

UN Environment Management Group  
UN Common Approach to Biodiversity: Webinar Series

# Urban Spatial Planning for Biodiversity Conservation and Preservation Webinar

## Outcome Document

The [United Nations Common Approach to Biodiversity](#) (Common Approach) webinar series launched on Wednesday 24 April 2024, with the first webinar titled “Urban Spatial Planning for Biodiversity Conservation and Preservation”. Hosted by the [United Nations Environment Management Group](#) (EMG) and the [United Nations Human Settlements Programme](#) (UN-Habitat), this event brought together experts on urban settlements, city designers and environmental specialists to raise awareness on the need to take urgent action at urban and peri-urban levels to prevent the degradation and destruction of natural habitat, and to reflect on lessons learned from actions being taken at global and national levels to preserving and conserving biodiversity through urban spatial planning.

The webinar served as an opportunity to foster interagency collaboration, promote awareness on the Common Approach in support of the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and engage with different stakeholders involved in urban spatial planning. Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned in coordinating biodiversity action in multi-stakeholder environments were discussed with a view to identify ways to increase action.

### Event rundown and key messages:

Mr. Andrew Rudd from UN-Habitat provided a scene setting synopsis of the impacts of rapid urbanisation, informal development, land-use change, and the significant threats to biodiversity. In addition, UN-Habitat presented an overview of the actions being taken at a global level to integrate biodiversity in urban-spatial planning, including pro-biodiversity actions that can be undertaken by UN agencies as part of the implementation of the Common Approach.

The event featured case studies from the cities of Santiago (Chile), San José (Costa Rica), and Nairobi (Kenya), offering insights into the impacts of rapid urbanization within their respective regions. These

case studies illustrated the role of urban spatial planning in reducing biodiversity loss as well as preserving, conserving, restoring, and enhancing biodiversity, while emphasising the key ecosystem services biodiversity provides to urban environments and their inhabitants.

Mr. Rodrigo Caimanque, from the [University of Chile](#), provided an overview of the [Stgo+ Green Infrastructure Plan](#), including the lessons learned and challenges faced. The Stgo+ Green Infrastructure Plan serves as an indicative strategic planning instrument, built through collaboration of over 50 stakeholders from public, civil, research and private sector organizations. It seeks to transform Santiago, Chile, a fragmented city with a notable deficit in green infrastructure, into a more sustainable and resilient city by consolidating an integrated network of green spaces, promoting equity, preserving and including nature, and connecting Santiago with the regional territory.

From the [Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements](#) of Costa Rica, and [University of Costa Rica](#), Mr. Manuel Morales summarized Costa Rica's activities concerning urban spatial planning. The nation is experiencing an urban crisis due to the rapidly expanding Greater Metropolitan Area. To address these challenges, Costa Rica is implementing a series of programs and strategies for housing and human settlements. Costa Rica's framework to address regenerative urban planning is shaped around 3 areas; the Right to the city; the Right to landscape and healthy environment; Social and urban structure.

Mr. Mumo Musuva provided a more localized case study on the [Nairobi Rivers Commission](#)'s work to restore Nairobi River in Kenya by taking an integrated approach to urban spatial planning. The Commission has developed a long-term plan to involve environmental, urban, social, economic and climate resilient transformations to regenerate the river basin.

## Main Takeaways:

### Urgent action is needed at urban and peri-urban levels to prevent the degradation and destruction of natural habitat and biodiversity:

- Land use change is, in almost every area of the world, the most significant threat to the environment. Land use is primarily converted for agricultural purposes, with the secondary transition being for urban areas and infrastructure.
- The density of global cities is declining resulting in an increase of urban sprawl.
- Main challenges also include changes in available land area and population growth: for example, the land area of the Greater Metropolitan Area of Costa Rica has tripled since 1979 leading to an urban crisis, while the population of Kenya is expected to double by 2050.
- Actions at urban and peri-urban levels shall consider different scales, as well as the relations and dynamics among these. For example:

