



**Executive Board of the
United Nations Development
Programme, the United Nations
Population Fund and the United
Nations Office for Project Services**

Distr.: General
28 March 2024

Original: English

Annual session 2024

3 to 7 June 2024, New York

Item 10 of the provisional agenda

UNDP evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation

I. Introduction

1. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP conducted an evaluation on UNDP support to ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation to take stock of UNDP strategies and programming for accelerating the implementation of global, national, and local measures to promote healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. It is the first global independent evaluation of UNDP environmental support since 2011 and the first IEO evaluation with in-depth focus on organization support for ecosystems and biodiversity.
2. The evaluation takes a forward-looking view, providing recommendations to inform the strategic and programmatic direction of UNDP support over the remainder of its current strategic plan (2022-25), the recently launched Nature Pledge, and 2030 Global Biodiversity Framework. It forms a part of UNDP accountability towards its Executive Board, development partners, and local populations by assessing the relevance and results of organizational support.
3. UNDP welcomes evaluation findings and recommendations and provides clarification and evidence on certain conclusions. Lessons from the evaluation will inform the implementation of the UNDP Nature Pledge and support to countries, as well as evidence to promote organizational learning for improved effectiveness.

II. Ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation in the global development context

4. Nature is entwined with, and indivisible from, human life, societies, and economies. The diversity of biological species and natural processes that occur within ecosystems provide essential services to human life: Clean water, nutritious food and medicines, in regulating disease, pollinating crops, supporting soil formation, and providing cultural, recreational, and spiritual benefits. In the current Anthropocene era, biodiverse ecosystems are considered critical to human survival. The retention of carbon in organic matter, for example, plays a significant role in limiting atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions while the release of this 'irrecoverable carbon' from rich sources—by draining peatlands and logging/burning of mangroves and intact/pristine natural forest—poses a threat to our ability to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius. To facilitate the protection of ecosystems,



international cooperation is primarily framed within the Convention on Biological Diversity, established in 1992 and expanded in subsequent decades. The Convention assigns responsibility for protecting biodiversity to sovereign states and prescribes forms of support the international community can provide. Biodiversity and ecosystem management also contributes directly to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and other multilateral environmental conventions.

5. In 2010, at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, governments agreed to 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets. None of these targets were achieved by 2020 and only partial achievement was registered under six targets: (1) identification and prioritization of invasive species; (2) proportion of land and ocean designated as protected areas; (3) operationalization of the Nagoya Protocol (a legal instrument on access and benefit-sharing for genetic resources); (4) development of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs); (5) generating and sharing of information and knowledge on biodiversity, and (6) increases in financial resources for biodiversity from domestic sources, international flows and official development assistance.

6. In December 2022, governments agreed to meet 23 targets by 2030 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, alongside four goals for 2050. Momentum is channelled through the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) where the strategy intends, *inter alia*, to finance restoration on the ground, promote leadership, set appropriate incentives, shift behaviours, and invest in research and build capacities. Initiatives dovetail with the Sustainable Development Goals, which sets targets for terrestrial biodiversity improvements under Goal 15. In July 2022, the United Nations General Assembly brokered a landmark agreement recognizing the human right to a healthy environment, further compelling governments to act.

7. Despite several international environmental governance agreements, the pace and scale of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss has accelerated over the past decades. Nearly 10 million hectares of forest are destroyed each year, and 1 million species are considered to be at risk of extinction. One third of all freshwater species are threatened with extinction while freshwater is becoming a scarce commodity. Economic development interests that continue to be viewed as mutually exclusive ‘trade-offs’ between environmental interests needs to change.

III. UNDP support to ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation

8. UNDP has provided support to ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation over the last four decades in over 140 countries, making it the largest United Nations provider of support in this field. During 2018-2023, UNDP delivered support through 602 projects with a total expenditure of over \$1.5 billion in 134 countries. This enabled governments and other stakeholders to implement relevant initiatives that connect development and environmental objectives through a variety of mechanisms, such as: Integrating biodiversity into national budgets and development plans, identifying natural areas essential for supporting human life, strengthening and expanding the coverage and concept of protected areas, promoting the role of indigenous people, issuing grants for local organizations and communities, and working with the private sector as potential employers or to promote value chains for eco-friendly products.

9. UNDP support for ecosystems and biodiversity was guided by the 2012-2020 Biodiversity and Ecosystems Global Framework, which was in effect until October 2023. Three signature programmes existed under this framework:

(a) Integrating biodiversity and ecosystem management into development planning and production sector activities to safeguard biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services that sustain human wellbeing;

(b) Unlocking the potential of protected areas, including indigenous and community conserved areas, to conserve biodiversity while contributing towards sustainable development; and

(c) Managing and rehabilitating ecosystems for adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change.

