



HLPF 2019: EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND ENSURING INCLUSIVENESS AND EQUALITY WWF OVERARCHING BRIEF

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Summary

Significant advances have been made in economic and social development around the world, including in economic growth, poverty eradication, improving human wellbeing. However, it is clear that these gains have been made through unsustainable consumption and exploitation of the world's limited natural resources. Inequality, across many dimensions including income, health and education, has increased. If we continue along this path, we jeopardise further progress and a secure future for coming generations, especially for those being left behind. We must urgently make a just transition to a net carbon-neutral society and halt and reverse nature loss, including through green and blue finance and shifting to clean energy and environmentally friendly food production. By scaling up the use of nature-based solutions to climate, food, land and development challenges, we can forge an integrated approach to climate, nature and sustainable development. Sustainably managing, protecting and restoring natural habitats and ecosystems provides important benefits for people's livelihoods, wellbeing and inclusion, and can accelerate progress on the SDGs.

Our planet's natural systems are collapsing, and this is having a direct impact on human life and wellbeing. More and more people are coming to realise that our disregard of the environment in public and private decision-making has been, and continues to be, a grievous mistake. People are taking to the streets in protest against inaction on climate change and nature loss. Private sector recognition of the problems is also on the increase: extreme weather, climate policy failure and natural disasters are the top three global risks for 2019 identified by the World Economic Forum. Water shortages, biodiversity loss and large-scale displacement of people also rank in the top 10.

The concerns are well founded: each year more than seven million people die prematurely from air pollution, which includes 600,000 children (UN Human Rights 2019). In 2012, more than 12.6 million people died from environmental causes, which represents nearly one quarter of all deaths worldwide that year (UN Environment 2019). Biodiversity - the variety of life at genetic, species and ecosystem levels - is essential to our food and agriculture, and it is in severe decline. Nearly a third of fish stocks are overfished and a third of freshwater fish species are threatened with extinction. Ecosystems that supply clean water, protect against hazards and provide habitat for species such as pollinators, are declining rapidly (FAO 2019). Biodiversity and functioning ecosystems cushion societies against catastrophes and they support recovery afterwards. With the degradation of ecosystems, these roles can no longer be taken for granted.

Deterioration of our planet causes inequality, disempowers and excludes people

The state of the world's environment, and the unsustainable way in which natural resources are managed and distributed, directly impact on inclusiveness and equality for people. Although food production today is sufficient to satisfy global needs, approximately 11 per cent of the world's population is undernourished (IPBES 2019). Poor people and poor countries disproportionately bear the impacts of climate change, environmental exploitation and degradation and loss of nature. Rural poor people are most directly dependent on ecosystem goods and services for their everyday needs, ranging from food, building materials and medicines to climate regulation and clean water supplies. They are therefore most directly affected by the loss of biodiversity (while richer people can often afford substitutes). Around 1.6 billion people, including 60 million indigenous people, directly depend on natural ecosystems for their livelihoods (FAO 2014). At the same time, many indigenous peoples remain among the world's most marginalised, impoverished and vulnerable peoples.

Empower people to ensure a healthy environment for our future development

A healthy environment increases poor people's options for dealing with extreme events such as drought, disease and the effects of climate change, and therefore increases their resilience. A diverse agricultural base, for example, provides farmers' crops with more resistance to pests and diseases that may affect some crops but not others, and can buffer against market forces. Biodiversity can help mitigate such events and provide households with a critical 'safety net' during hard times. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation. At the same time, protecting human rights and empowering people helps to protect the environment. Recognising the rights, knowledge, institutions and values of indigenous peoples and local communities and promoting their participation in environmental governance often enhances their quality of life, as well as nature protection and restoration (IPBES 2019).

Nature-based solutions can help achieve multiple objectives

Substantial negative trends in nature and ecosystem services will undermine progress towards 35 of the 44 assessed targets of the SDGs, related to poverty, hunger, health, water, cities, climate, oceans and land (IPBES 2019), thereby threatening achievement of the SDGs as a whole. To accelerate progress, we need a **New Deal for Nature and People** that includes bold commitments and action to **halt and reverse nature loss by 2030**. Governments and non-state actors can no longer address climate, nature and sustainable development issues in silos, as they are closely interlinked. We need to make nature a top priority and forge an integrated approach to climate, nature and sustainable development. This can be achieved through scaled up **use of nature-based solutions to our environment and development challenges**. Nature-based solutions protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems, to address challenges such as climate change, food and water security or natural disasters. At the same time, nature-based solutions can bring important benefits including to human well-being and biodiversity.

