

# Nature Opportunities for Human Security



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**EMG**



# United Nations Environment Management Group Nexus Dialogue on Biodiversity in the context of Human Security and Wellbeing

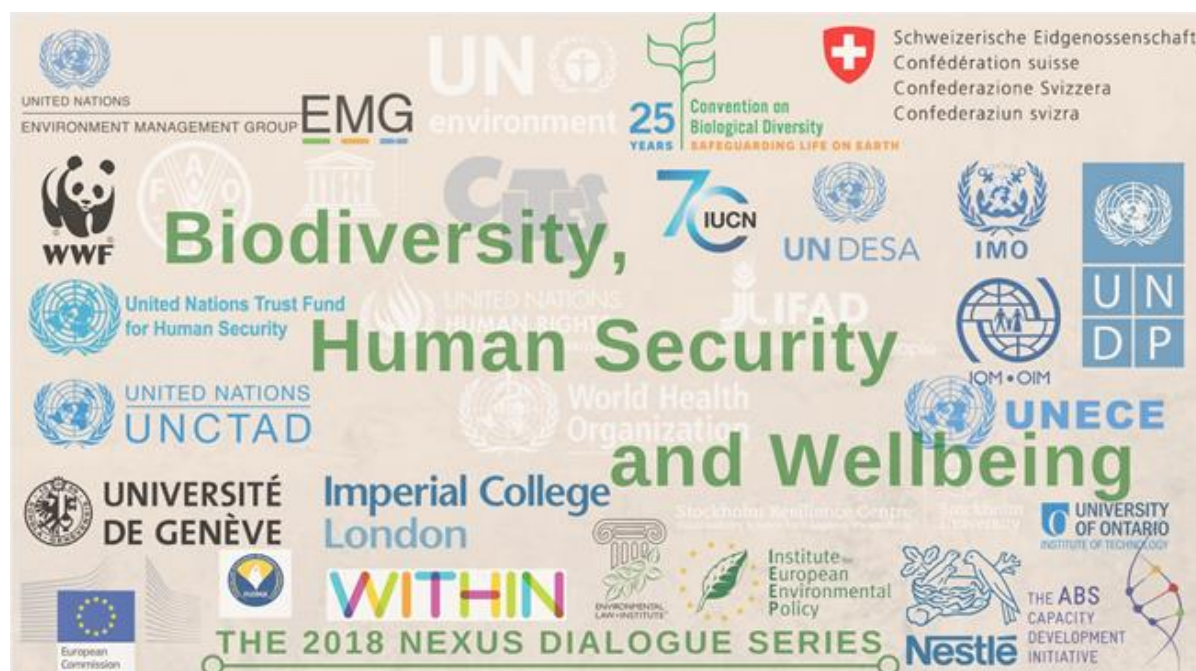
## *Mainstreaming Biodiversity through Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue in the framework of the 2030 Agenda*

The Nexus Dialogue organized by United Nations Environment Management Group on 2-3 May in Geneva explored and highlighted the importance of biodiversity in supporting human security and wellbeing, through exploring successful narratives and examining the main challenges of mainstreaming biodiversity in various sectors. The Dialogue also considered how UN agencies and other partners could enhance collaboration as well as individual efforts to support progress towards global biodiversity targets as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Dialogue put biodiversity in the spotlight across the UN system and beyond. Over 100 participants represented 55 different entities, including 17 UN agencies, representatives of 10 governments, various universities, research institutes and NGOs as well as the private sector. Over two days, 45 speakers shared the experiences of their organizations working towards biodiversity mainstreaming. Participants shared a wide range of experiences which highlighted the interdependencies of biodiversity and various components of human security and wellbeing, from human rights, food, health and water, to climate change, disaster risk reduction, trade, migration, and conflict. The dialogue also addressed the communication strategies necessary to support biodiversity mainstreaming.