10. UNDP initiatives helped bridge the perceived dichotomy of production or protection in several cases and demonstrated that community development plans and livelihoods can support conservation. Although the need to connect development and ecological action is widely accepted in the environmental sector, UNDP support stands out for providing practical solutions for implementation, thereby leveraging the broader portfolio of the organization in sustainable development, governance, planning, institutional strengthening, and non-governmental participation.

11. Through its Biodiversity Financing Initiative (BIOFIN)—that grew from 12 countries in 2012 to reached 30 in 2018—UNDP identified barriers for advancing financing for biodiversity and piloted a new methodology for national finance planning. Phase 2, ongoing, has nine donors funding 41 countries, while a related Global Environment Facility (GEF) financed programme supports 91 additional countries.

12. Globally, UNDP has contributed to conservation efforts across a spectrum of biomes and ecoregions since 2018. Over the years, the portfolio of projects designed to mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management into production landscapes and sectors has seen results across regions and in many countries, with many successful examples of scaling.

13. Ethiopia used successive GEF funds to establish a system of protected areas, improve management effectiveness and promote community participation in biodiversity conservation. Ethiopia has also successfully used GEF financed projects to reach many farmers in the country and deepen regional farmer extension support, enhancing capacities for uptake and adoption of sustainable land management practices at farm and communal landscape levels.

14. Costa Rica has worked with UNDP to scale up programmatic approaches on gender within the environmental sector. In 2019, the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINA E), with support from UNDP, put in place Executive Directive (005-2019) to reduce gender gaps in the biodiversity sector, including water, protected areas and forests. The Executive Directive is a formal legal mechanism to promote commitment to accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment in the environmental sector at the national level. Through BIOFIN a groundbreaking programme was built to create financial instruments that centre women and nature, as well as close the gender gap and support a 'nature positive' future. Three financial instruments valued at \$30 million/year were launched with more in the pipeline. The +Women and +Nature Programme, launched by the MINA E and UNDP, includes three financial mechanisms to boost women's access to financial instruments in biodiversity-related areas such as tourism, forestry, agriculture and fishing—activities traditionally disproportionately undertaken by men. Likewise, UNDP, with GEF financing, and in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and National Institute for Rural Development, helped conserve biodiversity and sustainably manage natural resources while also transforming gender norms, values, and power structures through the promotion of opportunities for women in non-traditional sectors, reaching over 30,000 women participating in natural resources and ecosystem services management activities involving productive landscapes and urban biological corridors.

15. Namibia has worked with UNDP since 2000 to design and implement protected area and wildlife conservation projects that have strengthened national capacities to protect wildlife and strongly integrate conservation into economic development by expanding national protected areas from 17 per cent to 20 per cent. This includes transboundary parks, strengthening protected areas given rising tourism infrastructure through community participation and advocating the benefits of wildlife and forest conservation and establishing laws and policies for managing conflicts between wildlife and people. To date, the Sustainable Management of Forested Lands project in Namibia has supported the gazettement of 4 million hectares of land as community forests that continue to function as biodiversity management infrastructure.

16. South Africa has also successfully implemented its ‘biodiversity mainstreaming’ projects and protected area management projects, which have designed subsequent initiatives to facilitate scaling up these projects through additional investments in project landscapes, adopted policy and/or regulatory instruments that enable further scaling across sub-sector, sub-national and national levels. Examples include the South Africa Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Land Use Regulation and Management at the Municipal Scale project that supported the adoption of tools and strategies that strengthened the integration of biodiversity conservation into the water sector, with nationwide application. This project supported the introduction of tax incentives to promote biodiversity conservation by private landowners that are now officially included in the national Income Tax Law.

17. Another project in South Africa supported innovative approaches to expand protected areas through gazettelement, recognition of privately managed landscape as protected areas, and institutionalizing approaches, systems and tools for increasing protected area effectiveness that include monitoring and reporting. Tools and approaches introduced by this project are used by South African National Parks (SANParks), the national authority tasked with managing parks. One of the biggest successes of this project was to introduce/pilot and improve a tool that is now officially used nationally to monitor the management effectiveness of Protected Areas (PAs).

18. In Malaysia, UNDP institutional and policy support through multiple projects led to instituting ecological fiscal transfer from the federal government to state governments for incentivizing ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation at scale. Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Wild Relatives of Crops in China ended in 2014 and impressively established 72 additional conservation sites for wild varieties of crops across 15 provinces within the project period. This was done through a range of policy and financial incentive mechanisms created for the project and included alignment of government poverty reduction and farmer livelihood support programmes and budgets. Also in China, UNDP support for the national wetland protected area programme, comprising several provincial and a national coordination project, led to scaling some of the successful initiatives across the national network of wetland protected areas.

19. In Nagaland, India a participatory land use planning process—introduced to promote sustainable land and ecosystem management in project sites—was adopted by the state government and integrated into its Land Use Policy and scaled across the state. This was actively promoted by the project focus on identifying best practices and reviewing policy/legal bottlenecks for upscaling and replicating results.