#### Global level:

- Through the Common Approach, the UN System has committed to integrate biodiversity and nature-based solutions into UN policy and programme planning and delivery. Within this commitment, the UN System expresses a shared recognition on the need to address urban expansion, a driver of biodiversity loss, through sustainable urban and regional planning.
- Through the GBF, Member States have committed to address urban spatial planning, particularly within Target 1 which references spatial planning and effective management, and Target 12 which directly addressed the enhancement of green spaces and urban planning for human well-being and biodiversity.
- In 2022, UN-Habitat published the "[Cities and Nature: Planning for the Future](#)" paper, aiming to provide strong examples of how to preserve green spaces inside cities and at the edge.

- In 2023, the UN Habitat Assembly adopted the Resolution “[Biodiverse and Resilient Cities: Mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services into urban-territorial planning](#)”, it explores how nature-based solutions can be used in combination with other types of interventions to generate multiple benefits for biodiversity and strengthen the resilience of cities. The government of Costa Rica contributed to the formulation of this resolution.

National and local level examples provided in the case studies:

- In Chile, the [Stgo+ Green Infrastructure Plan](#) considers different scales at the city level (Macro, Meso and Micro scale), allowing the development of particular initiatives and projects for each scale, in collaboration with different partners and stakeholders.
- In Costa Rica, urban challenges are addressed through national policy frameworks such as the [National Urban and Environment Agenda](#). At a sub-national level, Costa Rica is in the process of developing a neighbourhood improvement strategy as a public policy instrument that will improve coordination between the government and municipalities on the management of informal irregular settlements.
- In Kenya, the Kenyan Government has adopted river planning corridors which requires the review of land-use to allow for replanning and re-engineering of these areas. At the sub-national level, the city of Nairobi is developing a Nairobi Rivers Vision for 2050, which will consider the role of biodiversity.

**Multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral collaboration and dialogue is key:** The panellists shared the view that bringing together stakeholders from public, civil, research and private sector organizations to engage in bilateral meetings, workshops, training sessions and collective mapping exercises on urban spatial planning for biodiversity conservation is key to achieve positive results. Promoting equity and fostering unity allows stakeholders to embrace the complexity of these cross-cutting issues as one. On this foundation they can identify and target action towards agreed shared goals and strategies, leading to transparent governance arrangements with clear roles and responsibilities for the different actors involved throughout the entire process (from diagnosis to implementation).

Moreover, establishing a shared understanding and developing a common language on biodiversity, ecosystem services, green infrastructure, and other related concepts, increases trust and communication amongst the different stakeholders.

**Quality, configuration and interconnectivity of biodiverse spaces:** In urban spatial planning, biodiversity shouldn't be solely considered by the quantity in the urban area; rather, by the complexity and configuration of green and biodiverse spaces within the urban area.

Particular attention should be paid to the creation of a consolidated and integrated network of green spaces which preserves nature within cities and connects the cities green spaces with the regional territory, for example through green corridors.

**Prioritization and scaling:** Prioritization programmes and strategies, such as urban renewal strategies, regularization and relocation of informal and irregular settlements, allows planners to identify strong imperatives and related opportunities to minimise loss and enhance biodiversity. Prioritization helps identify areas where land use conflicts may occur and mitigate the impact of biodiversity loss. Multiple sectors should be considered when prioritizing efforts, such as environmental, urban, social and economic.

**Recognising human-environment interdependencies:** Institutions and communities must understand that human development and nature conservation and sustainable use must be addressed together. Communities are an important part of creating value for local ecosystems.

**Overcoming sectoral silos:** Sectoral fragmentation is a challenge at all levels, both within the UN System and Member States. There is a lack of coordination on the various existing initiatives addressing urban spatial planning and biodiversity.

