targets or international commitments, can enable this (Indicator 8.3).

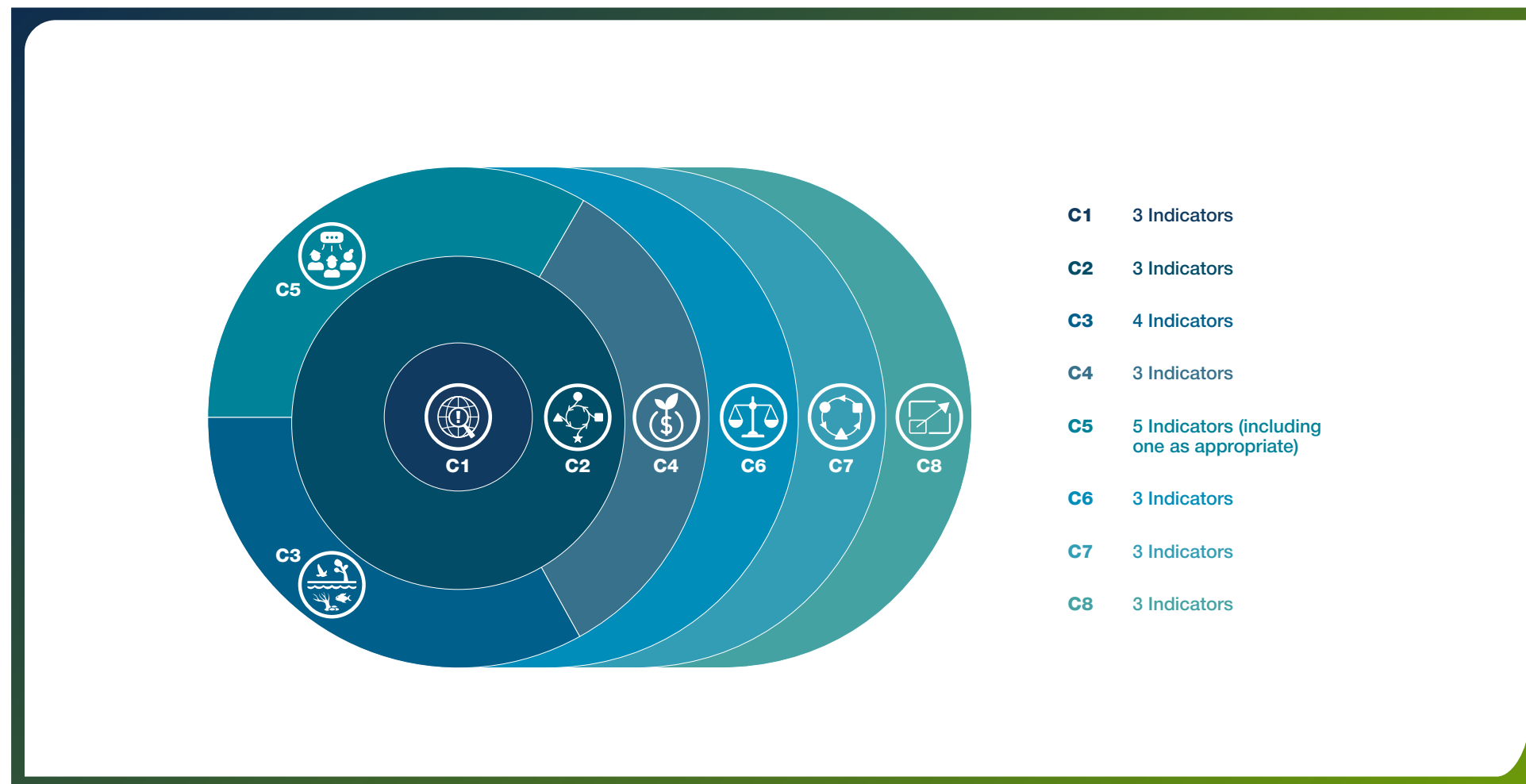


Figure 6 A schematic overview of the eight criteria and 27 indicators (including one indicator to be applied as appropriate) of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™, Second Edition
Source: IUCN (2026).

How to use the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™

The eight criteria and 27 associated indicators (including one indicator to be applied as appropriate) are the foundation of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ and, together with the voluntary Self-Assessment Tool (SAT)³ by which users can identify the strengths and weaknesses of their NbS interventions and opportunities for improvement, constitute the core of the comprehensive standard package.

The SAT and the SAT Manual complement the Global Standard for NbS by providing a stepwise guidance to evaluate how well an intervention adheres to the eight criteria of the Global Standard for NbS. The output comes in the form of a percentage match compared against good practices, with a traffic light system to identify areas for further work and adherence to the Global Standard for NbS. The SAT enables a systematic comparison of an NbS intervention against the Global Standard's indicators through a structured, self-evaluated Q&A process. The resulting output highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the NbS intervention, which can then be used to identify and prioritise areas for improvement and enhanced adherence to the Global Standard for NbS.

Further detail, including case studies,⁴ additional operational tools and references, are available in the Guidance documentation on the iNbS.⁵



Photo: Joyce Mnyazi Jefwa

3 Available online at: <https://inbs.iucn.org>

4 See, for example, Cohen-Shacham et al. (2025).

5 Available online at: <https://inbs.iucn.org>

Governance

While the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ is designed to be directly used by a wide spectrum of stakeholders, to successfully transition towards well-designed, successful, practicable, and viable NbS, its application is nonetheless overseen by an authoritative and recognised governance structure (Figure 7).

The governance structure includes the following interlinked components:

- The [IUCN Council](#) is IUCN's principal governing body in between sessions of the World Conservation Congress, the general assembly of the Union's members. It sets strategic direction and policy guidance for the work of the Union, provides oversight and guidance on the performance of the components of the Union as a whole and of the Director General in particular, and fulfils its fiduciary responsibilities to the Members of the Union and renders account to them.
- The International Standard Committee (ISC) is the overarching authority that ensures the scientific robustness of the Global Standard for NbS, its scientific rigour, and the high-level oversight of its application. The ISC is composed of members appointed by the IUCN Director General, selected to ensure complementary expertise, geographic diversity, gender balance, and the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' representation.
- The [IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management \(CEM\)](#) is a network of professionals whose mission is to act as a source of advice on the environmental, economic, social and cultural factors that affect natural resources and biological diversity. In particular, the IUCN CEM Nature-based Solutions Thematic Group is working on developing and improving the knowledge base on NbS. It is helping

to better integrate NbS in planning and decision-making, develop practical tools to be implemented on the ground, promote good NbS practices, and raise awareness, while supporting the further development of the Global Standard for NbS.

- The [IUCN NbS Management Hub](#) helps drive efforts to scale up NbS and supports the uptake of the Global Standard for NbS, its mainstreaming in national policies and strategic plans, as well as in financial decision-making.
- The [global User Group](#) drives the learning and feedback for evolving the Global Standard for NbS through lessons learnt from applications. It is an open and diverse community of practitioners, organisations, and stakeholders using the Standard across regions, ecosystems, and sectors, enabling broad representation and facilitating shared learning and continuous improvement.
- The [IUCN Operationalising Hubs](#) (regional or national) support the interpretation of the Global Standard for NbS to national or regional contexts and the consequent development of solutions relevant for society, the economy and the environment that are durable and beneficial in the long term.