20. In Comoros, sequential UNDP supported projects established the first marine protected areas and operationalized the national protected area system. This will be supported through the Blue and Green Island Integrated Programme for ensuring alignment with the Biodiversity Financing Initiative, the UNDP international waters portfolio, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in Small Island Developing States (ISLANDS) programme, and Least Development Countries Fund interventions in agricultural value chains and Green Climate Fund financed projects on sustainable water supply.

21. UNDP support to over 50 countries in establishing legal frameworks and institutional capacities for access and benefit sharing provided potential for significantly scaling benefits from conservation of genetic resources and related international trade.

22. In addition, several global initiatives provided critical inter-country, South-South learning opportunities for upscaling successful solutions that contribute to long-term human well-being and sustainable development. This includes:

(a) PANORAMA solution project, which works to identify and promote successful approaches to protected area management and governance;

(b) Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net), a capacity sharing ‘network of networks’ that promotes dialogue between science, policy and practice for more effective management of biodiversity and ecosystems;

(c) Nature for Development work to champion pathways that put nature at the heart of development, including showcasing nature-based solutions of indigenous people and local communities through the Equator Initiative; providing spatial data on the intersection of nature and development to countries to help them embed nature into their development decisions through the United Nations Biodiversity Lab; providing support to learners around the world through the Learning for Nature website, and raising awareness of the value of nature through the Nature for Life Hub.

IV. Findings and conclusions of the evaluation

23. UNDP welcomes evaluation findings to inform its work on ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation and implementation of the UNDP Nature Pledge.

24. UNDP accepts the recommendations as follows:

25. UNDP agrees with Recommendation 1 to prioritize building ownership of the Nature Pledge in regional bureaux and country offices and to enhance collaboration with key partners, particularly given the continued decline in biodiversity. This includes an action plan focused on strategies for scaling and replicating ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation practices that have proven to be successful with milestones to assess projections periodically.

26. The Nature Pledge vision is on a future where the world’s biodiversity and ecosystems are protected, restored, and valued as a planetary safety net for all of humanity, and for safeguarding our food, water, livelihoods and jobs, climate, health and security. The Nature Pledge was formally launched by the Administrator in October 2023 to upscale UNDP support to over 140 countries, focusing on three systemic shifts of value, economic and finance, and policy and practice required for countries to achieve the Global Biodiversity Framework and other Global Goals.

27. The Nature Pledge brings the whole of UNDP approach, leveraging the unique expertise and networks of the organization across Goal areas, including gender, health, governance, conflict and peace building, rule of law and human rights, and inclusive growth. A detailed Action Plan has been developed to drive and support implementation of the Pledge across UNDP as the organization guides pledge implementation through its corporate Action Plan across bureaux, country offices and key partners to deliver transformation at scale and in line with vital global targets. Nature Pledge initiatives are designed to protect and restore the planet, eradicate poverty, reduce gender and other inequalities, and protect human rights.

28. The Nature Pledge provides a corporate strategy and action plan for their integration into UNDP core and daily development business by putting Nature at the heart of development decisions and actions. Through the implementation of a detailed action plan to deliver the Nature Pledge the Pledge Shifts and Strategic Actions Plan will be embedded in corporate policies and programming to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and Global Goals.

29. UNDP welcomes Recommendation 2 for UNDP Senior Leadership to create a global taskforce to target the drivers of biodiversity loss. The taskforce will galvanise a whole-of-UNDP response to fill a critical gap, and bolster country office support for economic transitions.

30. The drivers of biodiversity loss are nested within a current unsustainable production and consumption system and intertwined with a prevailing economic model that ignores environmental externalities and value of biodiversity and ecosystem services. UNDP as the United Nations

development agency with an integrated portfolio and multi-sector relationship in-country and globally, can make enormous contributions to address these drivers. The UNDP Nature Pledge targets drivers of biodiversity loss through its three systemic shifts.

31. At the portfolio level, all UNDP environmental vertical fund programming is based on an analysis of drivers and threats, and project design is developed to address these. UNDP projects directly address harmful drivers of biodiversity loss, through identifying policy, institutional, finance, and action barriers and by addressing these barriers. UNDP will continue to strengthen the focus on addressing drivers in both vertical fund and non-vertical fund programming.

32. UNDP welcomes Recommendation 3 to promote harmful subsidy reform as a key organizational offer.

33. According to the 2023 UNEP Report on Finance for Nature, \$7 trillion is invested every year on nature-negative activities. A 2021 UNDP, UNEP, and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report on agriculture subsidies revealed that nearly 90 per cent of \$540 billion in annual support to agricultural producers is either price distorting or harmful to nature and health.

34. UNDP, through BIOFIN, has long advocated for the importance of looking at nature negative public expenditure while supporting countries in creating new sustainable financing mechanisms for biodiversity conservation. BIOFIN has supported 27 countries in examining the harmful impacts of subsidies on biodiversity and created action plans to rethink and redesign them, towards redirecting nature negative government expenditure towards nature and people. Countries are looking at subsidies that promote unsustainable production patterns, including use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, over-harvesting of fish, timber and other resources, and conversion of natural ecosystems to managed lands.

