



Rapid ELSA Identification: Global Policy Analysis

Methods & Results

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Introduction

While there is ample commitment to protect, manage, and restore ecosystems around the world, we must equip governments, corporations and communities with tools to translate that commitment into a plan of action. Without a clear, geographically explicit plan, countries are likely to continue facing hurdles in land use planning where decision-making occurs in sectoral silos. By developing their own 'Maps of Hope', government agencies, communities, and stakeholders from across UNDP's initial 12 pilot countries have identified national essential life support areas (ELSAs). These are places where nature-based actions can sustain critical benefits to humanity, including food and water security, sustainable livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, and carbon sequestration. The result is a map that governments can use to harmonize nature and development policies and prioritize areas for protection, management, and restoration.

The project, Mapping Hope: A Rapid Approach to Identify Essential Life Support Areas, has streamlined the pilot approach with the goal of being able to support 100 countries to rapidly map their ELSAs by 2024. The first step in this process was to identify priority global policy targets to frame the analysis that are relevant for countries around the world. **This document presents the methods and the results of the global policy analysis that the project uses to guide rapid ELSA identification.**

This work is led by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Impact Observatory (IO), working in close partnership with the UN Biodiversity Lab (UNBL) partnership and an [ELSA Expert Advisory Committee](#) composed of national authorities of Colombia, Costa Rica, and South Africa as well as leading global scientists and environmental policy experts. It is funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Theory of Change

Our theory of change is that map-based, credible, high-quality information combined with direct relationship and capacity building at the national level will drive the transformative change needed to address our biodiversity and climate crises. We promote a three-tiered approach, drawing from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that recognizes the need for concerted action from global to sub-national scales to drive systemic change to address our planetary crisis. This includes:

- 1. Tier 1 - Rapid ELSA Identification:* Standard framework and approach using global data to conduct a national analysis to create a Map of Hope.
- 2. Tier 2 - National ELSA Identification:* Customized approach to create a Map of Hope based on national priorities and capacity.
- 3. Tier 3 - Focused ELSA Identification:* Highly tailored approach to create a Map of Hope based on the needs of a sub-national region or use case.

Global level data and maps can provide a foundation to support national action (Tier 1) and ensure that all countries, regardless of their capacity, have access to common spatial data and tools that have the potential to guide implementation, monitoring, and reporting for their commitments on nature and sustainable development. Governments often need further, customized support to use local data at the national (Tier 2) and subnational (Tier 3) scales to implement policies and projects based on unique national priorities for nature and sustainable development.

Objective of the Global Policy Analysis

The primary objective of the policy analysis was to generate a global policy vision for rapid ELSA identification that would be relevant for countries around the world. We aimed to identify a body of global policy targets to guide the rapid analysis. More specifically, the global policy analysis aimed to:

- Identify common trends across the priority national policy targets selected by pilot countries to guide their ELSA analysis;
- Identify key global policy frameworks that can frame the rapid ELSA analysis; and
- Evaluate the global policy frameworks to identify nature-based, mappable global policy targets.

The results of the global policy analysis were used to identify priority global policy targets and global area-based targets for protection, restoration, management, and urban greening to guide rapid ELSA identification and serve as the foundation for the ELSA maps in participating countries.

Methods

Step 1. Analyze priority national policy targets across 10 pilot countries to identify common policy trends

We built this analysis based on our work with our initial 10 ELSA pilot countries (Tier 2 and 3). The results of the policy hackathons that we conducted in these countries provided us with a wealth of information on the values that truly matter to countries, ranging from urban greening to disaster risk reduction. Through assessing trends in the policy priorities identified by each of the 10 pilot countries, we were able to hypothesize what themes are important to countries, at large.

To identify trends in the policy analyses, we created an [Excel matrix \(Tab 3\)](#) with all the priority national policy targets of the 10 pilot countries. Then, we standardized each target (column D), with the aim of extracting the most important elements of each target and elucidating common trends among the targets.

