

Nature-based Solutions: Don't forget their social dimension!



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NbS are actions that work with or support nature. Through locally adapted interventions, they provide environmental, social and economic benefits which bring nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes. NbS benefit biodiversity, human well-being and support the delivery of ecosystem services (Cohen-Shacham et al. (2016); European Commission (2015)). NbS have effects in two dimensions:

Ecological dimension: protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems



Social dimension: address societal challenges effectively and adaptively

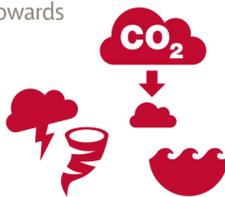
Proponents claim that NbS have transformative potential towards a more resilient and sustainable world with benefits for...



ecosystems



biodiversity



climate



human well-being

Empirical insights

into international cooperative initiatives (ICIs)* that promote NbS or activities related to NbS:

6x

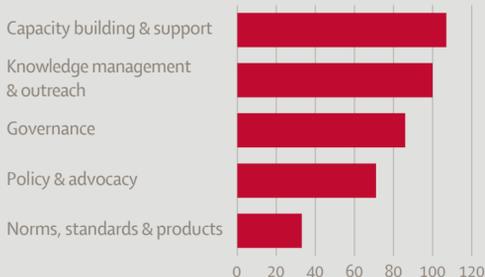
From 2010 to 2020 the number of ICIs promoting NbS increased from 11 to 64, with major jumps in 2015 and 2017.

Implemented activities by region



Main activities described by these initiatives

(n.ICIs=64)

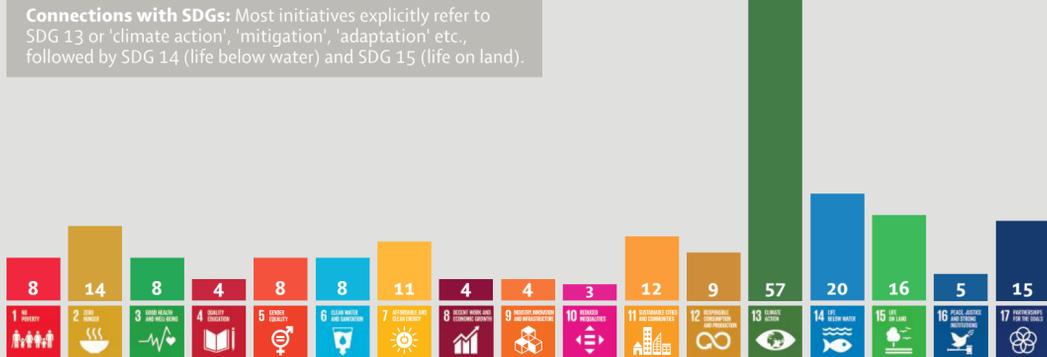


Major action groups in these initiatives

(n.ICIs=64; n.leaders=240; n.participants=3203)



Connections with SDGs: Most initiatives explicitly refer to SDG 13 or 'climate action', 'mitigation', 'adaptation' etc., followed by SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land).