35. UNDP work has influenced target 18 of the Global Biodiversity Framework in reducing harmful subsidies by \$500 billion per year by 2030. As UNDP implements economic and finance shifts of the Nature Pledge, it will upscale its support for repurposing harmful subsidies.

36. UNDP agrees with Recommendation 4 to develop a list of priority geographic areas for addressing the environmental and poverty nexus, and work with country offices in the most at-risk areas to create context-specific strategies.

37. There is a direct link between nature and multidimensional poverty: Four billion people around the world depend on nature for their livelihoods. Healthy environments play the most critical role in underpinning livelihoods, water security, food security, health, energy and safety of the most vulnerable, especially those facing multidimensional poverty. Identifying a list of priority countries will help UNDP focus its work on leaving no one behind and ensuring that healthy ecosystems can play their full role in supporting the ecosystem services needed to tackle extreme poverty.

38. Addressing the poverty-nature nexus is a niche and critical area for UNDP support and programme development to upscale application of nature-based solutions for poverty reduction, including increasing social and community resilience supported by healthy ecosystem services. The Nature Hub and Inclusive Growth Team can leverage the exercise of developing a prioritized list of targeted geographies, indicatively set at 10-15 countries, to explore specific dimensions of the nature-poverty nexus, building on lessons from the Poverty and Environment Initiative and its successor, the Poverty-Environment Action programme, where UNDP and UNEP are founding members.

39. UNDP agrees with Recommendation 5 to engage with the current reshaping of international finance mechanisms to develop a clear combined UNDP-IFI offer of support to governments on ecosystems and biodiversity.

40. Interweaving the UNDP Nature Pledge into the work of financial institutions, governments and key external facilitators will increase the scale of the impact and help avoid segregation. UNDP has

close working relationships with financial institutions and IFIs through various workstreams of the Sustainable Finance Hub. UNDP works with over 20 of the world's largest IFIs in 77 countries and five regions. Using its six Signature Solutions, UNDP supports government efforts towards sustainable and inclusive growth on joint analysis and assessments, Goal-aligned tools and methodologies, knowledge products and policy support, capacity development and project implementation.

41. Collaboration between UNDP and financial institutions is also promoted in UNDP-supported programmes and platforms such as BIOFIN, the Task Force for Nature-related Financial Disclosure (TNFD), the Biodiversity Credit Alliance (BCA) and blended instruments such as the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR). The Nature Hub seeks to continue engaging in these efforts and scaling partnerships to translate global policies and frameworks into local actions. Recent collaboration of the Nature Hub with actors from the finance and business sectors—such as the UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)—are part of those ongoing efforts.

42. UNDP will integrate ecosystems and biodiversity into existing sustainable finance offers to finance institutions at international and national levels across public finance for sustainable development (tax, budget, debt instruments), unlocking private capital (building bankable projects, blended finance and impact management and measurement), Integrated National Finance Frameworks, as well as UNDP international policy engagement like the Finance for Development Process. This will include strengthening partnerships with IFI's on nature such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to explore the application of debt instruments and credit enhancements to unlock capital for biodiversity and conservation.

43. UNDP agrees with Recommendation 6 to develop guidance and invest in human resource capacity development at regional and country levels to enable country offices to offer governments integrated support for ecosystems, biodiversity, climate and green growth agendas.

44. While UNDP provides guidance to country offices and regional teams through the Global Policy Network, including individual project interventions and technical advice for policy development and reform that are part of country programmes, there is room for a more coordinated and integrated process in providing such guidance. Key actions are underway as part of Nature Pledge Activation, as per joint preparation of the “Nature for X” series of kits with other UNDP teams. These include (i) Nature for Gender Equality (with the UNDP Gender Team); (ii) Nature for Prosperity (Inclusive Growth Team); (iii) Nature for Food Security (Crisis Bureau); (iv) Nature for Climate Action (Climate Hub); (v) Nature for Disaster Reduction and Resilience (Crisis Bureau Disaster Risk Reduction Team), and (vi) Nature for Peacebuilding (Crisis Bureau Peacebuilding Team). During a 2024 business planning meeting of the Nature and Vertical Fund hubs in January and February 2024, concrete plans for integrated support were discussed and agreed upon with a number of Global Policy Network thematic teams including the Climate Hub, Inclusive Growth Team, Gender Team, and Crisis Bureau Teams.

45. UNDP agrees with Recommendation 7 on taking the opportunity to build on its comparative advantage with sub-national governments and seek opportunities to reduce transactions costs and barriers to scaling.

46. UNDP has been instrumental in providing capacity-building support to sub-national governments across various countries through ecosystems and biodiversity projects. These initiatives span regions and countries like China, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, and beyond. Recognizing the importance of bolstering capacities at the sub-national level, especially in countries with robust decentralized governance systems, UNDP fosters strong partnerships with sub-national governments and local stakeholders. Through targeted

capacity building, policy coherence support, and promotion of knowledge sharing, policy advocacy, and innovative financing mechanisms, UNDP aims to scale up successful nature-positive initiatives.

