



## **KEY MESSAGES**

# **Nature-based Solutions in Humanitarian Contexts**

**November 2023**

## International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives and have opportunities to thrive.

In 2021, IFRC and ICRC established the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#) to step up its commitment to address the climate and environmental crises. IFRC's Plan and Budget 2021-2025 includes a target for 100 National Societies to be implementing nature-based Solutions for Climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction. Finally, in 2022, IFRC established the [Global Climate Resilience Platform](#) to catalyze USD 1 billion of new and innovative finance, increase the climate resilience, and build the adaptation skills, of 500 million people in the most climate-vulnerable countries. One of the focus areas of the platform is nature-based solutions.

These **Nature-based Solutions in Humanitarian Contexts Key Messages** are aimed at humanitarian organizations and policymakers.

### Contact

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Photo: Gambia RCS Tree Planting in North Bank, Central and Upper River Regions supported by the WFP UN Peace Building Fund Project 2021 © Gambia RCS

## Introduction

Climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent and intense<sup>i</sup>; 2023 is virtually certain to be the hottest year on record and global temperatures are forecasted to continue to surge to record levels in the years to come.<sup>ii</sup> Never before has climate change been so acutely felt, by so many, around the world. We are not on track to meet the Paris Agreement goals and as we close out 2023, scientists warn that we are already close to reaching 1.5 C warming.<sup>iii</sup>

At the same time, we have altered over three quarters of the land surface and a stunning four-fifths of our oceans, degrading the environment, reducing carbon sinks, and bringing many species to the brink of extinction.<sup>iv</sup> Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse are one of the fastest deteriorating global risks over the next decade.<sup>v</sup>

The implications of climate change and the environmental crises are stark. Between 2016 and 2021 over 43 million children were displaced as a result of weather-related disasters.<sup>vi</sup> By 2030 an unprecedented 150 million people annually will require humanitarian assistance due to floods, droughts, and storms. By 2050 this is expected to increase to 200 million people.<sup>vii</sup>

Ecosystem collapse will have far-reaching and devastating economic and societal consequences. Half of the world's economic output - equivalent to \$58 trillion - is moderately to highly dependent on nature.<sup>viii</sup> Land degradation is already adversely affecting 40% of the global population.<sup>ix</sup>

**Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, the triple planetary crises, are humanitarian crises.** These crises threaten to exceed the humanitarian sector's capacity to respond over the coming decades. It is crucial to accelerate decisive climate action, including phasing out fossil fuels and climate change mitigation, and increasing locally-led adaptation and climate-smart disaster risk reduction with accessible funds for addressing, averting, and minimizing loss and damage.

**Nature can be a powerful ally to support humanitarian action, including reducing disaster risk reduction and combating climate change.**

Nature-based solutions have the twin objectives of providing for human well-being and protecting the environment. Nature-based solutions can build immediate and long-term resilience for those affected by crisis. Implementing nature-based solutions can reduce the number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance due to climate change and weather-related disasters.

### Nature-based Solutions

Nature-based solutions are "actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience and biodiversity benefits."<sup>x</sup>

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It is urgent that all step up their efforts to address the climate and environmental crises. **IFRC is highlighting five key messages on nature-based solutions to strengthen climate and disaster resilience in humanitarian programmes and operations.**

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1

## We must adopt a 'do no harm' approach to both people and the environment.

A healthy environment<sup>xi</sup> is a human right. In line with the accepted humanitarian principle of 'do no harm', humanitarian actors must avoid, minimize, and manage the damage we cause to the environment and the climate, while maintaining our ability to provide timely and principled humanitarian assistance.

*We call on policy makers and donors across the climate-development-humanitarian nexus to increase support, including financing, for capacity strengthening, research, and tools that enable humanitarians to develop and operationalize policies that implement "do no harm" principle for both people and environment.*