This governance structure ensures a scientifically robust and globally relevant application of the Global Standard for NbS. It allows the interpretation of the NbS concept and application of the Global Standard to the context at hand, while maintaining its rigour, consistency, quality, and assurance. In addition, the User group is instrumental in ensuring iterative learning feedback loops, fostering partnerships with other existing networks and initiatives, and promoting the Global Standard for NbS as the main reference for NbS globally, while supporting the scaling out, up, and deep of NbS.

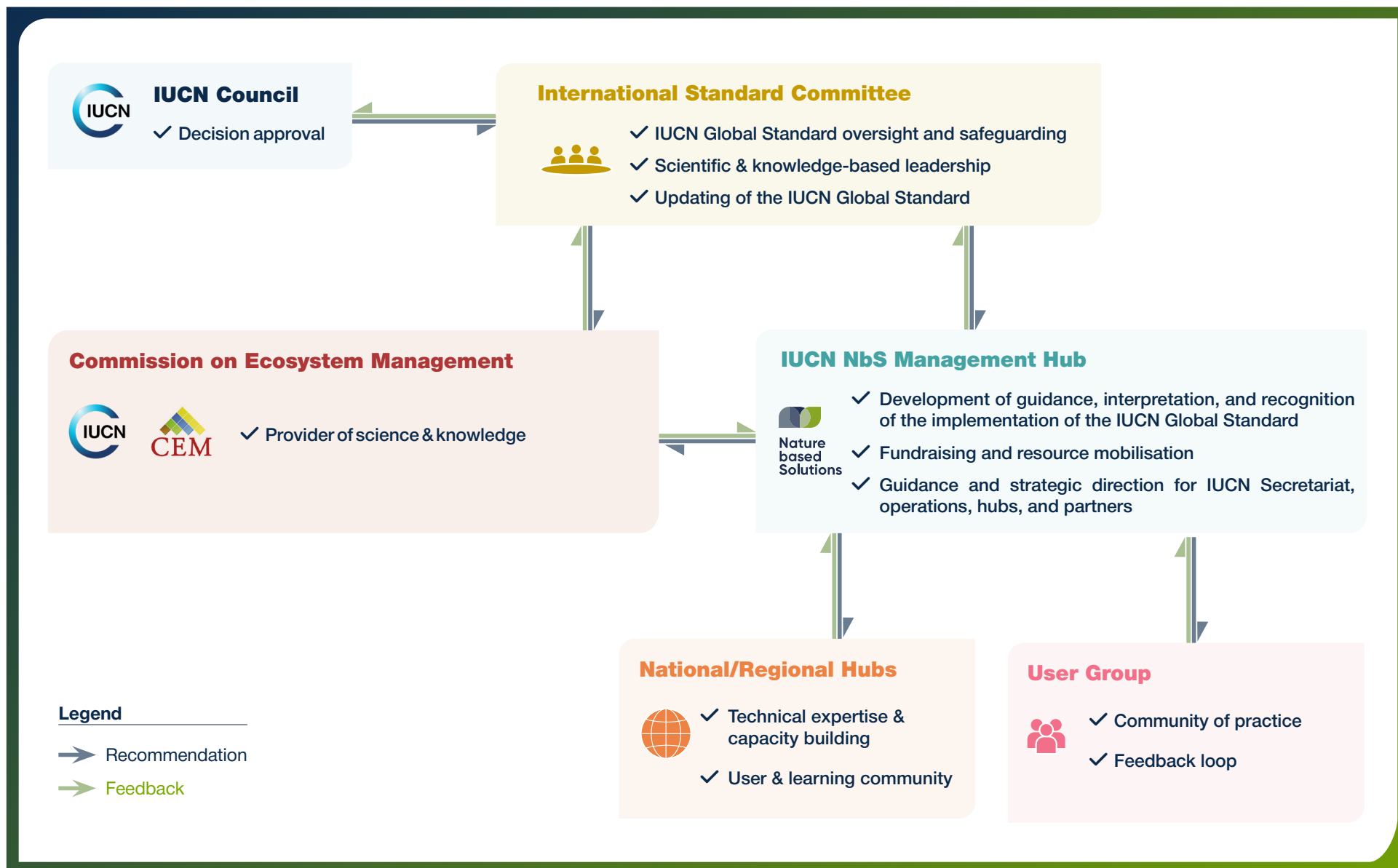


Figure 7 Governance structure of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™

Source: IUCN (2026).

Criteria and indicators⁴



Criterion 1: NbS effectively address societal challenges

Guidance

The purpose of this criterion is to ensure that NbS respond to the societal challenges, such as climate change, disaster risk, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, unsustainable resource use, and pollution, to ensure food security, water security, human health, and social and economic development, amongst others.

These challenges should be identified, understood, and prioritised through participatory processes (Criterion 5) involving those who are or will be directly affected.

Indicators

1.1 The societal challenges addressed are clearly identified, understood, and documented

NbS must address clearly specified challenges that have significant and demonstrable impacts on society, economy, ecosystems and biodiversity. To optimise the NbS and ensure future accountability, it is important to establish a distinct and documented rationale of the societal challenges and their drivers and ensure these are well communicated and understood by affected stakeholders and rights-holders. Societal challenges should be assessed at the relevant levels (local, subnational, national, and international) as interactions across levels are critical for achieving the NbS outcomes (Criterion 2).

1.2 The most pressing societal challenges for stakeholders and rights-holders are prioritised

Prioritisation of the most pressing societal challenges to be addressed by the NbS is best informed by a transparent, inclusive, and participatory process (Criterion 5), through which stakeholders and rights-holders share their knowledge and concerns and contribute to an equitable and just prioritising of the challenges.

1.3 NbS outcomes for people and nature are identified, benchmarked and periodically assessed

Actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use or manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems must deliver tangible and substantive benefits to human well-being, biodiversity, and ecosystem integrity (Criterion 3). Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) outcomes should be established and used to address the prioritised societal challenges (Indicator 1.2). Specific indicators/Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are associated to these outcomes (benchmark) and regularly assessed to monitor impact (for accountability) and inform adaptive management (Criterion 7).

⁴ For an overview of the eight criteria and 27 indicators, please see Figure 8.



Criterion 2: NbS incorporate an ecological, economic, social, and cultural systems perspective

Guidance

The purpose of this Criterion is to ensure NbS recognise and respond to the complexity and uncertainty that occur in the ecological, economic, social and cultural systems within which they are designed and implemented. Understanding the complex interconnections and interactions within a system helps identify intended and unintended impacts of and on the NbS and inform any adaptive measures (Criterion 7).

A participatory process is more likely to produce a context-specific rich representation of these interconnections and interactions, reflecting the views, knowledge, shared values, cultural norms and experiences of stakeholders and rights-holders (Criterion 5).

Indicators

2.1 NbS recognise and respond to interactions between the economy, society, ecosystems, and cultural norms

The success of an NbS intervention is determined not only by the quality of the technical intervention but also, critically, how well the interconnections and interactions between the people, their shared values and cultural norms, the economy, and the ecosystems are understood and responded to. For NbS to be durable and sustainable, a 'systems-perspective' framing is required to ensure these interconnections and interactions are identified, acknowledged, built into the NbS decision-making process (Criterion 5), and their evolution monitored over time to ensure the NbS adapt to changing context (Criterion 7).

2.2 NbS seek synergies across sectors and with complementary interventions

To enhance/strengthen the effectiveness/efficiency in pursuing their outcomes, it is important for NbS to seek synergies with and complement other types of interventions (such as engineering, information technology, financial instruments, insurance, cultural practices, etc.), and work across different sectors according to the specifics and context of each situation. Likewise, it is important to identify complementary interventions and relevant sectors through participatory process (Criterion 5).