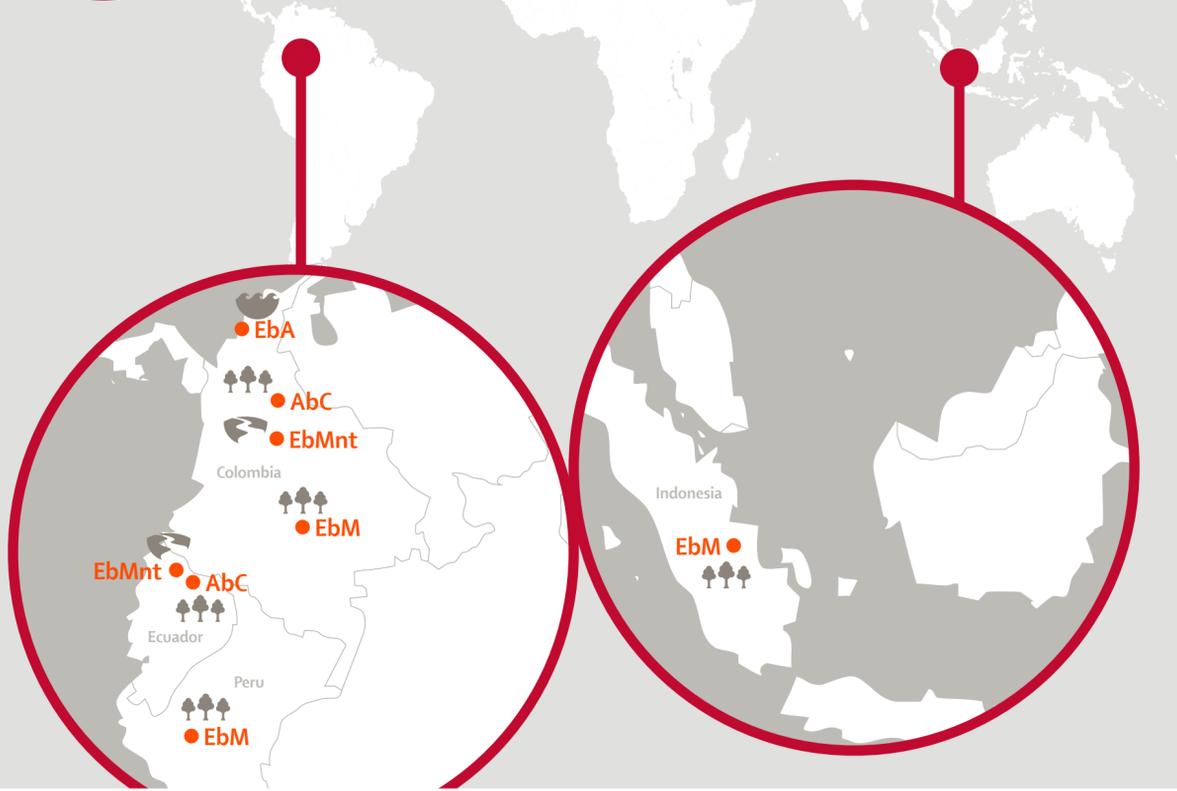
* An ICI is a partnership between two or more actors, at least one being a non-state or subnational actor (city, region, business, etc.), who either cooperate or implement across two or more countries. The analysis comprises 64 ICIs. It excludes individual actions by actors or actions within a single country. Data collection is limited to initiatives with an online presence. The high amount of NbS-focused initiatives exists because many conduct NbS activities in addition to climate mitigation/adaptation activities. An initiative is considered 'aligned' with an SDG if its website or documents explicitly refer to the SDG or its related terms, e.g. SDG 13, climate action, emissions reduction, SDG 15, life on land, protecting biodiversity, etc.

Though international cooperation on NbS is increasing, their transformative potential remains unclear. And though NbS are broadly perceived as beneficial, they may also do harm.



Social analysis of NbS

DIE carries out research to understand the socio-economic impacts of NbS on Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs). Qualitative research was conducted in Latin America and Southeast Asia on several cases of NbS: Ecosystem-based Mitigation (EbM), Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA), Ecosystem-based Management (EbMnt) and Area-based Conservation (AbC). Rather than aiming at representativeness, we sought to gain insights into the real-life impacts of NbS.



Recommendations and limits

NbS can have a lot of positive impacts. They can...

- ... reduce monetary poverty
- ... diversify income
- ... improve social capital
- ... connect multiple actors around environmental management
- ... highlight the importance of stakeholders and IPLCs' participation in decision-making
- ... improve environmental awareness



NbS can also have negative consequences for relevant stakeholders and IPLCs. They can...

- ... reduce or deny control over and access to natural resources
- ... increase conflicts over natural resources
- ... exacerbate food insecurity
- ... criminalise the use of natural resources by IPLCs
- ... reinforce power imbalances
- ... legitimise uneven natural resource distribution
- ... violate human and environmental rights



To strengthen positive impacts, it is important that NbS projects are just!



NbS alone cannot ...

- ... put the global economy on a transformational pathway leading to decarbonisation and harmonise economic growth to stay within planetary boundaries
- ... tackle the whole range of proximate (e.g. habitat loss, pollution) and underlying (e.g. overproduction, overconsumption) drivers of climate change and biodiversity loss

NbS must ...

- ... reduce the risk of greenwashing by fully relying on emissions reduction rather than on carbon offsets
- ... be implemented under strict and constantly monitored social and environmental safeguards plus accessible and transparent grievance mechanisms
- ... promote equitable control over and access to natural resources and associated ecosystem services plus strengthening local governance
- ... support the recognition of IPLCs' rights to natural resources (rights-based conservation) and help to protect environmental activists

Sources:
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