



GLOBAL YOUTH POSITION STATEMENT ON NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS





Our key messages

NbS

“Nature-based Solutions” (NbS) is a new term for an old idea that has been understood and practised for millennia.



The term “NbS” is vulnerable to greenwashing that could promote monoculture plantations, the commodification of nature, land grabbing, and other impacts to human rights.



NbS must not delay the urgently needed decarbonization of our economy. It is critical that mechanisms be put in place to eliminate this risk.



One of the most dominant NbS narratives overemphasises carbon sequestration through carbon offsetting schemes. NbS must provide benefits for both biodiversity and climate, since they are interlinked, and biodiversity conservation and ecosystem integrity must be centralized within NbS policy, research, and practice.



For NbS to be effective, they must prioritize local biodiversity conservation, ecosystem integrity, and ecosystem functions, and must be grounded in justice, equity, and inclusion.



If NbS are to be featured in policy, it requires a legally agreed framework that is recognized and upheld by both the CBD and the UNFCCC to prevent misuses and misinterpretation and to centre community leadership, ecosystem integrity, rights-based approaches, and justice.



NbS implementation must follow strict binding social and environmental safeguards, with a focus on ecosystem integrity and functions, meaningful participation and free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, human and Indigenous rights, and rights of nature.



Young people will not tolerate polluters and decision-makers who co-opt and misuse “NbS” to evade their responsibilities - we commit to calling out co-option and false solutions.



Statement

“Nature-based Solutions” (NbS) has become an increasingly popular concept over the last few years. It has been positioned as one potential strategy with tremendous potential to address the interrelated issues of the climate crisis, ecosystem degradation and extinction, inequality, and injustice. At the same time, it is generating risks of perpetuating neo-colonial policies, jeopardizing Indigenous, local communities, and human rights, while acting as a vehicle to delay decarbonization and needed systemic changes. Missing in all of this is a united youth voice, across both the climate and biodiversity communities that clearly outlines how the global youth community understands NbS and what is acceptable and not acceptable both in policy and on the ground.

This statement represents the first-ever, globally representative and collectively crafted position from young people on “Nature-based Solutions”. We are addressing decision-makers and key stakeholders, to present our own views, priorities, and demands from the NbS conversation which, until now, has excluded us from the narrative. **The content of this statement reflects the consultation efforts by the Global Youth Biodiversity Network, YOUNGO, and Youth4Nature¹, and is backed by the knowledge and perspectives of more than 1,000 youth² from 118 countries that have participated in our online survey**, which was conducted in Spanish, French, and English.

NbS is an umbrella concept that includes other approaches, such as ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA), ecosystem-based mitigation (EbM), Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR), and more.

Importantly, NbS is not a new idea - it describes actions that have been understood and practised holistically for millennia, largely by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

Currently, some of the most dominant NbS narratives in global environmental governance (in particular, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity) are being driven largely by large corporations, governments, and international environmental and conservation organisations, many of whom have colonial histories and troubling records around human rights. These narratives have opened up concerning pathways for the commodification of nature and corporate greenwashing, threatening the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and focusing on climate mitigation and carbon sequestration rather than fostering a more holistic view that interconnects nature loss and human rights.

There is an urgent need to centre those most impacted by the impacts of the interlinked socio-ecological crises and by the decisions that are (and are not) being made to address them: women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and Local Communities. We are alarmed by recent proposals, such as silver-bullet carbon offsetting “solutions” and only quantitative area-based conservation and restoration targets which risk displacing and harming Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in carbon and biodiversity-rich ecosystems through land-grabs, and risk degrading ecosystem integrity through the establishment of monoculture tree plantations. There is a clear need for legal frameworks, safeguards, and guidelines rooted in rights and justice at all scales.

¹ About our coalition: Two of the largest global youth environmental networks, the **Global Youth Biodiversity Network** (the youth constituency for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity) and **YOUNGO** (the youth constituency for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), and **Youth4Nature**, a global, youth-led non-profit organization founded to provide youth with resources and platforms to address both climate and nature together, have partnered to co-develop a nuanced, critical, and inclusive youth perspective on nature-based solutions.

² In the context of the survey, youth were defined as everyone under 31 years of age.