2.3 NbS incorporate risk identification and management

For the NbS to be viable, durable, and sustainable, an appropriate risk identification and management framework should be incorporated into the NbS design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A risk-based approach means the NbS is assessed to understand whether it might pose risks that could give rise to any negative social or environmental impacts and whether external risks, including those that originate beyond the immediate intervention site, may affect its performance and sustainability. Once risks are identified, documented, and understood, the appropriate risk response measures should be taken in accordance with the level of risk. Risk identification and management is a continuous process throughout the life of the NbS. It requires adequate monitoring exercises to detect new and changing risks and constantly evaluate the response measures used in dealing with them accordingly (Criteria 6 and 7).



Criterion 3: NbS result in positive change in the state of biodiversity and enhanced ecosystem integrity, including connectivity

Guidance

As the recognition of the fundamental role that biodiversity and ecosystems play in addressing societal challenges and supporting human well-being is the cornerstone of the NbS definition, the NbS design and implementation shall avoid undermining the integrity of ecosystems and, instead, proactively seek to sustain and enhance their functionality, biodiversity and connectivity. Doing so can also ensure the long-term resilience and durability of the NbS.

Indicators

3.1 The state of the ecosystems and the drivers of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss are identified, assessed, and documented

To develop a solution based on nature, it is important to have a well-founded understanding of the state of the ecosystems concerned. A baseline assessment should be established as a benchmark against which progress and the performance of the NbS can be measured (Criterion 7). The baseline assessment should characterise the state of the concerned ecosystems, and identify the drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. The baseline assessment should make use of both local/traditional knowledge and scientific understanding when available (Criterion 5) and provide a foundation for the NbS monitoring plan (Indicator 3.3 and Criterion 7).

3.2 Opportunities to enhance ecosystem integrity, including connectivity, are identified, assessed, and documented

NbS provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management efforts in ways that other types of interventions, such as engineering, will not be able to achieve. For example, NbS can enable greater ecosystem connectivity when implemented close to natural ecosystems that are managed explicitly for conservation outcomes. Or they can help re-introduce lost components of an existing ecosystem by deliberately choosing formerly existing species of vegetation when restoring. It is important to identify and assess any requirements and opportunities to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, including connectivity, through participatory process and based on the best available knowledge (both scientific and traditional/local knowledge) (Criterion 5). This assessment also ensures that NbS do not undermine ecosystem integrity but instead contribute to its enhancement.

3.3 Measurable biodiversity outcomes are identified, benchmarked, periodically assessed, and reviewed, according to evidence-based assessments

The NbS should integrate SMART outcomes for enhancing and/or recovering key biodiversity and ecosystem values (Indicator 1.3) that are based on a baseline assessment (Indicator 3.1) and respond to identified drivers and opportunities (Indicators 3.1 and 3.2). Based on the baseline assessment (Indicator 3.1), measurable indicators and associated targets for enhancing key biodiversity and ecosystem values are to be set to track progress (Criterion 7). For each NbS, the type of indicator and target may differ; for example, the indicator could be the percentage of ecosystem area restored or the return of a keystone species.

3.4 Unintended consequences on nature arising from the NbS are periodically assessed and addressed

Ecosystems are complex with interdependent components and processes. There will always be a level of uncertainty in how they will react to specific interventions or other external changes. NbS should be designed and periodically monitored (Indicator 2.3 and Criterion 7) to minimise and mitigate any unintended impacts that might undermine the ecological foundations of the solution itself.



Photo: Emmanuelle Cohen-Shacham



Criterion 4: NbS are financially feasible and economically justified

Guidance

To be sustainable and scalable, NbS should be both financially feasible and economically justified. Financial feasibility refers to the ability of an intervention to attract the necessary investment and generate sufficient revenues to cover all costs over time, including capital, operations, and maintenance. Economic justification takes a broader perspective; it is not limited to financial flows, but seeks to capture the full societal value created or lost, including whether the monetary and non-monetary benefits outweigh the overall costs. This includes positive or negative externalities that may affect people beyond those directly involved in the project. Addressing the financial and economic dimensions of NbS helps prevent short-term dependencies, supports a just distribution of costs and benefits among affected stakeholders and through adequate safeguards and associated corrective actions (Criterion 6), informs the establishment of enabling financial and economic policies (Criterion 8), and reinforces the long-term viability of NbS.

Indicators

4.1 The distribution of financial and societal costs and benefits is understood and documented to ensure distributional equity

Identification and documentation of the main financial and social costs and benefits, including monetary and non-monetary elements derived from the intervention, are key components for assessing the financial feasibility and viability and economic justification of an NbS. Upfront and recurring costs are to be assessed against the anticipated longer-term benefits of the proposed intervention, while making explicit, testing, and verifying all assumptions, ideally within a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) framework. Finally, it is important to understand who receives the benefits and who bears the costs of the intervention, to allow for a fair and just allocation of benefits and costs across stakeholder groups (distributional justice), and the development of safeguards and associated corrective actions against any possible financial inequalities (Criterion 6).

4.2 NbS are economically and financially justifiable against alternative solutions

A key attribute of NbS is the ability to address societal challenges in a manner that is both economically viable and efficient. This means that, when possible, the cost-effectiveness of a candidate NbS should be tested against viable alternatives to help justify its selection. Firstly, it is important to understand whether alternative solutions to the candidate NbS exist. Alternative solutions may include a different NbS (for example, watershed catchment management rather than floodplain management), a different combination of conventional and NbS, or substitution of the NbS entirely with a more conventional approach such as engineered infrastructure. When comparing the candidate NbS to alternative solutions, the analysis should consider the range of costs and benefits associated with each option, including financial, environmental, and social dimensions. The assessment of the costs of alternative interventions in reaching the same outcome(s), ideally within a cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) framework, should be based on the long-term and not only on short-term financial returns. If the candidate NbS proves less cost-effective than an alternative in purely financial terms, this should be weighed against the broader range of co-benefits it can provide, with a clear understanding that prevention of biodiversity loss at the source is preferred over a compensation of its effects elsewhere (offsetting).

4.3 Financial mechanisms are identified and secured to ensure NbS long-term viability

To unlock their potential in delivering multiple benefits to people and nature, NbS need to be financially feasible and viable over their lifetime. Investing heavily in upfront costs without considering the longer-term financial viability (including maintenance of infrastructure and the development of an exit strategy) can negatively impact the intervention's sustainability over time. Resourcing packages need to be developed and negotiated, integrating a range of financial mechanisms, such as public-sector grants, incentives and low interest loans, private-sector loans and equity, blended public-private partnerships, as well as philanthropic and voluntary contributions or combinations of the above, reflecting an equitable distribution of both the risks and returns. While securing its financial viability over time, NbS should inform and encourage the establishment of enabling conditions for their financial viability and upscaling (Criterion 8).



Photo: Emmanuelle Cohen-Shacham



Criterion 5: NbS are based on inclusive, transparent, and empowering governance processes

Guidance

This criterion requires that NbS identify, acknowledge, recognise, respect, and involve stakeholders and rights-holders, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and vulnerable groups who are directly or indirectly impacted by the NbS intervention, in decision-making processes at all levels and throughout the NbS lifetime. At a minimum, NbS should adhere to and align with the prevailing legal and regulatory provisions, particularly those regarding Indigenous Peoples and local communities' rights. Governance provisions should be clear on where legal responsibilities and liabilities lie. However, as often is the case with natural resources, basic compliance should be complemented with ancillary mechanisms that actively engage and empower affected stakeholders and rights-holders.