The Dialogue was organized in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, with the support of the Swiss Government and the technical support of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

The following UN agencies presented their efforts towards biodiversity mainstreaming during the Dialogue: CBD, CITES, FAO, IFAD, HSU, IMO, IOM, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNECE, UN Environment, UNESCO, WHO. Experiences from civil society, academia and the private sector additionally enriched the discussions.



## Nexus Dialogue Outcome

Significant progress has been made in recognizing the two-way interactions between biodiversity and the various constituents of human security and wellbeing. The same way that biodiversity loss threatens the core of human security, weak human security exacerbates biodiversity loss and natural resource degradation.

There is growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity in underpinning human security and wellbeing. A few notable examples are the recognition of the role of pollinators in supporting food security, the 'One Health' approach<sup>1</sup>, recognizing that human health and animal health are interdependent and bound to the health of their ecosystems, the recognition that solutions to climate change could be found in biodiversity management in forests and wider landscapes, and the recognition of the inter-dependency of human rights and biodiversity by the highest levels of the United Nations.

At the same time, biodiversity can be negatively affected by some actions taken in pursuit of human security, and thereby undermine the wider sustainability of human security itself. Notable examples are the intensification and expansion of agricultural land to ensure food security and the construction of infrastructure to provide energy and water security. Environmental safeguards are increasingly being adopted to mitigate such impacts, and consumers are increasingly aware of such impacts.

Despite the many examples of successful mainstreaming of biodiversity in various sectors of the economy and society, there remains considerable opportunity to scale-up such efforts. The key is to move from the recognition of the importance of biodiversity to the integration of biodiversity in decision making and practice.

The following recommendations, identified during the Dialogue, aim to strengthen the recognition of the role of biodiversity in achieving human security and wellbeing outcomes as well as to support progress towards existing biodiversity targets and the development of a post-2020 global strategy for biodiversity.

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1. *Ensuring stronger political support for biodiversity within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*
  2. *Learning to deal with complexities of biodiversity and nature*
  3. *Finding effective ways to deliver multiple benefits while addressing trade-offs*
  4. *Urgently stepping up the integration of biodiversity in policy and strengthening governance*
  5. *Seeking synergies with other issues to integrate Global Agendas and to explore new nexuses*
  6. *Shifting our focus to positive communication and targeted messaging*
  7. *Forming strong partnerships with long-term horizons*
  8. *Championing and mainstreaming innovative approaches*
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<sup>1</sup> If you are interested in knowing more about the 'One Health' approach follow this [link](#).

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## ***1. Ensuring stronger political support for biodiversity within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***

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There is great need for stronger political support to champion biodiversity at the international, national and local levels. Political leaders and businesses across different sectors need to increase the global political profile of biodiversity, highlighting its vital role for human security and wellbeing. It is not possible to halt biodiversity loss without strong leadership and high-level coalitions that bring attention to the issue. The lack of strong support could be due to the complexity of the topic, to shortcomings in communicating to the relevant stakeholders and to the lack of widespread understanding of the important role of biodiversity in sustaining human security and wellbeing.

By presenting these outcomes at a high-level event organized at the High-Level Political Forum in July 2018, we intend to seek stronger political support from the UN system, member states and businesses. We aim to communicate and stress the relevance of biodiversity in the framework of the 2030 Agenda, including through the development of a post-2020 global strategy for biodiversity. Greater political will could result in mainstreaming biodiversity agenda more widely, leading to behavioural change and action at the international, national and local level. The United Nations' leaders should lead the way in the global call for action to halt biodiversity loss.



