

OPINION: Amplifying voices for nature at COP28

-By Lakshmi Menon and Kachan Kargwal

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) convenes annually for international climate scientists, policymakers, and experts to deliberate on pathways towards the critical goal of 1.5 degree Celsius. Besides catalysing global action, it serves as a networking hub hosting diverse side events with extensive media coverage, bringing climate change into living rooms worldwide. As high-level ministerial groups navigate climate science findings and activists push for emission reductions, commitments to conserve and restore nature as a means to meet climate goals often get overshadowed. Although several international conventions prioritise nature conservation, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, their visibility is way lower than the climate COPs.

Underlining the Nature-Climate Nexus

Climate change is a universally urgent issue that impacts all nations, with interlinked consequences for economies, societies, and ecosystems. At the seat of this problem lies the unchecked, irreversible land-use change affecting about 32 per cent of the Earth's terrestrial area. [COP28](#) provides an opportune moment to shed some light on prioritising nature and biodiversity conservation, alongside carbon-centric strategies.

A slow but positive change was seen at COP26, where 137 countries signed a pact to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030. Subsequently at COP27, nature-based solutions (NbS) were formally integrated into UNFCCC negotiations for the first time. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of NbS—which emphasises actions to safeguard, manage, and rehabilitate ecosystems for tackling societal challenges, while benefiting both human well-being and biodiversity—played a pivotal role in this integration. The COP27 decision text included specific references to NbS in the forest section, underscoring people-led, biodiversity-centred actions for local, social benefits that also slash greenhouse gas emissions. COP27 also introduced ENACT (Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for an Accelerated Climate Transformation), an initiative aiming to unify and enhance collaboration among existing NbS initiatives and partnerships.

Climate Finance for Nature-based Solutions

NbS can help in meeting 40% of climate mitigation goals and offer 26% reduction in climate hazard intensity. Efforts such as planting native trees, restoring derelict lands, enhancing soil practices, and agroforestry can play a substantial role not only in reducing carbon excess in the atmosphere, but also in aiding adaptation to extreme climate risks and providing sustainable livelihoods, while fostering biodiversity richness. Yet, though the potential for climate-biodiversity opportunities in nature-based action is vast, policy, finance, and implementation mechanisms fall noticeably short. A 2022 analysis states that 84% of the revised global nationally determined contributions (NDCs) integrated ecosystem protection, restoration, or agroforestry into their mitigation or adaptation strategies. However, NbS receives only 2% of climate finance (USD 133 billion) annually, as reported by the [United Nations Environment Programme](#) in 2021. Within climate finance initiatives, development finance directed towards addressing climate change through “NbS-like” approaches declined from 32% in 2017 to 16.7% in 2019. Meanwhile, the global nature conservation funding gap surpassed USD 700 billion (in 2019). The 2022 State of Finance for Nature Report says that a rapid

boost in investments for NbS (USD 674 billion annually by 2050) is the key to unlocking these funding deficits. The investments must include funds for enhancing technical capacity aimed at formulating clear metrics and timelines for evaluating NbS successes against alternative interventions and integrating them into the ongoing adaptation plans.

A Resounding Call for Nature

The upcoming thematic day for Nature, Land Use, and Oceans (9 December) at COP28 holds promise for discussions on these interlinked decisions. Building on the momentum of the CBD COP15 — which established the 30x30 biodiversity goal (conserve at least 30% of the land and water bodies by 2030) — nature and climate co-benefits are expected to take centre stage this year, given the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) mid-term review. However, unlike the broad scope of climate change, working with nature warrants context-specific knowledge that impedes widespread consensus. Additionally, apart from knowledge-sharing and governance challenges, there is an inadequate involvement of stakeholders — especially indigenous communities who oversee roughly 20-25% of land hosting 80% of biodiversity and 40% of terrestrial protected areas. The State of the World's Forests Report, 2022, shows that 91% of community lands conserved by indigenous peoples can be maintained in good to moderate ecological conditions, signalling their custodianship for nature-based climate action. The outcome of the Global Stocktake this year is likely to highlight nature from the ecosystem services lens, particularly for its potential to capture carbon. However, it is crucial to move beyond the carbon-centricity of climate conversations and bring nature conservation and locally led, rights-based approaches to the forefront. COP28 offers a unique opportunity to interlink environmental conservation, sustainable land management guided by indigenous knowledge, and effective climate action, fostering a holistic and inclusive strategy to address the global challenge of climate change.

[This piece was written by [Lakshmi Menon](#) and [Kanchan Kargwal](#). The authors work in the area of climate adaptation and risk analysis at the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), a research-based think tank]