If Indigenous Peoples and local communities are potentially impacted by the intervention, the NbS should not diminish or extinguish the rights that they currently have or may acquire in the future. NbS should respect their collective rights, including their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) before any implementation. Inclusive governance arrangements mean that Indigenous Peoples and local communities participate fully and effectively through their representatives designated by them, following their own procedures, to avoid that otherwise well-intended actions adversely affect the legitimacy of benefit and cost sharing arrangements.

Indicators

5.1 Stakeholders, rights-holders, and Indigenous Peoples, who are directly and indirectly affected by the NbS, have been identified and are invited to fully and effectively participate in all processes

Stakeholder mapping and analysis identifies those who may be directly and indirectly, positively or negatively, impacted by the NbS. Rights, uses, and responsibilities of stakeholders, rights-holders, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and vulnerable groups in relation to the NbS should be assessed and documented. This allows the intervention to afford opportunities to impacted parties to engage with and fully and effectively participate in the design and implementation of the NbS, advocate clearly to uphold their rights and interests, and where necessary, to prevent further marginalisation. This is particularly important when dealing with Indigenous Peoples: their rights to FPIC must be upheld and respected.

5.2 A defined and fully agreed upon grievance and conflict resolution mechanism is available, accessible, and implemented

Grievance and conflict resolution mechanisms can include formal, legal or informal non-legal complaint systems that operate according to a clear set of procedures, roles, and rules for receiving complaints and providing a remedy. Effective grievance and conflict resolution mechanisms are characterised by their acceptance and legitimacy among impacted stakeholders, rights-holders, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and vulnerable groups, as well as their transparency, accessibility, and adherence to rights-based approaches. They should operate in a predictable and equitable manner and be based on engagement and dialogue. The mechanisms should be culturally appropriate considering Indigenous and local languages and regularly reviewed and adapted (Criterion 7).

5.3 NbS are based on inclusive participation, mutual respect and equality, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or social status

For governance arrangements to function effectively, the enabling conditions should be guaranteed and affected stakeholders, rights-holders, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and vulnerable groups need to be equipped with the right information at the right time, in a language that they understand, and their inputs need to be meaningfully addressed. In doing so, a conscious effort is required to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, local communities and vulnerable groups are actively brought into the process in a manner that upholds their dignity and encourages their full and effective participation. This is particularly the case when an NbS intervention operates or impacts on the lands, waters, and territories of Indigenous Peoples, where their right to self-determine interventions and outcomes should follow established Indigenous Peoples' FPIC rights and protocols.

5.4 Decision-making processes document and respond to the rights and interests of affected stakeholders, rights-holders, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities

It is important that transparent and accessible documentation records key steps in NbS decision-making procedures. This helps enhance accountability and provides a strong basis for recourse in the case of any disputes or disagreements. Specific attention should be given to noting which stakeholders and rights-holders, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and vulnerable groups, were involved in decision-making and the role they played. This is particularly important where persistent or structural injustice exists so that processes can be adapted to actively encourage full and effective participation of those most affected by inequity.

5.5 Where the scale of the NbS extends beyond jurisdictional boundaries, mechanisms are established to enable joint decision-making among stakeholders and rights-holders in the affected jurisdictions (as appropriate)

Ecosystems do not follow political and administrative borders. Where the scale of the NbS extends beyond jurisdictional boundaries, mechanisms are established to enable joint decision-making among stakeholders and rights-holders in those jurisdictions affected by the NbS, to help ensure coherency and consistency of approach and desired outcomes.



Criterion 6: NbS seek to equitably reconcile the achievement of their primary goal(s) with any intended and unintended impacts on the continued provision of multiple benefits

Guidance

NbS have the potential to deliver on multiple benefits. However, often the benefits to one area or to a certain stakeholder group come at the cost of another area or group. For example, restoration of a forest may benefit a water utility company in a downstream city, whose water treatment costs are stabilised due to avoided increase in sediment loading.

At the same time, depending on how it is structured, the forest restoration may exclude local communities from those lands and waters. Determining who receives the benefits, and who might be negatively impacted by NbS, is critical to the long-term success and fairness of NbS. It also helps develop the right responses to avoid or mitigate negative impacts on different stakeholders and rights-holders, including vulnerable groups, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (recognition justice).

Indicators

6.1 Safeguards and associated corrective actions are established through a transparent, inclusive, and participatory process, to address the intended and unintended negative social or environmental impacts of NbS

Safeguards are designed as risk response measures applied to interventions that may intentionally or unintentionally generate negative social or environmental impacts. Where risk associated to the NbS has been identified (Indicator 2.3 and Indicator 4.1), safeguards should be developed through transparent and inclusive consultations with affected stakeholders and rights-holders to anticipate and avoid or mitigate adverse consequences of the interventions. Safeguards may be put in place for biodiversity (e.g. setting aside a certain area for protection or limiting the timing of fishing) and for people (e.g. procedural – grievance mechanisms (Criterion 5), consultation obligations, right to appeal or substantive – contracts, legal and regulatory provisions). In case of unavoidable adverse consequences of interventions, corrective actions, including compensation (not only financial compensation), should be arranged through transparent and inclusive consultations with affected stakeholders and rights-holders.

6.2 Safeguards and corrective actions are documented, available, accessible to affected stakeholders and rights-holders, and implemented

Established safeguards and corrective actions should be documented, available, publicly accessible and disclosed to affected stakeholders and rights-holders, including clear information on when and how they will be reviewed. They should be incorporated into the NbS, fully implemented and monitored along with other activities (Criterion 7). This is particularly important when dealing with Indigenous communities, where FPIC should be upheld and respected (Criterion 5).

6.3 Safeguards and corrective actions are periodically reviewed to ensure that they have been fully implemented, proactively address conflicts, and remain relevant

Safeguards and corrective actions need to adapt to changing circumstances, including when new activities trigger additional risks. Periodic reviews are necessary to ensure safeguards and associated corrective actions remain relevant. The periodic review should be conducted through transparent and inclusive consultations with affected stakeholders and rights-holders, and any changes need to be documented, available, accessible, and disclosed to affected stakeholders and rights-holders (Criterion 7).



Criterion 7: NbS are managed adaptively, based on evidence

Guidance

This Criterion requires that NbS include provisions to enable adaptive management as a response to uncertainty and as an option to effectively harness ecosystem resilience. A degree of uncertainty is inherent when managing ecosystems due to their complex, dynamic, and self-organising nature. This also means that ecosystems have greater resilience which confers a wider range of options to respond to unanticipated social, economic, ecological or climate events. The foundation of adaptive management is the evidence-base provided by regular monitoring and evaluation, drawing on scientific understanding, as well as Indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge. By proactively adopting an adaptive management approach, the NbS can continue to be relevant through the lifecycle of the intervention and the risk of redundancy and stranded investments minimised.

Indicators

7.1 Assumptions on how desired NbS outcomes are attained under dynamic social, economic, and ecological conditions are defined and made explicit

The NbS outcomes to address the priority societal challenges and biodiversity outcomes (as defined in Indicators 1.3 and 3.3) – and the actions to be taken to achieve them – should be informed by the prevailing economic, social, and ecological conditions, and supported by the best available scientific evidence and Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge. Clear assumptions should also be made to whether and how the prevailing conditions are expected to change and impact the delivery of the desired NbS outcomes. Therefore, the integrated systems perspective should be applied (Indicator 2.1).