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## 2. Learning to deal with complexities of biodiversity and nature

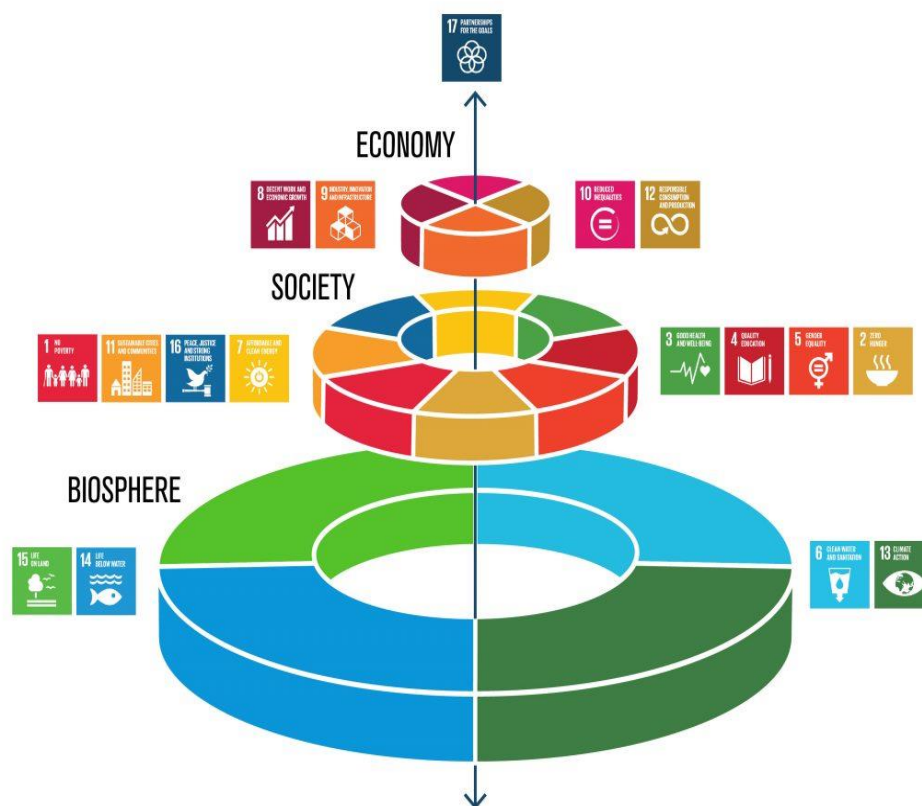
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Biodiversity is a complex concept. It includes the **variety, abundance and distribution of species**, identified as animals, plants, fungi, etc. Biodiversity also includes the **diversity of ecosystems, their functions and processes**, which provide many benefits to human security and wellbeing, such as regulation of quality and quantity of water and carbon sequestration. Biodiversity also includes **genetic diversity**, which provides resilience and adaptive capacity, and underpins the diversity of global food systems.

It is vital to understand that nature does not work in the way institutions are set up, it is not compartmentalized and it cannot be dealt with without considering all the variables and drivers involved. The same way we cannot take components out of a complex system and expect it to function the same way, we cannot modify life on Earth and expect the system to carry on without compromise.

When addressing biodiversity, we deal with a range of natural and heavily modified systems, which are extremely important for all biodiversity, including humans and contribute to human security and wellbeing. For example, the biodiversity of agricultural landscapes is essential to food production, and sustainable management of forests can conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable biomass for food and energy production.

Even though the overall concept of biodiversity might be complex, we need to learn from this complexity and use it as an opportunity to learn from nature, to create new and innovative partnerships and to find innovative ways of protecting life on Earth.



Graphics by Jorke van der Kolk

Figure 1- A graphic depiction of the SDG framework that recognizes the essential underpinning of the biosphere in achieving the economic and social aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Illustration: Azote Images for Stockholm Resilience Centre



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### 3. Finding effective ways to deliver multiple benefits while addressing trade-offs

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There are often multiple benefits that can be achieved through considering biodiversity in the context of human security and wellbeing. Maintaining our ecosystems intact reduces the risk of exposure to infectious diseases and helps healthy populations of pollinators to support greater agricultural yields. The conservation of forests keeps carbon out of the atmosphere and improves air quality, whilst providing habitat for many species.