Step 2. Create categories that summarize those trends

As our national ELSA analyses identified 10 priority policy targets for each country, we needed a way to capture the diversity of targets in approximately 10 categories. All ELSA national policy priorities relate to common themes, such as water security or disaster risk reduction. We were able to appropriately classify the 100 targets ([Excel matrix, Tab 3, column E](#)) into 10 initial categories that represent the end goals that nature-based actions should contribute to. These were:

1. Ecosystem integrity & conservation
2. Species conservation¹
3. Food security
4. Water security
5. Land degradation neutrality
6. Climate change mitigation
7. Disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation
8. Urban health
9. Jobs, livelihoods and green recovery
10. Sustainable forest management

Step 3. Identify key global policy frameworks that guide action on the categories identified

Once we identified the categories, we selected the most relevant global policy frameworks for each topic using standardized criteria. These criteria stipulated that frameworks must be:

- *Nature-based*: the framework offers nature-based actions that address the categories.
- *Current*: the framework is as current as possible.
- *Widely accepted*: the framework is globally or widely accepted by governments.
- *Target-oriented*: the framework defines key global policy targets.

¹ Even though there is overlap between the categories “Ecosystem Integrity & Conservation” and “Species Conservation”, they can be differentiated by their primary foci. Ecosystem Integrity & Conservation is focused on protected areas, ecological representation, and connectivity of wider landscapes and seascapes. In contrast, Species Conservation focuses on species as the target unit, aiming to reduce their rate of extinction. It is common for international policy to differentiate these two scales (e.g. ABT 11 vs. ABT 12). This is also in line with the general approach of identifying coarse scale filters and fine scale filters for biodiversity in conservation planning, see e.g. [Tingley, Darling & Wilcove 2014](#).

We selected nine policy frameworks through a careful review:

- [2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#)
- [Paris Agreement](#)
- [Sendai Framework](#)
- [UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development \(New Urban Agenda\)](#)
- [Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes \(UN Water Convention\)](#)
- [First Draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#)
- [Aichi Biodiversity Targets \(CBD\)](#)

The 2030 Agenda proved to be a very useful global policy instrument for the analysis, as it included nature-based targets for many of the categories that lack a nature-oriented and global policy framework (for example, the categories for food security, water security, and land degradation neutrality).

We also included both the CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the first draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), as we are in the transition from one framework to the other. As the post-2020 GBF is still in the process of negotiation, we will update the analysis based on the final targets adopted by Parties at the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the CBD (CBD COP 15).

Step 4. Review each document to identify relevant global targets

To select the priority global policy targets, we looked for nature-based targets that address the 10 categories identified in Step 2. For example, for the category disaster risk reduction, we chose targets from the Sendai Framework that encourage the management and use of ecosystems to reduce disaster risk. In the case of the category biodiversity conservation, we identified four different frameworks contributing relevant nature-based targets.

We created a list of targets by category ([Excel matrix, Tab 1](#)) with a total of 45 targets for the 10 categories. The number of targets varies per category depending on how many nature-based targets we found in the policy frameworks.

Step 5. Choose one priority policy target per category

The next step was to select the 10 priority global policy targets that would provide the foundation for ELSA analysis. It is important to note that these were selected to be aspirational targets, i.e. a target that indicates a clear value or goal for the category that can be achieved

through nature-based actions. To select these targets, we used the following criteria:

- *Comprehensive*: the target addresses the category in a wide and ambitious way.
- *Current*: the most recent agreed target and with a pertinent time horizon.
- *Wide-spread global support*: the target originated in the most widely endorsed framework at the global level.
- *Mappable*: as this is a geospatial analysis, the target must be able to be expressed cartographically.

The chosen global policy targets can be found in this sheet ([Excel matrix, Tab 1, green row](#)) and in Section 5.

Step 6. Identify area-based global targets

The rapid ELSA analysis requires indicative area-based targets to define the percentage of land area that could be allocated to protection, restoration, sustainable management, and urban greening efforts. The ELSA analysis uses these nature-based actions as the means to work towards the goals spelled out by the global policy targets. Once an area-based target is defined for each action, the ELSA algorithm runs an optimization to identify where each of the four actions should be taken to have the most impact towards the achievement of the diez priority global policy targets.

To select these area-based targets, we used the following criteria:

- *Clear*: the target offers a clear indicative quantitative target for protection, restoration, management and/or urban greening.
- *Current*: the most current target.
- *Ambitious*: the most ambitious target.

The area-based targets chosen are ([Excel matrix, Tab 2](#)) and in the results section.