7.2 The validity of the assumptions is periodically tested through monitoring and evaluation as part of an ongoing learning process

In adaptive management, a feedback loop is a crucial iterative learning process where monitoring data is used to evaluate and adjust management strategies, leading to continuous improvement and learning. A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan is a key requirement to understand whether NbS effectively deliver the intended outcomes and whether any changes in the assumptions require a change in the NbS actions. The M&E should be conducted throughout the lifetime of the intervention to ensure long-term ecological and social impacts are assessed and inform not only the NbS management but also the establishment of the enabling conditions for NbS mainstreaming and scaling (Criterion 8). Where NbS have synergies with other complementary interventions (Indicator 2.2) and safeguards and relevant corrective actions (Indicator 6.1), these should be included in the M&E plan. Observed and sustained changes in the stated assumptions (Indicator 7.1) should trigger an adaptive management response (Indicator 7.3).

7.3 Necessary changes to the management of the NbS are defined and implemented through an inclusive and participatory approach

While Indicators 7.1 and 7.2 provide the framework for iterative learning that enables adaptive management to be applied throughout the intervention lifetime, the adaptive management approach of Indicator 7.3 may involve implementing corrective actions ensuring that NbS objectives remain relevant. Any changes to the NbS should be implemented through an inclusive and participatory approach (Indicator 5.3). The learning framework should be established within local or partner institutions to strengthen long-term ownership and ensure continuity beyond the project's duration.



Criterion 8: NbS contribute to the enhancement of the enabling conditions for their implementation, sustainability, and mainstreaming

Guidance

This Criterion requires that NbS are designed, managed and implemented with a view to their long-term sustainability and mainstreaming, including scaling up (policy or programmatic mainstreaming), scaling out (expansion at the geographical or sectoral level) or replication. This can only happen if certain enabling conditions are in place, such as secure land tenure or appropriate land use planning, inclusive institutional mechanisms and governance, economic and financial incentives, risk sharing, social justice and stakeholder involvement, and other systemic enablers.

As further assessment is needed – mainly to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness and social benefits of NbS in comparison to hard/grey infrastructure or other conventional interventions – NbS should inform, contribute to, and encourage the enhancement of the enabling conditions. This includes socio-economic conditions such as policy and market incentives, cross-sector collaboration, and inclusive governance and should ensure alignment with national development priorities and global frameworks, to support their implementation, sustainability, replication, and/or scaling.

Indicators

8.1 Lessons learnt from NbS design and implementation, including barriers and enabling conditions, are captured and documented

Lessons learnt from NbS design and implementation, including insights into barriers and enabling conditions, should be systematically collected and documented. This knowledge supports adaptive management, fosters collective learning, and helps inform the replication and scaling of successful interventions (Indicator 8.2).

8.2 NbS inform and enhance the policy, finance, and regulatory frameworks enabling their mainstreaming

Beyond retrieving internal learning, NbS interventions should also contribute to ensure continuous improvement of the multiple enabling conditions for their long-term success, scaling up, and out, and replication at local, national or sectoral levels (i.e. policy, finance, incentives, technology, geographical, and climatic contexts). A knowledge management and communication strategy should be in place to inform and influence decision-makers, public policies and institutions, regulations, and corporate accountability mechanisms, to trigger deep structural shifts in governance, economy, and social behaviour, and ensure the long-term viability of NbS.

8.3 NbS contribute to relevant jurisdictional environmental, economic, and social targets and frameworks

NbS can make significant contributions to economic, social, and environmental targets and frameworks, and help achieve local, national, regional and/or global commitments, such as on climate change, human rights, human development, and biodiversity. Making these linkages explicit, documenting, and communicating them, helps reinforce the profile and role of NbS, secure broad-based and durable political commitment, as well as societal and financial support, thereby enhancing the long-term sustainability of the intervention.

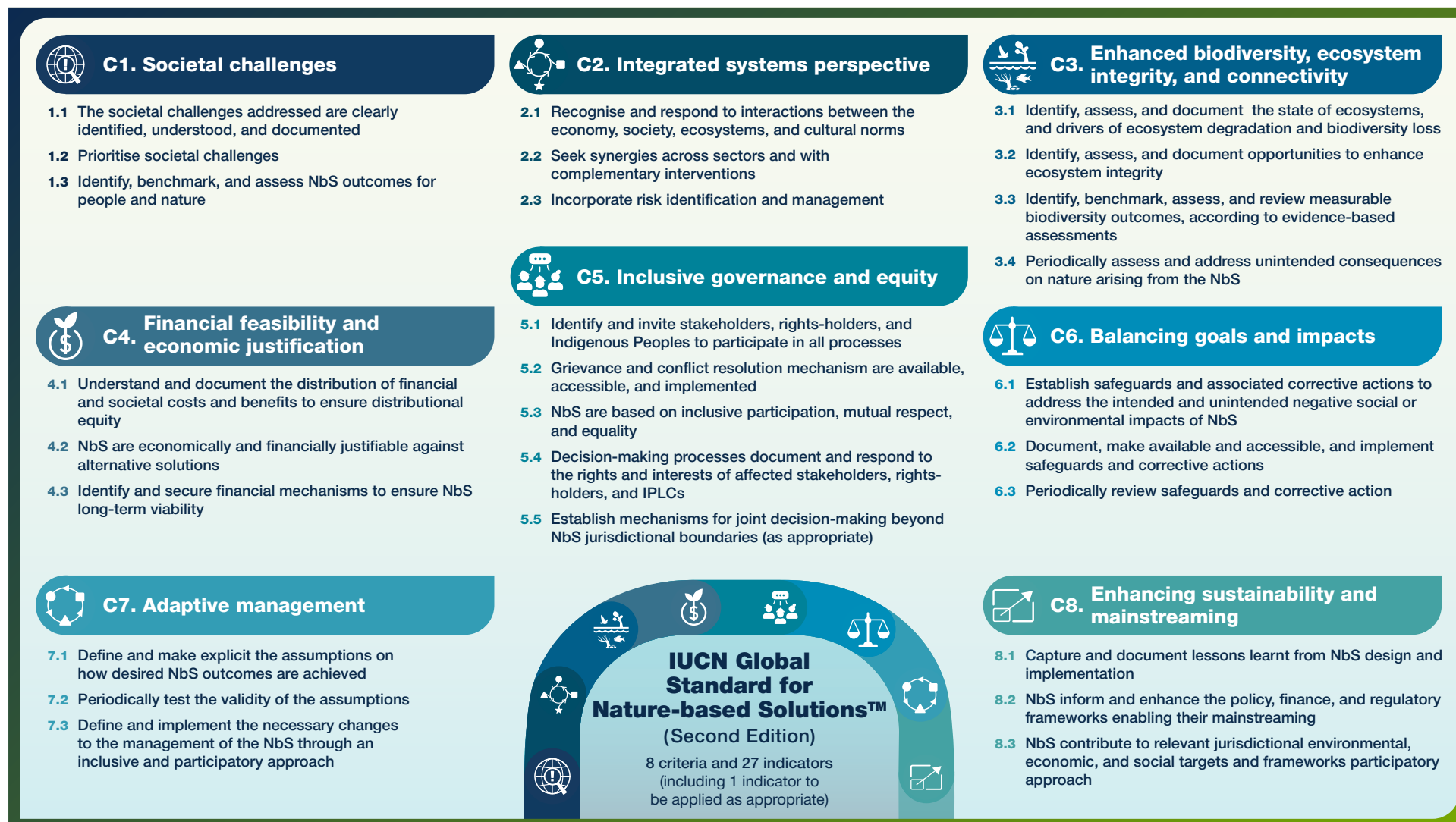


Figure 8 IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™ — Overview of the eight criteria and 27 indicators (including one indicator to be applied as appropriate)

Glossary of terms

Adaptation

In climate science, the term adaptation refers to various actions that help to reduce the risks associated with climate change.