However, in many circumstances there are trade-offs to consider as well. Land use choices for food production or the expansion of bio-energy productions in areas important for biodiversity are cases where trade-offs are challenging for decision-makers and managers. When in need for food security or when livelihoods are jeopardized biodiversity does not always seem like a priority in decision-making.

Policies, plans and decisions need to explicitly recognize such co-benefits and trade-offs. By identifying economic value for biodiversity, the co-benefits can be better explained and justified at project level. We can make better informed decisions by analysing co-benefits and trade-offs throughout supply chains and life cycles of products. Scenarios can also be useful tools to explore the implications of evident trade-offs, and to better understand the uncertainties associated with such decisions. Another way to ensure the consideration of such co-benefits and trade-offs is by looking at biodiversity management in the broader framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and including all stakeholders in the decision-making process.

*Figure 2 - Luke Bell, National Geographic 2017*



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#### 4. Urgently stepping up integration of biodiversity in policy and strengthening governance

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We recognize the pressing need for further mainstreaming biodiversity in the work of UN agencies, national governments and businesses, while promoting stronger institutions, policies and strategies that support the biodiversity agenda especially at national level. Strong institutions can facilitate the integration of biodiversity in national priorities and strategic planning. This cross sectoral integration could in turn improve governance mechanisms to effectively help in the conservation and use of biodiversity to support human security and wellbeing.

One of the main challenges has been equipping environmental ministries, organizations and entities with the arguments, communication tools and processes to engage with other sectoral ministries and organizations. The entities responsible for biodiversity mainstreaming need to be equipped to effectively communicate and demonstrate the importance of biodiversity to their interlocutors, but many countries lack the capacity to drive biodiversity mainstreaming and policy implementation. Biodiversity remains an unfamiliar concept to many, which adds to the challenges faced by many responsible ministries.

There is a need for more coherent and shared governance across relevant sectors in relation to biodiversity and issues linked to human security. Initial steps can be taken in communications, engagement and joint planning. Nation-wide engagement is needed in the development of national biodiversity strategies and actions plans and further collaboration is needed in creating planning tools in various sectors. There is also need for further funding and research to strengthen links and knowledge on the benefits of such cross sectoral collaboration to good governance. Forming appropriate policies and encouraging good governance can be the key to biodiversity preservation and, in turn, good biodiversity management can support and maintain good governance.



Figure 3 - Dr. Jane Goodall, Messenger of Peace, renowned scientist, and passionate communicator on biodiversity

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## 5. Seeking synergies with other issues to integrate global agendas and to explore new nexuses

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In a world that increasingly recognizes the importance of integrated approaches, biodiversity is not the only issue on the agenda to be mainstreamed in policies and practice. Other issues include, for example, human rights, gender and climate change. There may be value in learning from mainstreaming and integration carried out by those communities. A good example is the Global Pact for the Environment<sup>2</sup>, which aims to cluster the major principles that guide environmental action in a single document with legal force.

The strongest support to biodiversity mainstreaming can be found in the wider principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which are indispensable foundations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. The important dependencies between biodiversity and human rights have already been established by the work on the UN Human Rights Council. Standards and guidelines are now required to support the implementation of the 2018 Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment<sup>3</sup> in relation to biodiversity.

There is a clear need to explore new nexuses between biodiversity and other environmental issues in relation to topics such as migration, conflict and improving resilience. For example, we need to start considering human migration together with species migration, to look closer at biodiversity conservation as a way to reduce migration and include environmental considerations when addressing conflict prevention. To do so successfully, we will need to break silos and make sure various sectors work together towards human security and wellbeing.

