

Halfway to 2030: getting back on track to achieve the nature-related SDGs

A reaction to the Secretary-General's 2023 SDG Progress Report

humans.¹ While over 15% of the Earth's land surface is covered by protected areas, as the Secretary-General highlights, just under half of [Key Biodiversity Areas \(KBAs\)](#) are protected. Further, many are at risk of further adverse human impacts. For example, a recent analysis using the [Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool](#)

“Promise in peril...disappearing in the rear-view mirror...severely off track...time to sound the alarm.”

Much of the Secretary-General's [SDG Progress Report](#) makes for grim reading. Despite gains across many of the Goals, the acute and lingering effects of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the associated food, energy, and debt crises have halted or reversed progress in many areas. Issued in April, it notes that halfway to 2030 since the Goals were adopted, progress on the SDGs is insufficient, and in many cases, deteriorating altogether. For the Goals most directly relevant to nature, as for other Goals, there is great urgency to correct course. As part of that effort, the Report calls for the [SDG Summit](#) in September to mark a turning point, and to deliver a “Rescue Plan for People and Planet.”

What do the data say?

Greenhouse gas emissions are rising to levels unseen during the modern era, the world's forests continue to decline, and more than ¼ of the 140,000+ species assessed by the [IUCN Red List](#) are threatened with extinction.

On land, deforestation, land degradation, and species extinctions are all major challenges to [SDG15](#), driven by the fact that more than 70% of global land surface has been significantly altered by

In the freshwater realm, the latest data on [SDG6](#) indicate that none of the targets are on track. Unsustainable water use remains a key driver of ecosystem degradation and species loss.

Since 1970, freshwater biodiversity has declined by 83%,⁴ especially troubling as freshwater covers less than 1% of the

- **Implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).** Sustainable development crucially hinges on nature, and in particular on its biological diversity. Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from its utilisation, need to be at the heart of national development planning processes and policies, and poverty eradication strategies. Inclusive and participatory processes for establishing ambitious national biodiversity targets and action plans need to start as soon as possible, to ensure a whole-of-society approach.
- **Scale up and repurpose finance for biodiversity and climate.** At its heart, the 2030 Agenda is an investment agenda, and substantial investments in nature will be critical to reach the SDGs by 2030. Sustained financial resources must be secured and invested in conservation action, particularly in developing countries. This means adequately resourcing the GBF Fund without delay, mobilising \$200 billion per year by 2030, and reforming at least \$500 billion of the \$1.8 trillion in subsidies that are harmful for biodiversity.¹⁷ Only about 3% of climate financing is directed towards agriculture, forestry, and other land uses – what might broadly include Nature-based Solutions.¹⁸ Noting the recent analysis suggesting that flows to Nature-based Solutions must double by 2025 and triple by 2030, additional financing must be mobilised at scale.¹⁹
- **Protect, restore, and promote healthy freshwater systems and habitats.** Healthy freshwater ecosystems disproportionately support species and provide ecosystem services to people. To ensure their health, we must target better connectivity, quality, pollution control, and system integrity, while taking decisions around water governance and investment that consider multiple values of nature, including Indigenous knowledge and cultural values. Natural infrastructure – including mangroves, saltmarshes, and mudflats – can complement built infrastructure, accruing value and providing services to society over time.
- **Invest in land health.** Globally, agriculture and food systems are the leading drivers of land-use change and stress on biodiversity. There is an urgency not only to relieve this stress but to support biodiverse and resilient agricultural systems capable of feeding the world's population while responding and contributing to evolving consumer expectations and diets. This will involve adopting agroecological and regenerative approaches, reducing and redirecting subsidies that are harmful to the environment,²⁰ and

building mutual understanding between the conservation and agricultural communities.²¹

- **Mainstream nature as a cost-effective, no-regret approach**

¹ UNCCD (2022). The Global Land Outlook, second edition.

<https://www.unccd.int/resources/global-land-outlook/glo2>

² Whieldon, E., Rueedi, J., Yap, S., Desme, G. (2022). Rocks and hard places: The complicated nexus of energy transition minerals and biodiversity. S&P Global.

<https://www.spglobal.com/esg/insights/featured/special-editorial/rocks-and-hard-places-the-complicated-nexus-of-energy-transition-minerals-and-biodiversity>

³ Diagne, C., Leroy, B., Vaissière, AC. et al. (2021) High and rising