In human systems, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

In natural systems, adaptation is the process of adjustment to the actual climate and its effects; human intervention may facilitate adjustment to the expected climate and its effects. Various types of adaptation exist, e.g. anticipatory and reactive, private and public, and autonomous and planned.

Source: [How to adapt to a changing climate. Summary for All \(2022\)](#).

Adaptive management

Adaptive management can be defined as a systematic process of continually improving management policies and practices by learning from the outcomes of previously employed policies and practices.

Source: [IPBES Glossary \[website\] \(n.d.\)](#).

Affected stakeholders

Affected stakeholders can be defined as people or groups that have been, or may be, affected by an organisation's operations, products, services and value chains, including an organisation's nature-related dependencies, impacts, risks and/or opportunities, and responses to those issues. Affected communities can range from local communities living adjacent to the organisation's operations or the site of its activities to those living at a distance but affected, for example, by nature loss, such as the loss of migratory species, or impact drivers, such as water or air pollution that the organisation generates. Affected communities can include Indigenous Peoples who have internationally recognised rights related to their lands, territories, resources, cultures, traditional knowledge and the conduct of their affairs, and the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent before activities affecting their lands may proceed.

Source: [TNFD Glossary of Terms \(2026\)](#).

Ancillary mechanisms	Mechanisms that provide necessary support to the primary activities. Source: Adapted from the Oxford English Dictionary.
Benchmarking	Benchmarking involves measuring specific indicators against previous data to determine if an intervention is meeting its outcomes.
Beneficiaries	Different social actors and groups who may be benefiting from nature and its contributions to people in different ways and to different degrees, including individual, household or collective levels. They are a type of stakeholder whose primary focus is on the benefits they receive. Beneficiaries may be customers, investors or members of a community. Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).
Biodiversity conservation	The management of human interactions with genes, species and ecosystems so as to provide the maximum benefit to all life on earth while maintaining their potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations; encompasses elements of saving, studying, and using biodiversity. Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).
Biodiversity loss	From the time when humans first occupied Earth and began to hunt animals, gather food and chop wood, they have had an impact on biodiversity. Over the last two centuries, human population growth, overexploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation have resulted in an ever-accelerating decline in global biodiversity. Species are diminishing in numbers and becoming extinct, and ecosystems are suffering damage and disappearing. An estimated 80% of the original forest that covered the Earth 8,000 years ago have been cleared, damaged or fragmented. Some experts assess the rate at which species are becoming extinct at 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than the natural rate would be. A sample of 23 common farmland birds and 24 common woodland birds monitored in 18 European countries show a decline in numbers by 71% between 1980 and 2002. Source: Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA). A Toolkit for National Focal Points and NBSAP Coordinators, Biodiversity Glossary (2007).

Biodiversity offsets	Measurable conservation outcomes resulting from actions designed to compensate for significant residual adverse biodiversity impacts arising from project development after appropriate prevention and mitigation actions have been taken. The goal of biodiversity offsets is to achieve No Net Loss and preferably a Net Gain of biodiversity on the ground with respect to species composition, habitat structure, ecosystem function and people's use and cultural values associated with biodiversity. Source: IUCN Policy on Biodiversity Offsets (2016).
Biological diversity or Biodiversity	The variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. Source: Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 2 (1992).
Carbon offset or offsetting	A climate action that enables individuals and organisations to compensate for the emissions they cannot avoid, by supporting worthy projects that reduce emissions somewhere else. Source: UN Carbon offset platform (n.d.)
Climate change	Climate change in IPCC usage refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity. This usage differs from that in the Framework Convention on Climate Change, where climate change refers to a change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. Source: Climate Change 2007. Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007), Appendix I, Glossary.
Compensation	Measures taken to offset or remedy any residual significant adverse impacts that cannot be avoided or minimised. Source: IUCN Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS). Manual (2016).

Conflict

Conflict can be defined as a situation where opposing attitudes, beliefs, identities, interests, norms or values coexist. This can lead to an active disagreement between people. When different interests collide in a decision-making situation, the conflict can be described as an interest conflict.

Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).

Connectivity

Refers to the external exchanges – the two-way flows that occur between ecological units within the landscape or aquatic environment including flows of energy, water, fire, genetic material, animals, and seeds. Exchanges are facilitated by habitat linkages.

Source: International standards for the practice of ecological restoration – including principles and key concepts (2016).

Conservation

The protection, care, management, and maintenance of ecosystems, habitats, wildlife species and populations, within or outside of their natural environments, to safeguard the natural conditions for their long-term permanence. The conservation of the components of the biological diversity outside of their natural habitats is referred to as ex situ conservation. The conservation of the ecosystems and natural habitats and maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural environments and, in the case of tame and cultivated species, in the environments where they have developed their specific characteristics is referred to as in situ conservation.

Source: IUCN Species Survival Commission Guidelines on the Use of Ex situ Management for Species Conservation, Version 2.0 (2014).

Consultation

Consultations involve information exchanges with stakeholders with the objective to obtain feedback on the analysis, design, implementation and monitoring/evaluation and/or other decisions related to an intervention.

Source: IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 (2020).

Cost

In cost-benefit analysis (CBA), cost refers to any resource or value sacrificed or lost when a decision is made or a project is undertaken, encompassing financial, non-financial, and opportunity costs.

Source: OECD (2018).

Cost-benefit analysis (CBA)

The systematic and analytical process of comparing benefits and costs in evaluating the desirability of a project or programme. CBA has two primary purposes: i) to decide whether the project is sound, justifiable, and viable by deciding whether its benefit prevails over cost; and ii) to provide a benchmark for comparing alternative projects by identifying which delivers greater net benefits relative to its costs (Mishan & Quah, 2020).

CBA involves translating all benefits and costs into monetary terms, including nonmarketed environmental, social and other impacts. Subsidies or taxes are viewed as societal transfers that are net-out and excluded from the analysis. Benefits and costs over time are discounted to current value using social discount rate that is typically lower than the market interest rate relevant to private investors.

Source: [Cost-Benefit Analysis and the Environment \(2018\)](#).

Cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA)

An analytical tool to identify the best activity, process or intervention that justifies/minimises resource use to achieve a desired result/outcome. When multiple interventions are potentially available to reach the same objective, CEA assesses which option achieves the target for the least cost.

Source: [IPBES Glossary \[website\] \(n.d.\)](#).

Cultural

Refers to spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, tradition and beliefs.

Source: [UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: a vision, a conceptual platform, a pool of ideas for implementation, a new paradigm \(2002\)](#).

Cultural diversity

The variety or multiformity of human social structures, belief systems, and strategies for adapting to situations in different parts of the world. Language is a good indicator of cultural diversity, with over 6,000 languages currently being spoken.

Source: [Communication, Education and Public Awareness \(CEPA\). A Toolkit for National Focal Points and NBSAP Coordinators, Biodiversity Glossary \(2007\)](#).

Decision-making

The process of making decisions. It can happen at the individual level or amongst groups and entails the prioritisation of certain values. This prioritisation greatly influences which issues are found worthy of consideration, do and do not become part of the agenda, as well as determine which decision-makers are considered socially legitimate to participate in the process.

Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).

Disaster

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources. A disaster is a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk.