Step 7. Validate with Expert Advisory Committee

To ensure that the approach used for the policy analysis is valid and that the results reflect priorities that would be relevant for a wide range of countries, we conducted a validation process with the ELSA Expert Advisory Committee. This Committee is comprised by experts from three ELSA pilot countries: Colombia, Costa Rica, and South Africa. The process consisted in two consultations: a workshop in August 2021 and written feedback in February 2022. The suggestions and changes proposed during these consultation periods can be accessed in Annex 1. The final changes have been embedded in this document.

Results

The final Rapid ELSA Analysis global policy targets and area-based targets are summarized in the figure below²



AREA-BASED TARGETS



²1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 2. Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10. Ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increasing the productivity and resilience of these production systems.
^{**} The average national commitment for sustainable management in the 10 ELSA pilot countries was 5.7 percent.

2 The results will be adjusted based on the final version of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework that will be adopted by Parties at the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15).

Annex I

Updates to the Analysis in Response to the Expert Advisory Committee Feedback

Annex I compiles the feedback received by the Expert Advisory Committee during the consultation process conducted to validate both the methodology and its results.

It also summarizes the proposed changes to the methods, global categories, priority global policy targets, and global area-based targets based on input from the Expert Advisory Committee, the UNDP science team, and the UNDP Nature for Development Global programme.

Changes based on consultations with the Expert Advisory Committee

Changes to this document

- Deleted “reach a consensus on action” in the introduction.
- Added the clarification that goals/targets selected must be compatible with spatial analysis.
- Changed the summary wording to emphasize that the targets of the 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) will be updated based on the final agreement of Parties at COP15.
- Added “Step 7: Validate with Expert Advisory Committee” to the methods and results doc . This will explain the consultation process and make reference to the changes made based on this document.
- Adjusted the text around the Post-2020 GBF to clarify that we are working with the draft version of it and we will update the targets as needed after the final version is approved.
- Removed the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People as a policy framework, as it is actually a global campaign and its proposed area-based target has already been included in the drafted GBF.
- Included a footnote explaining the relation between the global policy targets and the area-based targets.
- Included a footnote explaining the logic behind the differentiation between the categories Ecosystem integrity & conservation and Species conservation.
- Changed the term “headline commitments” to “10 priority global policy targets” in all our documents, to avoid confusion with the “headline indicators” of the new Global Biodiversity Framework. The new terminology was widely discussed by UNDP’s ELSA team.
- Included “Target-oriented: the framework defines key policy targets.” as part of the criteria used to select the global policy frameworks analysed.
- Included “Mappable” as part of the criteria used to select the global policy targets. As this is a geospatial analysis, the target must be able to be expressed cartographically.

Changes to categories (see in the [summary google sheet](#))

- Modified the first three categories, including: (1) used Ecosystem integrity & conservation for the first category; (2) kept Species conservation as the second one; and discarded Biodiversity conservation. The logic behind this change was that the last categories are embedded in the first two and including only these two would nonetheless lead to the inclusion of relevant data layers in the ELSA analysis.
- Considering UNFCCC³ definitions, changed the category named “carbon sequestration” to “climate change mitigation”.
- Changed the category named Sustainable forestry to Sustainable forest management.
- Merged the categories on Urban greening and Health into one category named Urban health. Urban greening, as a category, was difficult to interpret for the science analysis, as there is an area-based target using this category.

Changes to priority global policy targets and area-based targets (see in the [summary google sheet](#))

- Added a clear definition of management, especially related to food security and forest management, when presenting the results of the scientific analysis.
- Included the whole Article 5 of the Paris Agreement (not only point 2) as priority policy targets for the category Climate change mitigation.

Previous priority policy target	New priority policy target
Paris Agreement, Article 5, point 2: Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results-based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: policy approaches and positive incentives for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches.	Paris Agreement, Article 5: 1. Parties should take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1(d), of the Convention, including forests. 2. Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results-based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: policy approaches and positive incentives for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches.

³ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-convention/glossary-of-climate-change-acronyms-and-terms#m>

- Prioritized 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework Target 1, as well as Target 3, for Ecosystem integrity & conservation, as the combination of these targets represent a more ambitious and comprehensive framework than the previous target.

Previous priority policy target	New priority policy target
<p>SDG target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.</p>	<p>1st draft of post-2020 global biodiversity framework Target 1. “Ensure that all land and sea areas globally are under integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning addressing land- and sea-use change, retaining existing intact and wilderness areas” & Target 3. By 2030, ensure that at least 30 per cent globally of land areas and of sea areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.</p>

- Prioritized the 1st draft of post-2020 global biodiversity framework draft Goal A, Milestone A.2 for Species conservation, as this represents a more ambitious and comprehensive target than the previous one recommended.

