

K4D International Nature Learning Journey

Session 1: Our Relationship with Nature

26 May 2021, 09:00-10:30 GMT

Session overview

Lord Goldsmith

The UK is doing important work to provide leadership across the world in the fight to preserve our natural world. The overall statistics are bleak - about 30 football fields worth of forests are being lost every minute. We are rapidly depleting life in our oceans and around a million animals face extinction.

However, the world is waking up to the importance of tackling climate change. The UK is hosting the G7 this year and we are trying to make real advances with alignment to the Paris Agreement. The market is moving fast and driving big changes in the use of carbon, such as the decrease in the cost of solar panels and reduction in the use of coal.

But the same cannot be said for nature. Poverty and climate change have taken precedence in global matters over the concern for nature, but these issues are intertwined. We are all dependent on the natural world. About 1 billion people depend on the forest for their essential needs and about 1 billion people depend on fish as their main source of protein. Overfishing and land degradation are hitting the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world the hardest.

There is no pathway to net zero without nature but it is currently taking second place to climate change. The UK has put nature at the heart of our approach to climate change and poverty.

The UK is providing leadership domestically. We've put in place a 25-year environment plan to put nature on course to recovery. We're the first country to legislate for net zero. We're phasing out fossil fuel subsidies; legislating for biodiversity net gain in all new developments; and legislating to clean up our supply chain. But there is still a lot more to do.

We are also providing leadership internationally. The UK has doubled its climate finance to £11.6 billion with nearly a third committed to nature. Nature restoration will help create jobs and protect and restore landscapes and the marine environment. We hope to work more with indigenous people, who are often at the bottom of the economic and political ladder but are essential to protecting and preserving nature. We're building coalitions of countries committed to transforming land use subsidies. We are trying to break the link between commodities and deforestation through unprecedented dialogue. We are running an alliance protecting 30% of the world's ocean and land by 2030. And much more. If we are successful in these campaigns, the impact will be huge, shifting the incentives and turning the market into an engine of renewal.

Professor Nathalie Seddon, Nature based Solutions Initiative, University of Oxford (naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org)

The state of nature is showing that biodiversity is in free fall. 40% of primary productivity has been modified. We have seen an 82% decline in mammals and an 80% decline in wild fish since the rise of human civilisation. There has been a decline in the population size of animals and a change in understanding about our relationship with nature. Biodiversity and the health of our systems are in free fall and the world's emissions are still on the rise. The world is 1% warmer on average than in pre-industrial times and this is set to increase even further.

There is more poverty and inequality around the world. The risks to the global economy, climate action failure, the water crisis and the loss of biodiversity are serious issues that need to be addressed urgently. Biodiversity loss and climate change share some similar drivers and solutions.

Nature based solutions (NbS) was a term first used in 2008. The European Commission has a definition for it, but the most commonly accepted definition is by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Implementing NbS can help deal with other issues that impact people's lives.

Examples of NbS internationally include cocoa agroforestry in Sierra Leone; community wetland restoration in the Peruvian Andes; and urban forests in Wisconsin, USA. In the UK, some examples are tree planting and river wilding in the Lake District; restoring wetlands in Cambridgeshire; and Cairngorms Connect in Scotland.

NbS can reduce emissions arising from our use of lands and oceans. Estimating the global potential for NbS for mitigation is very challenging. We can only restore forest ecosystems in areas ecologically appropriate for forests. There are three pathways by which NbS can support human adaptation to climate change: by reducing exposure, reducing sensitivity and building adaptive capacity.

NbS for coastal defence projects are 2-5 times more cost effective compared to engineered structures. There are high levels of intention for NbS but they are currently not met by robust enough targets.

A focus on afforestation as climate solution can be problematic because it distracts from the need to keep fossil fuels in the ground. There has been a focus on planting rather than stewardship. NbS includes restoring soil health, bringing nature into our towns and cities, getting local people involved. It is important to understand the necessity of biodiversity and respect indigenous peoples' land. NbS can provide shelter from extreme weather and can ensure clean water is available all year round.

Dr Ina Porra, Economics, climate and environment adviser, FCDO **Case study on Nature based solutions in Costa Rica**

Costa Rica is one of the drivers of forest restoration. In the 1940s there was a growth in development as people fled from the war in Europe. In the 1980s Costa Rica faced several issues such as the Central American War, Economic War, the petrol and sugar crises and massive hyperinflation. The abolition of the army freed up more money for health and education systems. The Rio Convention has brought huge hopes for the country, although not all hopes were met and some farmers began to abandon land as its upkeep became too expensive. Payments for Environmental Services (PES) in Costa Rica gave cash incentives to landowners in exchange for positive environmental maintenance. A law came into place which made it illegal for forests to be cut down. Nature laws and policies have led to much positive change in Costa Rica in the last few decades. However, its implementation can't be taken for granted as with each new election these policies and laws need to be fought for to ensure their continuation.

DISCUSSION

How do we take NbS to scale? Communities in the Global South and around the world have been doing NbS for generations. For example, Bangladeshi floating gardens – using a water plant to create floating beds of vegetation in which vegetables are grown – are effective at preserving access to nutrition despite flooding. Local solutions that work can be spotlighted locally and shared horizontally. Some communities have dealt with unpredictability for generations, whilst for others it's a new issue.

We have begun to look at **top down approaches to scaling up** in Costa Rica and China, and also at **scaling out initiatives** by replicating small and successful initiatives. (See

<https://pubs.iied.org/16639iied>). Using government budget to approach multiple objectives, both social and environmental. Have to be careful, but it is possible to achieve scale.

In Costa Rica, there were many mistakes along the way which are opportunities for learning. Every four years the programme needs to be defended to a new Government, to maintain funding and benefits to the country. Monitoring and enforcement through payment is a meaningful incentive to stick to the law.

NbS is a framework which includes other approaches such as EbA (ecosystem-based adaptation) and eco-DDR (ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction). It does not replace these. They are all linked, and address different challenges through different mechanisms, underneath the umbrella of NbS.

The science and evidence from across the world are clear that **nature is our life support system** and therefore needs to be integral to governments and business decision making. Exciting to see different communities – biodiversity, climate change groups – are now working together and having this conversation.

We will not be able to tackle these issues with instruments which were made to work in a vacuum. We need to **invest in collective arrangements**, including traditional and informal institutions. Be very careful how these are implemented, to not exacerbate poverty and power imbalances further.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

[K4D Learning Journey on International Nature course overview](#)

Session 1 outline and videos:

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