47. Drawing from experiences and lessons learned from its extensive portfolio in approximately 140 countries, UNDP supports local efforts toward multi-stakeholder collaborations and explores opportunities to unlock private and public sector investments to facilitate scaling. These efforts empower sub-national governments as leaders in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

48. In addition to enhancing sub-national capacity, UNDP work at this level focuses on two critical aspects. First, UNDP actively supports local and sub-national governments in understanding the intrinsic value of ecosystems and biodiversity, emphasizing their pivotal role in the development discourse, particularly in poor and resource-dependent communities. By fostering a deeper comprehension of the interconnectedness between ecosystems, biodiversity, and sustainable development, UNDP empowers local stakeholders to integrate environmental considerations into their development strategies.

49. Second, UNDP collaborates with sub-national governments to establish context-specific safeguards aimed at preserving critical habitats from further degradation and safeguarding the rights of local and indigenous communities. Leveraging tailored approaches and inclusive stakeholder engagement, UNDP ensures conservation efforts align effectively with local socio-cultural contexts and developmental priorities. UNDP also prioritizes the protection of biodiversity-rich areas and promotes the rights of indigenous people.

50. UNDP welcomes Recommendation 8 for country offices and regional bureaux to undertake systematic capacity building of the institutions of indigenous people and local communities, including with rural women, remote and vulnerable populations, and other minority groups. The recommendation provides an opportunity to support these groups to advocate for their own self-determined needs and rights, and to meaningfully participate in relevant negotiation spaces at national, regional and global levels.

51. Numerous international policy frameworks exist that refer to inter-connected priorities of ecosystems, biodiversity and nature-based solutions, prioritizing the needs of indigenous people, local communities, and women's empowerment. The COP26 Glasgow \$1.7 billion US dollar pledge on access to climate finance and Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) include explicit targets to increase direct access to finance for indigenous people, local communities embodying traditional lifestyles, as well as targets on gender equality through a renewed and strengthened Gender Plan of Action. A more systematic approach to the capacity-building needs of indigenous people and local community institutions, including indigenous-led funds and women-led groups, need to be undertaken at all levels by UNDP, including country offices and regional bureaux. This activity needs to take place in tandem with the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) global teams responsible for the Environmental Governance and Local Action Service Offers (spread across the Nature Hub, Climate Hub, Waste and Chemicals Hub, and BPPS Governance teams).

V. Future UNDP support for ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation

52. The UNDP Nature Pledge is a commitment to provide accelerated and scaled support to over 140 countries to reach ambitious targets in the historic Global Biodiversity Framework. It focuses on three systemic shifts that address the drivers of biodiversity loss: value, economic and finance, and policy and practice. These shifts are required to scale and accelerate action towards global biodiversity commitments and support achievement of the Global Goals.

53. The UNDP Nature Pledge works to make nature "belong to all" within UNDP global and regional units and country offices, and it presents a major opportunity. A concrete step forward

would be for regional bureaux and country offices to integrate Nature Pledge principles and priorities across the three shifts into respective regional strategies, country programme documents (CPDs), and linked United Nations work on issue-based coalitions, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), and United Nations country team (UNCT) action plans.

54. The Ecosystems and Biodiversity portfolio, funded through the Global Environment Facility, has evolved in the last 10 years to become more integrated and multi-focal, in part necessitated by the requirements of funds. This trend is growing and expected to become the new way of programming and offers an opportunity for UNDP to strengthen integration in its programmes and projects.

55. Integrated actions already take place within UNDP. As an example, UNDP aims to be the leader for providing integrated climate-nature support as a key agency that supports Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and NBSAPs in countries. Discussions between the Nature Hub and Inclusive Growth team have identified the need for joint analysis and preparation of guidance for country offices on the contributions for Nature Hub initiatives to realize the [poverty moonshot](#). Other ongoing discussions are taking place between the Nature Hub and Crisis Bureau teams to identify opportunities for joint analysis, sharing tools to inform programme design and collaborate on joint projects on key themes such as drought resilience, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, rule of law, human rights, and security. The Blue and Green Island Integrated Programme that supports 15 small island developing states (SIDS), and is financed by GEF, is in development and aims to scale nature-based solutions in the food, tourism and urban sectors. Collaboration with the Chemical and Waste and Sustainable Energy hubs are ensured through regular coordination meetings.

56. UNDP work in ecosystems management and biodiversity conservation at the sub-national level or the “missing middle” are important to form a value proposition for strong partnerships with IFIs and other non-environmental vertical donors to implement NBSAPs and national financing frameworks at the sub-national or local levels. The UNDP position is further strengthened by work in the governance, gender, inclusive growth, poverty reduction and peacebuilding areas that increasingly focus on local and sub-national levels.