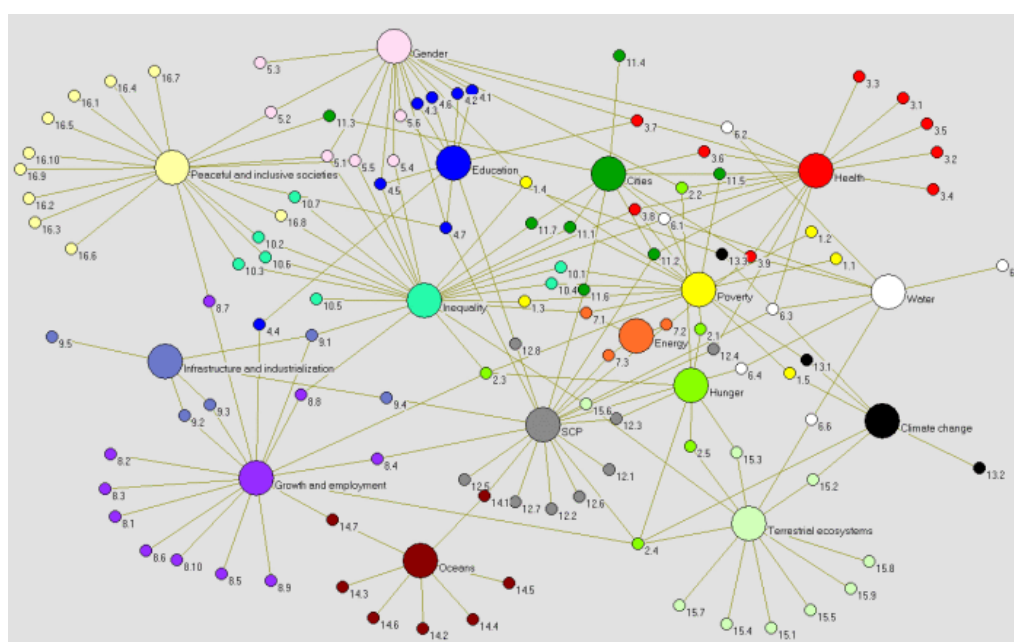


Figure 4 - Integrated Nature of SDGs (Le Blanc, 2015)

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<sup>2</sup> If you are interested in knowing more about Global Pact follow this [link](#).

<sup>3</sup> If you are interested in knowing more about the report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment follow this [link](#).



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## 6. *Shifting focus to positive communication and targeted messaging*

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The Nexus Dialogue strongly recognized the importance - and challenges - of communicating biodiversity. Strengthened communications on the interactions between biodiversity and the various components of human security and wellbeing are urgently required. Current messages on biodiversity loss and of its effects on human security and wellbeing are failing to elicit individual and institutional behavioural change. There is a need for simple and more positive messaging to resonate with all stakeholders, presenting sector-specific and implementable solutions to challenges building on biodiversity. To reach a wider public we need to tell stories with clarity and let people make their own connections with the interdependencies of biodiversity with human security and wellbeing.

While there was consensus on the importance of positive and solutions-oriented messaging, there was debate over whether a specific goal, equivalent to the 2-degree Centigrade target in the climate change community, should be voiced for biodiversity.

From across the various sessions of the Nexus Dialogue it was clear that narratives will need to be better targeted as part of different communication strategies for different communities. Such recognition complicates the use of the generic term “biodiversity” in relation to many aspects of mainstreaming. During the dialogue, terms such as “Earth”, “nature”, “natural capital”, “ecosystem services”, “ecosystems”, “nature based solutions” and “biodiversity” were used interchangeably in the discussions on different components of human security and wellbeing. There is need for target-specific communication material with wording that best resonates with a specific sector or community.

Campaigns such as “Earth Hour” were mentioned as successful communication strategies that created simplified and action-oriented language. “Superhero-like” narratives to fight biodiversity loss emerged as one possible new strategy. Story telling that involves people in the solution process and creates a personal connection would inspire the kind of confidence that leads to change. It was widely recognized that further work would be useful to better articulate the evidence base on the various links between biodiversity and human security and wellbeing, and develop associated narratives that will better resonate across relevant communities. The use of visualization tools such as pictures, videos, maps, infographics can create powerful simple narratives while staying true to the complexity of biodiversity.