The persistent use of NbS by actors for carbon offsetting is especially concerning. Science and traditional knowledge are clear: we cannot limit warming to 1.5 degrees without nature, but nature cannot get us there alone without transformative, systemic change. **NbS are not a replacement for decarbonization.** NbS will only be able to support a 1.5-degree world if they are paired with a drastic reduction and elimination in the extraction, production, and consumption of fossil fuels. We must foster an immediate transition from our current extraction-based system to a fossil-fuel-free economy.

NbS policy, research, and practice must emphasize the **conservation and restoration of local biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and ecosystem integrity** in order to support a regenerative, reciprocal, and resilient future. The dominant NbS narrative leaves too much room for misinterpretation, enabling monoculture plantations and other actions that violate these ecological principles to be labeled as NbS. It further allows polluters to keep their practices, and platforms the wrong people. Negotiations and discussions are failing to ensure that Indigenous, Global South, and youth voices are meaningfully centred. Instead, big polluters (including governments and corporations) continue to have privileged access and disproportionate leverage in the NbS discussion.

Based on the perspectives of our youth communities, as gathered from our consultative survey, we propose the following recommendations to improve the NbS conversation:

- **It is critical that NbS policy, research, and practice be grounded in inclusion, equity, and justice.** This will require shifting narratives, platforms, and resources towards those who have been leading on NbS for millennia, centring a diversity of knowledge-holders (including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, women, and youth) and prioritizing rights-based approaches in all NbS decision-making and implementation processes. The meaningful involvement of all voices, grounded in the principle of free, prior, and informed consent, and backed by science and traditional knowledge, is necessary for NbS to be effective.
- NbS are place-based actions that require **specific, local standards and indicators for different regions and ecosystems that are backed by science and local and Indigenous knowledge** to ensure the conservation of native ecosystems and existing species.
- **NbS interventions must be implemented using legal safeguards to address the concerns and risks** that are associated with their implementation. Safeguards are measures to protect or to avoid risks (do no harm) while promoting benefits (do good). Among the risks that must be avoided by these safeguards, some critical ones are greenwashing, interventions that cause biodiversity loss such as monocultures and plantations, land grabbing, and other impacts to human rights. These safeguards must also ensure that the design and implementation of NbS prioritizes ecosystem integrity, structure and functions, as well as the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, women, and youth.
- NbS cannot be a vehicle for polluters to avoid eliminating their emissions through carbon offsets. **An overemphasis on NbS as offsets risks the commodification of nature and distracts from the necessary decarbonization that both science and justice demand.** NbS must be paired with concrete plans to eliminate emissions in line with the 1.5 degree target, rather than be a substitute for them.
- There are still tremendous challenges when it comes to the just and fair financing of NbS. **Government, private sector stakeholders and large international organisations must redirect funding to the conservation, restoration, and management of nature** through global or national programs, taxation schemes on heavy polluters, and through public-private partnerships, ensuring meaningful leadership opportunities for youth and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and a rightful share of benefits.

Youth are already taking action for biodiversity, nature, and climate on the ground in their communities and should be meaningfully supported to continue and scale up this work, rather than tokenized (or “youthwashed”) for top-down, exclusive activities and engagements. Youth, like nature and biodiversity, are underfunded, and both need significant increases in dependable and secure funding resources if we are to collectively achieve bold, ambitious, and necessary goals for both biodiversity and climate.

The “Nature-based Solutions” concept has helped nature come to the forefront of climate discussions and has helped bring climate and biodiversity policy, practice, and conversation closer together. **NbS can be innovative and useful tools to address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and inequality in an interconnected, intersectional way.**

But **for this to happen, we need legally agreed frameworks, strong safeguards, and strict standards and guidelines that don’t leave any room for misuse and misinterpretation, and instead center community leadership, prioritize ecosystem integrity and rights-based approaches, and be grounded in justice.**

We are the youth of today. We are both the future and the present. Bold, ambitious, and just actions need to be taken now and without delay, leaving no one behind and centering frontline communities and knowledge holders. **We have no time for tokenistic talk and unmeaningful action, and we will not tolerate polluters and decision-makers who co-opt and misuse “NbS” to evade their responsibilities and continue with the status quo.** Young people have been burdened with the feeling of being powerless and the fear of not being heard, while the time left to act runs closer to zero. **We will no longer let ourselves be weighed down - we will use our collective voices to call out NbS co-option and false solutions, and instead amplify real solutions that promote wide, systemic, and transformative change for current and future generations.**