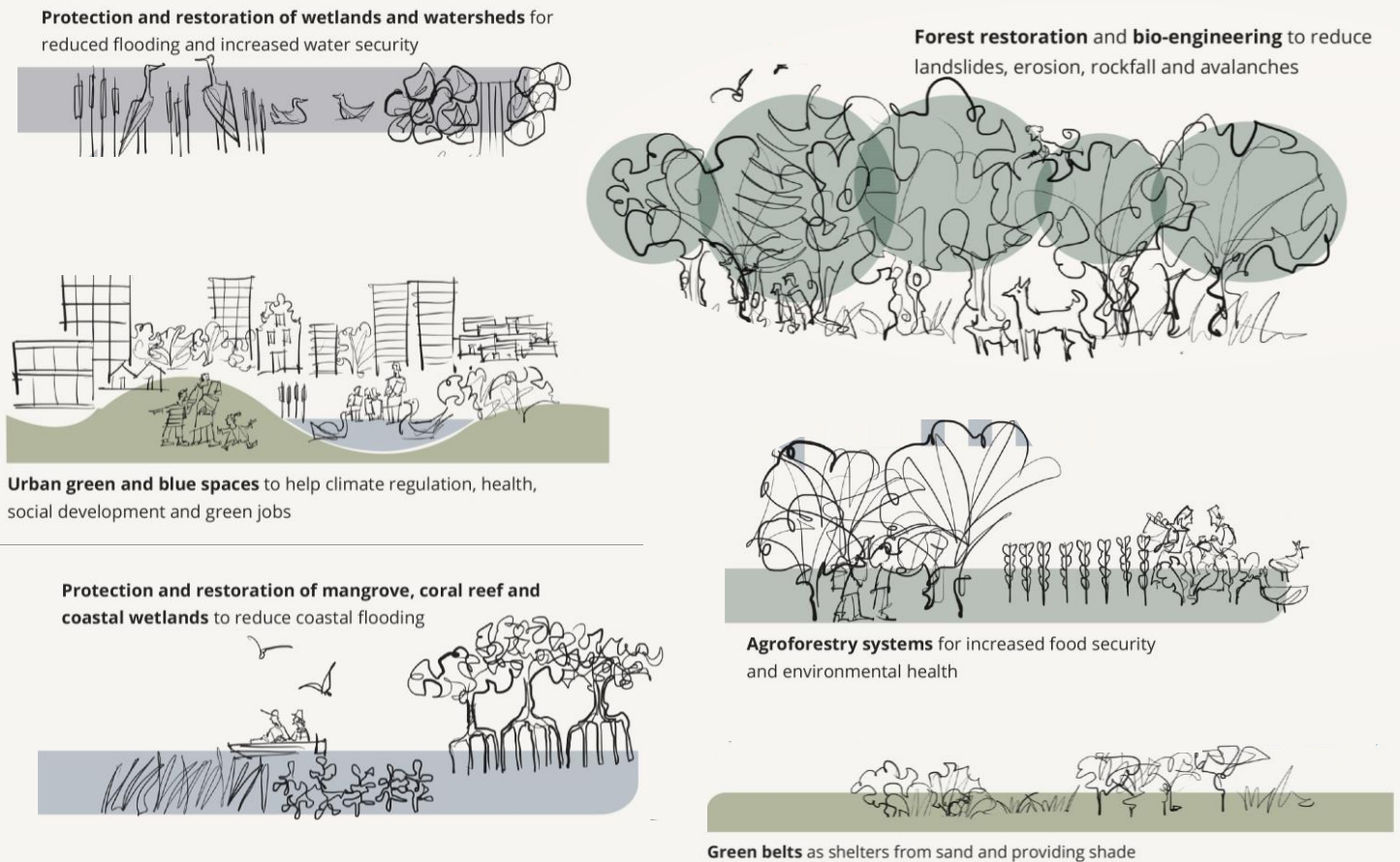
2

## We need to work more with nature to reduce disaster risk.

Working with nature can reduce risk and build resilience across all phases of the disaster continuum, in protracted crises, and in both slow-onset and sudden-onset events. Furthermore, it provides multiple benefits to the effected population (**Figure 1**).

*We ask that policy-makers and humanitarian organisations take environment, climate and disaster risk into account when planning response operations and longer-term resilience programmes and consider working with nature as one option.*

**Figure 1: Examples of Nature-based Solutions in Humanitarian Contexts (Source: Sphere 2023)**



### 3

## Locally-led nature-based solutions for climate change action and disaster risk reduction are crucial for equity and effectiveness.

Nature-based solutions can be an important approach to protect local communities from climate change impacts and provide livelihoods. However, in the absence of well-designed and inclusive environmental policies, some efforts to tackle climate change can have unintended consequences for the livelihoods of certain groups, including by placing a higher financial burden on poor households.

*We call for more locally-led adaptation, including through nature-based solutions, where all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, participate in developing, deciding, implementing, and monitoring actions.*

## 4

## Cross-sectoral partnerships across the climate/ environment-development-humanitarian nexus are crucial for delivering a holistic approach to resilience.

Partnerships are crucial to break down barriers in terms of technology, culture, or socioeconomic and across different thematic areas for the successful uptake of Nature-based solutions approach at local and global levels.

*We ask for enhanced collaboration across sectors and increased research, assessment, learning, awareness, capacity building, policy coherence, data and tools that support environmental integrity and nature-based solutions in humanitarian contexts.*

## 5

## There is a lack of financing for nature-based solutions for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

Globally, the financing gap for nature is approximately \$230 billion USD per year. By 2030 it is estimated to increase to \$330 billion USD.<sup>xii</sup> There is a need to unlock and accelerate financing for nature-based solutions in humanitarian contexts. Public, private, and blended finance can all play an important role in scaling up nature-based solutions.

*We ask for policy makers to enable innovative financial resources and mobilize diverse stakeholders to enable the implementation of nature-based solutions across the development-humanitarian nexus and the disaster management continuum.*

This document, along with the companion **NbS in Humanitarian Contexts Key Messages Technical Background**, can be found on the IFRC's [Nature-based Solutions website](#).

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<sup>i</sup> [IPCC 2022, Summary for Policy Makers](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [UN News, 5 October 2023](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Nature News, 22 September 2023](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Pörtner, Hans-Otto, et al. (2021). [IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored workshop report on biodiversity and climate change \(Version 2\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> [WEF, 2023, World Risk Report 2023](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [UNICEF 2023, Displaced Children in a Changing Climate](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [WWF-IFRC, 2022, Working with Nature to Protect People](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [PWC, 2023](#)

<sup>ix</sup> [Facts about the Nature Crisis](#)

<sup>x</sup> [UNEA 5.5](#)

<sup>xi</sup> The environment is the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates. It encompasses all the natural world that is the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (climate, soil, living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.

<sup>xii</sup> [UNEP, 2022, The state of finance for Nature](#)