57. Major opportunities for tackling drivers of biodiversity loss include BIOFIN, which will soon support 132 countries, and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, where UNDP directly supports 69 countries and indirectly supports 138 countries with UNEP.

58. The Global Biodiversity Framework includes two targets on gender equality and a renewed and strengthened Gender Plan of Action that focuses on addressing persistent barriers such as gender-based violence. Through the Nature Pledge, UNDP will ensure at least 100 countries promote women's leadership in natural resource management, close gender gaps and accelerate women's empowerment and align with and advance the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025.

59. Partnerships with indigenous people and local communities will contribute to recommendations of the previous UNDP Leaving No-One Behind evaluation (2023) that concern the need to increase support and attention to the topic of intersectionality with respect to social inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP future programming with vulnerable populations will be supported by the anticipated introduction of a policy marker to track projects and programmes supporting (a) human rights and (b) indigenous people. There is also an opportunity to build leadership capacity and empowerment of indigenous people, including women, to advocate for their needs and rights and be able to effectively participate in relevant negotiation spaces.

60. Through implementation of the Nature Pledge and actions described in this management response, UNDP is determined to make sizable and impactful contributions towards collective action to secure essential biodiversity and ecosystem services, which is the foundation of human life, prosperity and for future generations.

Annex | Key recommendations and management response

Recommendation 1: UNDP should prioritize building ownership of the Nature Pledge in regional bureaux and country offices and enhance collaboration with key partners. Given the continued declines in biodiversity, the action plan for Pledge must intently focus on strategies for scaling and replication of ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation practices that have proven to be successful and include milestones to assess projections periodically.

Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.

In line with Recommendation 1, following the formal launch of the UNDP Nature Pledge 2030 by the UNDP Administrator in September 2023, a detailed Action Plan to deliver the Nature Pledge has now been developed. The Plan seeks to: (a) embed the Nature Pledge into UNDP core and daily development business by mainstreaming the Nature Pledge’s shifts and strategic actions into our policies and programming, and drive corporate efforts to achieve the moonshots; (b) ensure that the shifts and strategic actions inform and influence global action to deliver the 2030 Agenda & Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreement by putting nature at the heart of development decisions and actions, including on climate change; (c) empower global action for nature beyond UNDP by capacitating UNDP staff as change agents to elevate ‘nature for development’ through partnerships with governments, civil society, private sector, practitioners, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and other key stakeholders; (d) rapidly and efficiently scale knowledge, collaboration, learning, finance, impact and capacity for nature, and (e) create opportunities to share experiences and solutions to scale up and accelerate nature-positive successes, and learn from failures.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1. Roll out the Nature Pledge and elevating the UNDP narrative on nature for development at global, regional and country levels, through structured dialogues with regional bureaux and country offices towards internal value shift for scaling impact of UNDP support for ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation.	June 2025	BPPS (Nature Hub, Inclusive Growth Team, Sustainable Energy Hub)	Ongoing	
2. Align nature and climate commitments by support to 30 countries with their NDCs and NBSAPs, encouraging high ambition on nature-based climate solutions and fostering integrated whole-of-government approaches on nature and climate.	December 2025	BPPS (Nature Hub, Climate Hub)	Ongoing	

Recommendation 2: UNDP Senior Leadership should create a global taskforce to target the drivers of biodiversity loss. The taskforce would galvanise a whole-of-UNDP response to fill a critical gap, and bolster country office support for economic transitions.

Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.

The UNDP Nature Pledge targets drivers of biodiversity loss through three systemic shifts—a value shift, an economic and finance shift, and a policy and practice shift. The drivers of biodiversity loss are nested within the current unsustainable production and consumption system, intertwined with the prevailing economic model that ignores environmental externalities and value of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Given its mandate as the United Nations development agency, with integrated portfolios and multi-sectoral relationships within countries and globally, UNDP has enormous potential and comparative advantages in supporting countries to address these drivers. This makes it critical to realise the whole of UNDP approach in delivering the Nature Pledge. A task force will be created building on the existing internal mechanisms to bolster country office support for economic transitions.

1. Roll out the Nature Pledge, elevating the UNDP narrative on nature for development at global, regional and country levels, through structured dialogues with regional bureaux and country offices towards internal value shift for scaling impact of UNDP support for ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation.	June 2025	BPPS (Nature Hub, Inclusive Growth Team, Sustainable Energy Hub)	Ongoing	
2. Expand existing nature-related task teams to include representatives from senior management in regional bureaux and country offices to serve as a global task force that: (i) addresses drivers of biodiversity loss for scaling support for economic transition, and with direct contribution to the environmental convention COPs and other relevant political processes, and (ii) integrates the Nature Pledge principles into their respective regional and country programme strategies.	February 2025	BPPS (Nature Hub), regional bureaux, country offices		

Recommendation 3: UNDP should intently promote harmful subsidy reform as a key organizational offer.

Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.

UNDP, through BIOFIN, has long been advocating for the importance of looking at nature negative public expenditure, while supporting countries with creation of new sustainable financing mechanisms for biodiversity conservation. BIOFIN has been supporting 27 countries in examining the harmful impacts of subsidies on biodiversity and create action plans to rethink and redesign them, towards redirecting nature negative government expenditure towards nature and people positive. Countries are looking at subsidies that promote unsustainable production patterns, including use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, over-harvesting of fish, timber and other resources, and conversion of natural ecosystems to managed lands. This work has influenced target 18 of the Global Biodiversity Framework with the target of reducing harmful subsidies by \$500 billion per year by 2030. With BIOFIN now supporting an additional 91 countries, beyond the current 41 countries, UNDP plans to scale support to address harmful subsidies globally. This directly contributes to the economic and finance shift of the Nature Pledge.

1. Rollout guidelines on repurposing subsidies harmful to biodiversity and improving their impact on people and nature.	June 2024	BPPS (Nature Hub)	Ongoing	
2. Support at least 20 additional countries with subsidy repurposing planning.	April 2026	BPPS (Nature Hub), regional bureaux, country offices		

Recommendation 4: UNDP should develop a list of priority geographic areas for addressing the environmental and poverty nexus, and work with country offices in the most at-risk areas to create context-specific strategies.

Management response: UNDP fully accepts this recommendation.

The UNDP global and national project portfolio extends to more than 140 countries. A short list of priority countries will help focus work with high-impact results. Based on prior UNDP experience, criteria for focusing on geographic priorities regarding the environmental and poverty nexus could include: (a) geographies where UNDP has a strong national focus on nature-related programming already, particularly in the areas of food security, water security and ecosystem restoration; (b) geographies where actions on protecting, restoring and sustainably managing nature are likely to have the most significant outcomes for multi-dimensional poverty, and (c) geographies with a low Human Development Index, high Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), and high levels of risk in context-specific areas. The 30 countries supported on NDCs and NBSAPs can also serve as a good entry point to ensure multiple impact. New development programme opportunities will be explored, and context specific strategies developed to inform country programme documents.

<p>1. Map geographic areas with biodiversity hotspots and high incidence of poverty and support development of country-specific strategies to inform country programme documents and new programming opportunities focused on the intersection of nature, poverty and human wellbeing, including ecosystem services that underpin human wellbeing.</p>	<p>December 2025</p>	<p>BPPS (Nature Hub, Inclusive Growth Team), regional bureaux, country offices</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	
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Recommendation 5: UNDP should engage with the current reshaping of international finance mechanisms to develop a combined UNDP-IFI offer of support to governments on ecosystems and biodiversity. This will require coordinated actions between headquarters and the country level.

Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.

Close interweaving of UNDP Nature Pledge into work of financial institutions, governments and key external facilitators will indeed increase the scale of the impact and help avoid segregation. UNDP has close working relationship with financial institutions including IFIs, through the various workstreams of the Sustainable Finance Hub. Indeed, UNDP works with over 20 of the world’s largest IFIs in 77 countries across five regions across the six UNDP Signature Solutions through joint analysis and assessments, Goal-aligned tools and methodologies, knowledge products and policy support, capacity development and project implementation to support governments’ efforts towards sustainable and inclusive growth. In addition, UNDP has unique branded instruments in the space that have proven effective over time such as the approach of the Biodiversity Finance Initiative where working with the finance sector is a signature solution. UNDP aims to expand this approach and strengthen its viability. UNDP also acts as a facilitator for the largest global nature disclosure and nature action platforms, including the Task Force for Nature related Financial Disclosure, and Biodiversity Credit Alliance, effectively helping co-manage global partnerships in this space. The key is to translate global policies into local action, and this is exactly where the three-tier structure of UNDP (headquarters-regions-country offices) comes into space, as hardly any other institution has it. UNDP has a mandate to fully engage nature stewards (local communities and indigenous people) in BCA, TNFD, and other nature policy and action from the beginning. UNDP is also expanding collaboration with International Financial Institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to provide fit-for-purpose credit enhancements to target countries in order to unlock financing for ecosystems and biodiversity.