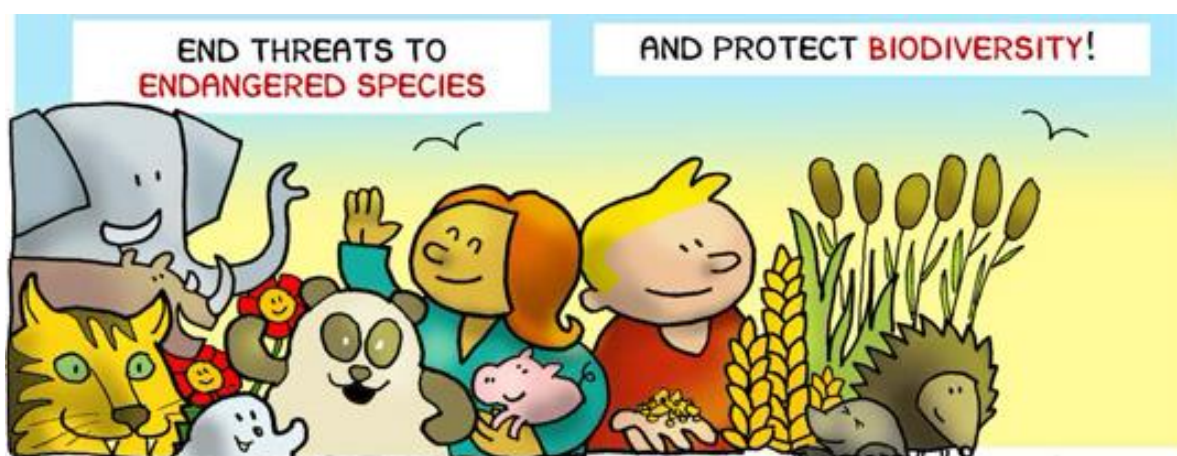


Figure 5 - Comics by Margreet De Heer

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## 7. *Forming strong partnerships with long-term horizons*

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The Nexus Dialogue showed that biodiversity has an important role to play in support of many different sectors, and that stronger partnerships among stakeholders will be essential in achieving positive outcomes for biodiversity, human security and wellbeing.

Further multi-stakeholder dialogues bringing together the UN system, Member States, businesses and actors from all constituents of human security and wellbeing, would enable us to move away from the silos that currently characterize the biodiversity and human security discourse. Cross-sectoral approaches are recognised as the only way we can truly contribute to the achievement of the full range of the Sustainable Development Goals. Biodiversity targets will not be achieved unless the needs of all people and communities are taken into consideration, with particular regard for those that are most directly dependant on local biodiversity for their security and wellbeing.

Particularly strong partnerships will be needed between climate and biodiversity communities. As highlighted during the Dialogue, current international political efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss are siblings, both arising from the Rio Summit of 1992. With 25 years of international political efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss, both science and experiences on the ground have shown that making progress on one without considering the other is just not possible.



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## 8. *Championing and mainstreaming innovative approaches*

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One of the most prominent messages heard during the Nexus Dialogue was the need for new and innovative approaches when tackling biodiversity loss and supporting human security and wellbeing.

Innovations are required in:

- Narratives communicating the role and importance of biodiversity.
- Capacity development and technology transfer to empower people at the local level.
- Tools and technologies to track and report on biodiversity, these may include data platforms and reporting tools on indicators and targets of Sustainable Development Goals linking various sectors and the use of electronic data in monitoring biodiversity trade.
- Interactive mapping tools to support biodiversity management, monitoring and decision-making, which can be used at national level to document and showcase national projects.
- Partnerships that can break silos and help mainstream biodiversity across different sectors, especially private-public partnerships.
- Approaches to policy implementation and governance that support integration of biodiversity across sectors.

There remains a strong role and opportunity for the UN system and partners to develop, support and incentivize such innovations, and to actively promote the scaling up of successful approaches to mainstreaming biodiversity in the context of human security and wellbeing.



## Acknowledgements

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