Figure 1: Our biosphere underpins the SDGs.



Source: Stockholm Resilience Centre 2016

Our natural environment is the foundation of the SDGs

As *Figure 1* depicts, earth's biosphere, our natural environment, underpins the realisation of the SDGs. To ensure that nature can continue to provide essential services to those most in need of empowerment, inclusion and equality, at HLPF 2019 WWF is calling for:

- *Continuity of environmental targets through 2030, strengthened policy coherence, and investments that are aligned with nature for the benefit of all people (SDG 17)*

12 environment targets under the SDGs have a 2020 end date because they were based on targets originally agreed under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as part of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which conclude in 2020. The HLPF has a responsibility to ensure that there is a clear way forward to update these targets, maintaining policy alignment between the 2030 Agenda and the CBD. It will ensure the integrity of the 2030 Agenda with a strong and integrated environmental dimension. States should also review and repeal policies that support or promote environmentally harmful activities, and put in place policies that support investments in nature, including through new financial products.

- *Guaranteed safe civic space to ensure empowerment, inclusivity and equity for local communities (SDG 16)*

Partnerships between state and non-state actors for the SDGs must be inclusive of civil society organisations. In addition to this, indigenous peoples and local communities must be empowered to continue their positive contributions to sustainable development. This includes through public recognition of land, resource and self-determination rights; the application of the principle of free, prior and informed consent; and improved collaboration, benefit sharing and co-management arrangements of natural resources with local communities.

- *An end to illegal wildlife trade and associated corruption (SDG 16)*

Target 16.4 to "strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime" must include ending wildlife crime and corruption, which threatens livelihoods in rural communities.

- *Seismic shifts in energy, land and sea use and scaled up nature-based solutions in order to reduce CO2 emissions, foster adaptation and resilience and ensure climate justice (SDG 13)*

Nature-based solutions can provide over one-third of the climate mitigation needed between now and 2030 to stabilize warming to safe levels, and provide cost-effective options for nations to deliver on the Paris Climate Agreement while improving soil productivity, cleaning our air and water, and maintaining biodiversity (Griscom et al 2017). They can also provide low risk, low maintenance and low cost solutions for adapting to many climate change related hazards and impacts.

- *Responsible global consumption, production and supply chains to address inequality, achieve food security and combat climate change (SDG 10)*

Environmental degradation, loss of nature and labour exploitation in poor countries is often associated with the production of export goods that are consumed in wealthier countries. Transparent and responsible trade, markets, investments and finance must be developed for commodities, especially for those which pose risk to forests and other ecosystems, which many of the world's poorest people rely on to meet their basic needs.

- *Radical transformation towards a sustainable, fair and inclusive economy (SDG 8)*

Our economic model is destroying our planet. We need to ensure the true value of nature and its contributions to people are systematically factored into economic decisions and environmental externalities are incorporated into economic systems.

- *Embed education for sustainable development in both formal and informal education in order to promote achievement of the SDGs (SDG 4)*

Education is not only a fundamental right; it also forms a cornerstone of development. In the same way, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is fundamental to sustainable development. By shaping values and perspectives, and developing skills and knowledge, it plays a crucial role in the transformation towards a sustainable, equitable and peaceful society.

We can choose the way forward

Progress in economic and social development over the past century has, lamentably, also led to global environmental degradation and endangered the very systems that provide the basis for our future development. A sustainable future is possible, but only by urgently transitioning to a net carbon-neutral society and halting and reversing nature loss. This includes through green and blue finance; shifting to clean energy; scaling up and prioritising nature based solutions; more sustainable consumption and production; and by protecting, restoring and sustainably managing our land and sea. This will ensure the continued provision of essential ecosystem services that underpin the SDGs and provide for the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of people being left behind. Responsible management of the planet's finite natural resources also requires responsible interactions with one another. Empowering indigenous people and local communities, while fostering inclusive partnerships and participation across sectors, are key to successful SDGs implementation and a secure future for all.

WWF has also produced briefings on each SDG under review to support discussions at HLPF 2019, which can be found, along with other information on WWF's work to support the SDGs, at: https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/sustainable_development_goals/. For further enquiries please contact Claire Blanchard cblanchard@wwfint.org who will be attending the HLPF.