1. Integrate ecosystems and biodiversity into existing UNDP sustainable finance offers to Finance Institutions at international and national levels across Public Finance for sustainable development (tax, budget, debt instruments), Unlocking private capital (building bankable projects, blended finance and impact management and measurement), Integrated National Finance Frameworks, as well as into UNDP international policy engagements such as the Finance for Development Process.	June 2025	BPPS (Nature Hub, Sustainable Finance Hub)		
Recommendation 6: UNDP should develop guidance and invest in human resources capacity development at regional and country level to enable country offices to offer governments integrated support for ecosystems, biodiversity, climate and green growth agendas.				
<p>Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>UNDP is rolling out a portfolio approach in countries to strengthen integrated support that aims to cause systems transformation required to respond to multi-faceted development challenges. In addition, the Ecosystems and Biodiversity portfolio funded through the Global Environment Facility has evolved in the last several years to become more integrated and multi-focal, partly necessitated by the requirements of the funds and UNDP integrated approaches. UNDP brings different thematic expertise to tackle ecosystem, biodiversity, climate and green growth agenda in an integrated fashion. Key lessons from these portfolios are being extracted to guide country offices' programming. As part of the Nature Pledge Activation, development of the Nature Pledge action kits is underway with participation of various thematic team. These include, (i) Nature for Gender Equality; (ii) Nature for Prosperity; (iii) Nature for Food Security; (iv) Nature for Climate Action; (v) Nature for Disaster Reduction and Resilience, and (vi) Nature for Peacebuilding. Other thematic areas of relevance to programming include landscape management for resilience building and ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change, and drought resilience or natural resources management for social cohesion and peacebuilding.</p>				
1. Complete the 'Nature for X' kits, including internal and external consultations, webinars, clinic sessions, and dissemination.	December 2024	BPPS	Ongoing	
2. Develop metrics for tracking the contribution of ecosystems and biodiversity projects to the UNDP poverty moonshot and include/integrate these into the monitoring and evaluation framework of individual projects, as appropriate.	December 2024	BPPS (Nature Hub, Inclusive Growth Team)		
Recommendation 7: UNDP has the opportunity to build on its comparative advantage with sub-national governments and seek opportunities to reduce transactions costs and barriers to scaling.				
<p>Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>UNDP provided capacity building support to sub-national governments in many countries through ecosystems and biodiversity projects, including China, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, and others. Sub-national level capacity building is critical for ecosystems and biodiversity management especially in countries with strong decentralised governance system. UNDP can indeed build on the lessons and good practices from its extensive portfolio of initiatives in over 140 countries in this regard. Through its ecosystem and</p>				

biodiversity initiatives, UNDP will strengthen partnerships with sub-national governments and local stakeholders, provide capacity-building support at systemic, institutional and individual levels, and promote measures to streamline regulatory frameworks for scaling. By fostering knowledge management and learning, and advocating for policy reforms, UNDP aims to reduce transaction costs and bureaucratic hurdles associated with scaling and accelerating nature-positive initiatives. The UNDP emphasis on exploring innovative financing mechanisms and promoting multi-stakeholder collaborations will help unlock much needed investments from both public and private sources for scaling. These concerted efforts will empower sub-national governments to take the lead in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development efforts at the sub-national level, ultimately contributing to the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem restoration, and acceleration of sustainable development pathways at a global scale.

<p>1. Develop guidance to country offices, project developers and project preparation grant/project development teams to integrate the Nature Pledge in project designs, including that policy reforms and regulatory frameworks that support nature-positive work at the sub-national level are included into the design of the future UNDP portfolio.</p>	<p>December 2024</p>	<p>BPPS (Nature Hub)</p>		
<p>2. Leverage ongoing vertical fund projects to deliberately target capacity building of sub-national governments focused on integrated nature-positive approaches through existing and future ecosystem and biodiversity portfolios.</p>	<p>December 2025</p>	<p>Country offices with technical support from regional bureaux and BPPS (Nature Hub)</p>		

Recommendation 8: UNDP country offices and regional bureaux should undertake more systematic capacity building of institutions of indigenous people and local and rural communities, and ethnic minority groups. This provides an opportunity to support women and minorities-led groups to advocate for their needs and rights, and to be able to meaningfully participate in relevant negotiation spaces.

Management response: UNDP fully accepts the recommendation.

The recommendation responds to the COP26 Glasgow pledge to provide \$1.7 billion in finance to indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund target to channel 20 percent of GBFF resources to IPs and LCs by 2030. A more systematic approach will include: (i) engagement of IPs and LCs in national planning processes for NBSAPs and NDCs, including by leveraging the UNDP Climate Promise; (ii) provision of direct access to finance by the SGP/local action delivery mechanism in over 120 countries; (iii) capacity-building to Indigenous-led funds; and (iv) recognition through global awards, training and fellowship programmes. Support will include targeted support for indigenous women-led organizations and further contribute to the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy, UNDP poverty moonshot, and leaving no-one behind priorities. In alignment with other United Nations agencies, UNDP will contribute to the United Nations System-Wide Action on Indigenous Peoples (UN SWAP), including through the introduction of a policy marker on programming supporting human rights and indigenous people.

<p>1. Further increase the integration of the SGP/local action country delivery mechanisms, financed by vertical and non-vertical funds, into the operations of UNDP country offices, aimed at strengthening the capacities of indigenous people and local community institutions (plus women-led groups), including for direct access to funds, and enhanced opportunities for South-South cooperation.</p>	<p>December 2025</p>	<p>BPPS (Nature, Climate, Vertical Fund hubs), Bureau of Management Services, UNDP country offices, regional bureaux</p>		
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Implementation status is tracked in the Evaluation Resource Centre.