

Policy note on nature-based solutions

Nature-based solutions (NBS) has been a controversial term. This controversy is both related to the notion that nature should deliver solutions to human-made problems and concerning the content of the term. The Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment (ForUM Norway) believes that nature has important functions that are central to our ability to slow down climate change, as well as adapt to the changes that it is already too late to avoid. Nevertheless, it is crucial that nature-based solutions are not seen as an alternative to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Nature's contribution to addressing the climate crisis is primarily a supplement to extensive emission cuts. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the value of nature is not primarily founded in the services it gives, something that should also influence the priority given to nature. ForUM therefore believes that only measures that take nature into consideration should be referred to as nature-based solutions, while measures that lead to natural destruction should not be included in a definition of nature-based solutions. An example of this is so-called greenwashing, where the concern is that companies, governments, and intergovernmental organizations are renaming their highly harmful practices into "green" practices.

ForUM believes that measures that facilitate nature's ability to (naturally) store carbon and strengthen nature's resilience in the face of increasing extreme weather and safeguard biodiversity should be given priority. Examples of this are the protection of intact nature, the restoration of degraded nature and regulations that make the use of nature more sustainable. This is in stark contrast to the single fixation of natural measures that extensive tree planting leads to, where species diversity and properties in the forest floor are lost.

Intact nature is irreplaceable, and in decline worldwide. Ancient forests, marshes and coral reefs are examples of habitats in Norway which are important natural carbon stocks, contribute to resistance to extreme weather and are home to a number of species. At the same time, these types of nature are vulnerable to climate change, decommissioning and pollution. Norway should continue its commitments to 30 percent protection of both land and marine areas, but it is crucial that protection is effective, representative, and implemented in line with human rights and the ILO's core conventions on the rights of indigenous peoples. This means that exemptions from conservation provisions should not be made, that the most valuable and rare nature must be prioritised, and that protection should be carried out for all habitat types and inclusive dialogue on traditional and sustainable use within protection must be carried out.

Where nature is already deteriorating, restoration can be a useful tool, but it is important that restoration is not seen as an equal alternative to the protection of intact nature. Restoration of marshes and wetlands, among other things, has had a good effect on natural carbon storage and contributed to the strengthening of species diversity. Together with the restoration of degraded nature, sustainable use of nature is central, it is especially important to limit particularly harmful activities such as bottom trawling and clear cutting of forests. Consideration for nature and ecosystems must be given a far more central place in the management of land, also outside the protected areas.

The fairness approach must be central to projects that have emission cuts, adaptation, and sustainable development as targets, both in Norway and internationally. Consideration for marginalised groups such as indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and small farmers must be addressed. It is particularly important that neither protection nor use has unreasonable consequences for local people who have managed nature sustainably for generations, while at the same time experiencing serious consequences of climate change and thus having a double burden. Furthermore, the development of renewable energy sources must benefit locals through jobs and access to energy, while at the same time not conflicting with their livelihoods. A large proportion of the world's poor and marginalised are small farmers who are exposed to the effects

of climate change. A commitment to nature-based solutions that facilitate natural carbon uptake can contribute to both poverty reduction and significant emission reductions in the agricultural sector globally.

Thorough impact assessments, consultations, and consultation rounds in both official and local languages, as well as consent, must form the basis for all land-based renewable energy projects to ensure that they do not compromise the rights of local people. Clear competence requirements must form the basis for all impact assessments, both to safeguard the rights of local people and to provide sufficient professional basis for assessing the natural consequences. International conventions must address clear requirements for human rights and environmental due diligence. Conventions must clearly reject states' reporting on internationally illegal infrastructure development in occupied territories as part of national climate measures, or at a minimum make it clear that national climate measures can only be reported on if they take place within a country's own borders.