Source: Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction [website] (n.d.).

Distributional equity

The allocation of costs, benefits, risks, and responsibilities, as well as of the products of nature requiring the disaggregation of values to highlight who benefits and who loses, and to demonstrate the consequences for those affected. It refers to the fair and just allocation of resources, benefits, and burdens across different groups and individuals in a society, ensuring that everyone has access to opportunities and resources in a way that is considered equitable. Redistribution can occur in various forms: i) geographic (i.e. transferring risk from one place to another), as is the case with upstream/downstream interventions; jurisdictional (i.e. transferring burdens/costs from one sector to another); ii) social (i.e. reducing risk for some portions of society at the expense of others), as can be the case with urban measures; iii) temporal and generational (i.e., addressing current risks but increasing or failing to account for future risks).

Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).

Duty-bearers

In a human rights context, duty-bearers are actors who have human rights duties or responsibilities towards rights-holders. States are the primary human rights duty-bearers - they have a legal obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. Companies have a responsibility to respect human rights, which includes avoiding infringing upon the rights of others and addressing impacts with which they are involved. Examples of duty-bearers in a business context include: a company operating a project or conducting business activities; business suppliers and contractors; joint-venture or other business partners; and state actors such as government authorities (Götzmann et al., 2020).

Source: UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication (n.d.).

Ecological connectivity

Ecological connectivity is defined as the unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth.

Source: Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species. UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.26 (2020).

Economic analysis

Economic analysis to assess societal benefits and costs associated with the activity. The economic costs of an intervention are not the same as its financial costs, in part because the economic costs also consider externalities. Externalities (positive or negative) are economic impacts that affect persons who are not necessarily part of the intervention scope. The financial (monetary) revenue of an intervention is usually a lower-bound estimate of its economic benefits; however, societal economic benefits can be much higher than monetary revenues

Economic justification

Economic justification takes a broader view than financial justification by assessing the overall economic benefits and costs on the society. This includes the monetary costs and revenues but also the societal impacts (positive and negative) that go beyond the investor, including environmental externalities. The activity is economically justified if its total societal benefits exceed total social costs (benefit-cost ratio is above one) and the chosen option is cost-effective (least cost option).

Economic viability	A project is economically viable if the economic benefits of the project exceed its economic costs, when analysed for society as a whole. Source: Assessing Project Feasibility and Economic Viability [website] (n.d.).
Ecosystem	A dynamic complex of plant, animal, and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit. Source: Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 2.
Ecosystem approach	A strategy for the integrated management of land, water, and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. Ecosystem approach aims to manage the ecosystem, based on the multiple functions that ecosystems perform and the multiple uses that are made of these functions. It does not aim for short-term economic gains but aims to optimise the use of an ecosystem without damaging it. Source: Biodiversity Glossary (n.d.).
Ecosystem integrity	The integrity of ecosystems is broadly defined by the status of their component species and the ecological processes they support and require. Integrity can be assessed by the degree of change (loss and gain) in the set of species and associated processes observed within an ecosystem and its habitats. Source: Measuring Ecosystem Integrity (Goal A) in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: the GEO BON Species Habitat Index (SHI) (2021). Ecosystems can be generally considered to have integrity when their dominant ecological characteristics (e.g. elements of composition, structure, function and ecological processes) occur within their natural ranges of variation and can withstand and recover from most disturbances. Source: Consolidated guidance notes for the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework [website] (n.d.).
Ecosystem services	The benefits people obtain from ecosystems. In the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, ecosystem services can be divided into supporting, regulating, provisioning, and cultural. Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).

Equity

The quality of being fair and impartial principle under which all individuals that are in the same situation must abide by the same laws, without any type of distinction or discrimination. Equity in conservation is a matter of governance and includes recognition and respect for actors and their human and resource rights, equity in procedure (e.g. participation, accountability). It is crucial both for ethical reasons and for effective conservation and applies both to conservation actions on site, and to complementary actions designed to support conservation (e.g. stewardship incentives, support for local schools).

Source: [Equity in conservation – what, why and how? \(2022\)](#).

Feedback loops

Processes that either amplify (positive feedback loop) or diminish (negative feedback loop) the effects of a biological invasion. Feedback loops may make the impacts of biological invasions stronger or weaker, starting a chain reaction that repeats endlessly.

Negative feedback loop is a human-natural feedback that continually stabilises or reduces ongoing or future biological invasions (also known as a ‘balancing’ feedback loop).

Positive feedback loop is a human-natural feedback that continually increases ongoing or future biological invasions (also known as ‘exacerbating’ or ‘reinforcing’ feedback loops).

Source: [IPBES Glossary \[website\] \(n.d.\)](#).

Financial analysis

Financial analysis considers any investor revenues and costs associated with the activity, including the market value of goods and services produced, sold, or otherwise compensated for, as well as any costs to initiate, operate and maintain the activity. Financial analysis also includes any positive or negative public incentives for the activity, such as subsidies or taxes, as either revenues (subsidies) or costs (taxes, tariffs, etc.). Future revenues and costs are discounted to their current value using discount rates applicable to the investor (e.g. market interest rates). The activity is financially feasible and viable if it can be funded and generates positive net returns (revenues minus costs) that meet the investors’ target return on investment.

Source: [Guidebook for Economic and Financial Analysis of Regional Electricity Projects \(2020\)](#).

Financial feasibility Financial feasibility determines if an intervention is financially possible and practical to undertake.
Source: [Assessing Project Feasibility and Economic Viability \(2016\)](#).

Financial viability Financial viability focuses on the ability of an intervention to sustain itself and generate profit over the long term.
Source: [Assessing Project Feasibility and Economic Viability \(2016\)](#).

Gender The term gender refers to the socially constructed expectations about the characteristics, aptitudes and behaviours associated with being a woman or a man. Gender defines what is feminine and masculine. Gender shapes the social roles that men and women play and the power relations between them, which can have a profound effect on the use and management of natural resources. Gender is not based on sex or the biological differences between women and men; rather, gender is shaped by culture and social norms. Thus, depending on values, norms, customs and laws, women and men in different parts of the world have adopted different gender roles and relations. Within the same society, gender roles also differ by race/ethnicity, class/caste, religion, ethnicity, age, and economic circumstances. Gender and gender roles then affect the economic, political, social, and ecological opportunities and constraints faced by both women and men ([CBD, 2017](#)). The framing of sex and gender as binaries is in fact a cultural ideology. The empirical reality is that sex is a spectrum, manifesting in a wide array of sex variance. Some people do not neatly fit into the categories of man or woman, or ‘male’ or ‘female’. For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female. Some people do not identify with any gender, or their gender changes over time.
Source: [IPBES Glossary \[website\] \(n.d.\)](#).

Gender equality

The state in which all people, regardless of their gender, have equal rights, freedoms, conditions and opportunities. To achieve it, gender equality programming uses gender equity approaches to identify gaps and barriers to gender equality and rectify the imbalances between genders. To compensate for the historical and social disadvantages faced by women in accessing these rights and roles in comparison to men, gender equality work focuses on women to close these gaps, while encouraging male support to achieve equality. Equity can be understood as the means, whereas equality is the end goal.

Source: [Gender equality for greener and bluer futures \(2024\)](#).

Governance

The processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms and institutions. It can be undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organisation or territory and whether through laws, norms, power or language.

Source: [IPBES Glossary \[website\] \(n.d.\)](#).

**Grievance
resolution
mechanism**

A grievance resolution mechanism can be defined as that which provides stakeholders fearing or suffering adverse impacts from an intervention with the assurance that they will be heard and assisted in a timely manner.