**Recognising the value of ecosystems and biodiversity, including its economic value:** benefits and ecosystem services provided by nature and ecosystems (e.g.: pollination, carbon storage, nutrient recycling, etc.), particularly in cities, are not well-known. Stakeholders should recognise the financial value which biodiversity brings to urban areas, including the value of ecosystem services. For example, the Kenyan government is progressing towards understanding the economic value of the Nairobi River Basin, however it is most likely that the current estimates undervalue biodiversity. Additionally, stakeholders should identify opportunities to invest in green spaces.

Moreover, urban planning should consider the role of nature and nature-based solutions in mitigating disaster risks, such as extreme flooding events. This is of particular importance to Costa Rica as, of the country's 600 informal settlements, 53% are located in the centre of the country and face significant disaster risk.

**Investing in Green Infrastructure:** Reviews should be taken to explore how can we ensure sustained investments in green infrastructure at the urban and peri-urban level, particularly in developing countries and cities with high levels of inequality and habitat fragmentation.

**Integrating equity and gender equality:** There is a correlation between nature, community care and a gender-sensitive approach in urban planning. Further investigation is warranted to understand how gender equality can be most effectively integrated into urban planning, particularly its linkages with biodiversity conservation.

Moreover, urban planning should address equity. As observed in the Chilean case study, Santiago's green spaces are not allocated evenly, with poorer parts of the city having fewer green spaces per inhabitant.

**Measuring the impact of spatial planning and developing green infrastructure:** There is a need to develop and apply methodologies and establish clear indicators on how to measure the impacts of spatial planning actions and the creation of green infrastructure in urban and peri-urban areas on biodiversity. This is considered key to track progress and monitor the effectiveness of such actions.

## Conclusions

- Addressing urban spatial planning for biodiversity conservation and preservation necessitates action across multiple scales, from global to sub-national. This undertaking requires integrated and collaborative efforts involving all stakeholders, sectors, and administrative levels, with a crucial emphasis on incorporating the inhabitants of these areas. Sharing resources, knowledge, and skills, alongside enhancing cooperation and coordination, will be instrumental in fostering a cohesive management approach to address this pressing human-environment challenge.
- The UN System is well placed to serve and support Member States in implementing global, national, and local urban spatial planning and biodiversity strategies and frameworks to significantly improve the quality and connectivity of biodiverse areas in and around urban areas, bridging the gap between

the global and sub-national levels. The UN Common Approach serves as a general framework that can guide such actions, in support of GBF implementation.

## Credits

The UN EMG and UN-Habitat would like to thank the speakers and the organizations for their valuable time and contributions to the webinar.

### Moderator:

- Paola Deda, Director of Forests, Land and Housing Division, UN Economic Commission for Europe

### Presenters:

- Andrew Rudd, Urban Environment Officer, UN-Habitat
- Rodrigo Caimanque, Assistant Professor of Urban Planning, University of Chile
- Manuel Morales Alpizar, Advisor at Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements of Costa Rica and Professor at University of Costa Rica
- Mumo Musuva, Commissioner, [Nairobi Rivers Commission](#)

## Contact:

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### Webinar Series Objectives:

- Promote and support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Promote the implementation of the Common Approach to Biodiversity.
- Support Member States in developing NBSAPs.
- Highlight biodiversity-related activities within the UN System.
- Promote the integration of biodiversity considerations into UN policies and programmes.
- Facilitate information sharing between UN organisations.
- Highlight case studies and lessons learned.
- Raise awareness of systematic challenges around biodiversity.

### UN Common Approach to Biodiversity:

In May 2021, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) endorsed the “[Common Approach to Integrating Biodiversity and Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable Development into United Nations Policy and Programme Planning and Delivery](#)” (Common Approach).

Through the Common Approach, the United Nations system expresses a shared recognition of the urgency of acting and a commitment to mainstreaming biodiversity and nature-based solutions through collective action [Insert Upcoming Events](#)

### EMG Issue Management Group on Biodiversity:

Established in 2021, the [IMG on Biodiversity](#) facilitates and enables a streamlined approach to implementing the Common Approach. One of the key activities under the IMG is to raise awareness and share knowledge on the Common Approach by stimulating interagency dialogue and cooperation.