Source: [IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 \(2020\)](#).

Human health

A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The health of a whole community or population is reflected in measurements of disease incidence and prevalence, age-specific death rates, and life expectancy. Constituents of well-being are the experiential aspects of well-being, such as health, happiness, and freedom to be and do, and, more broadly, basic liberties. Determinants of well-being are inputs into the production of well-being, such as food, clothing, potable water, and access to knowledge and information.

Source: [Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Policy Responses, Volume 3, Appendix D, Glossary, p. 601 \(2005\)](#).

Impact(s) (on nature)

Changes in the state of nature (quality or quantity), which may result in changes to the capacity of nature to provide social and economic functions. Impacts can be positive or negative. They can be the result of an organisation's or another party's actions and can be direct, indirect or cumulative. A single impact driver may be associated with multiple impacts.

Source: TNFD Glossary of Terms (2025).

Inclusive governance

Involves equitable, accountable and transparent processes and institutions that secure the rights of people to access, influence and exercise oversight over decision-making processes that recognise rights and duties, distribute resources, and determine the direction of public policy at all levels, with the view to enhancing inclusive outcomes.

Source: Policy Guidance on Enabling Inclusive Governance (2024).

Inclusive outcomes

Refer to an expansion of enjoyment of rights and/or a better protection of these rights for individuals and groups. It also refers to the equitable distribution of social and material benefits across divides within societies (e.g., gender, ethnicity, income, religion, caste and other), including benefits related to enhanced well-being and capacities.

Source: Policy Guidance on Enabling Inclusive Governance (2024).

Indigenous and local knowledge

Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) refers to dynamic bodies of integrated, holistic, social, and ecological knowledge, practices and beliefs pertaining to the relationship of living beings, including people, with one another and with their environments.

Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).

Indigenous Peoples

IUCN recognises Indigenous Peoples as those set out in the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Convention 169](#) (1989) and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP):

1. Tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
2. Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions.

Source: IUCN [\[website\]](#) (n.d.).

Iterative learning process

Involves repeatedly building, testing, and refining a product or process, incorporating feedback from each iteration to improve the final outcome.

Jurisdictional boundaries

In land and sea planning, jurisdictional boundaries define the extent of legal authority and responsibility for managing specific areas.

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

KPIs are a quantifiable measure of performance over time for a specific outcome/objective.

Life cycle

The consecutive and interlinked stages of a product (good or service), from the extraction of natural resources to the final disposal.

Source: Adapted from ISO 14040:2006, Environmental management, Life cycle assessment, Principles and Framework (2006).

Mainstreaming	Mainstreaming can be defined as incorporating a specific concern, such as sustainable use of ecosystems, into policies and actions. Source: Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Policy Responses, Volume 3, Appendix D, Glossary, p. 603 (2005).
Maintenance	The process of preserving a condition or situation or the state of being preserved. Source: Adapted from the Oxford English Dictionary.
Monitoring	The repeated observation of a system in order to detect signs of change. Monitoring includes baseline establishment, regular data collection, and adaptive feedback into planning. Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).
Participatory process	Entails specific methods employed to achieve active participation by all members of a group in a decision-making process. Source: IPBES Glossary [website] (n.d.).
Rights-holders	Individuals or social groups that have particular entitlements in relation to specific duty-bearers. In general terms, all human beings are rights-holders under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In certain contexts, there are often specific social groups whose human rights are not fully realised, respected or protected. Often, these groups tend to include women/girls, ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants and youth, for example. A human rights-based approach does not only recognise that the entitlements of rights-holders need to be respected, protected, and fulfilled, it also considers rights-holders as active agents in the realisation of human rights and development – both directly and through organisations representing their interests. Source: UNESCWA (n.d.).

Risk	The possibility that the occurrence of an event will adversely affect the achievement of the organisation's objectives. The IUCN Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) defines environmental or social risks of proposed projects as potential negative impacts on: • on communities and Peoples' rights, livelihoods, and well-being, and/or • the physical, natural, socio-economic or cultural environment. Source: IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 (2020).
Risk identification and management framework	A structured approach that helps organisations identify, assess, prioritise, and manage risks, ensuring proactive mitigation and continuous improvement. Source: IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 (2020).
Risk response measure	A specific action or strategy taken to address an identified risk, encompassing actions like avoidance, mitigation, transfer, or acceptance, all part of a broader risk management framework. Source: IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 (2020).
Scaling out, up, and deep	<i>Scaling out</i> refers to expanding the reach of an NbS by replicating or spreading it horizontally to new locations, communities, or populations. <i>Scaling up</i> focuses on changing the systems, policies, structures, and institutions that enable an NbS to become embedded at a broader scale. <i>Scaling deep</i> emphasises shifting mindsets, values, cultural norms, and relationships so that NbS take root meaningfully and lead to deeper transformative change. Sources: Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it (2015); Understanding the scaling potential of Nature-based Solutions (2022).
Safeguards	A measure taken to protect someone or something or to prevent something undesirable" (i.e. do no harm). They have wide remit and can apply to a project, set of projects or more widely to programmes as well as act as policies. Source: UN-REDD Programme Glossary [website] (n.d.).

Societal challenges

Complex, multi-level, multi-dimensional, human-induced problems, faced by humanity and impacting ecosystems and biodiversity, that require concerted efforts by various actors be successfully addressed.

Stakeholder analysis and mapping

A process that involves identifying, analysing, and visually representing individuals or groups who have a vested interest in a project or organisation, and their relationships with each other, to inform engagement strategies.

Source: [Understanding stakeholders' approaches to sustainability in building project, Version 2.1 \(2016\)](#).

Stakeholder engagement

A process involving stakeholder identification and analysis, planning the actual forms of engagement and implementing the actions. Engagement strategies include dissemination/disclosure of information, consultation and participation – during all phases of the project cycle as well as for addressing grievances and on-going reporting to stakeholders.

Source: [IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 \(2020\)](#).

Stakeholders

Persons or groups who may have an interest ('stake') in the outcome of a project, are likely to be able to influence the project and/or who are potentially impacted by the project, whether positively or negatively. Examples of stakeholders are local communities, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, national or local government authorities, traditional or religious leaders, civil society organisations, private sector entities and the academic community, comprising women, men, girls, and boys.

Source: [IUCN ESMS Grievance Mechanism – Guidance Note, Version 2.1 \(2020\)](#).

Sustainability

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meet[ing] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Source: [Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future \(1987\)](#).

Systems

A regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole.

Source: [Systems thinking and modelling to support transformative change: key lessons from inter-disciplinary analysis of socio-ecological systems in applied land systems research \(2025\)](#).

Systems perspective

A holistic approach to understanding and solving complex problems by focusing on the interconnectedness and relationships within a system, rather than analysing individual parts in isolation.

Source: [Systems thinking for planning and evaluating conservation interventions \(2019\)](#).

Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups are often defined as individuals or populations who, due to specific characteristics or circumstances, are at a higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes compared to others. Examples of vulnerable groups are women, children, Indigenous Peoples, and other groups highly dependent on biodiversity and ecosystem services for survival such as subsistence farmers.

Source: [Guidance on Integrating Biodiversity Considerations into One Health Approaches \(2017\)](#).

Well-being

Well-being can be defined as a context- and situation-dependent state, comprising basic material for a good life, freedom and choice, health and bodily well-being, good social relations, security, peace of mind, and spiritual experience.

Source: [Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Policy Responses, Volume 3, Glossary, p. 605](#).

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