Previous priority policy target	New priority policy target
<p>SDG target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.</p>	<p>1st draft of post-2020 global biodiversity framework Goal A, Milestone A.2 The increase in the extinction rate is halted or reversed, and the extinction risk is reduced by at least 10 per cent, with a decrease in the proportion of species that are threatened, and the abundance and distribution of populations of species is enhanced or at least maintained.</p>

- For Food security, prioritized SDG 2.4, as it is specifically on food production.

Previous priority policy target	New priority policy target
1st draft of post-2020 global biodiversity framework Target 10. By 2030, ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increasing the productivity and resilience of these production systems.	SDG 2.4: By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

- For the new category on Urban health, prioritized the global policy target previously suggested for Health: 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework draft Target 12. “By 2030, increase the area of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces, for human health and well-being in urban areas and other densely populated areas.”
- Updated the target for the category Jobs, Livelihoods and Green Recovery to be the 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework Target 9, as it is more current and broader than the previously proposed target.

Previous priority policy target	New priority policy target
Aichi Target 11: By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.	1st draft of post-2020 global biodiversity framework Target 9: Ensure benefits, including nutrition, food security, medicines, and livelihoods for people especially for the most vulnerable through sustainable management of wild terrestrial, freshwater and marine species and protecting customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

- Changed the area-based target for Management to 15%. In the absence of a globally agreed, area-based target less than 100%,⁴ the ELSA Expert Advisory Committee suggested this number as an increase in ambition from average current national commitments⁵ that can serve as a basis for the Rapid ELSA analysis.

⁴1st draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: 2. Meeting people’s needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10. By 2030, ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increasing the productivity and resilience of these production systems.

⁵The average national commitment for sustainable management in the 10 ELSA pilot countries was 5.7% (see the average exercise [here](#)).

- Set the area-based target for Urban greening to 0.5%. In the absence of a globally agreed, area-based target for urban greening, the Rapid ELSA Expert Advisory Committee suggested this number based on an average of the targets from the two pilot countries⁶ that used this action in their national analysis.

Annex II

Initial Results Before First Expert Advisory Committee Review

Annex II summarizes the proposed priority global policy targets and area-based targets preceding input from the Expert Advisory Committee. It is provided here for documentation purposes.

Proposed 12 Priority Global Policy Targets

Biodiversity conservation

SDG target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.

Species protection

SDG target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

Ecosystem restoration

SDG target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

Food security

CBD, 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 2. Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10. By 2030, ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increasing the productivity and resilience of these production systems.

Water security

SDG target 6.6: By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

⁶ Costa Rica and South Africa.

Land degradation neutrality

SDG target 15.3: By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world.

Carbon sequestration

Paris Agreement, Article 5: Line 2. Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results-based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: policy approaches and positive incentives for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches.

Disaster risk reduction

Sendai Framework: Priority 3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience: (n) To strengthen the sustainable use and management of ecosystems and implement integrated environmental and natural resource management approaches that incorporate disaster risk reduction.

Urban greening

UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development Strategic Plan 2020-2023: Outcome 3. Improved resource efficiency and protection of ecological assets (In the New Urban Agenda, Member States note the need to facilitate the sustainable management of natural resources and transition to a circular economy while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration, restoration and resilience.

Jobs, livelihoods and green recovery

Strategic Plan for the Convention on Biological Diversity, Aichi Biodiversity Target 11: By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.

Sustainable forestry

CBD, 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 2. Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10. By 2030, ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increasing the productivity and resilience of these production systems.

Health

CBD, 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 2. Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 12. By 2030, increase the area of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces, for human health and well-being in urban areas and other densely populated areas.

Proposed Area-Based Targets

Protection

CBD, 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 1. Reducing threats to biodiversity. Target 3. By 2030, ensure that at least 30 per cent globally of land areas and of sea areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

Restoration

CBD, 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 1. Reducing threats to biodiversity. Target 2. By 2030, ensure that at least 20 per cent of degraded freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems are under restoration, ensuring connectivity among them and focusing on priority ecosystems.

Management

CBD, 1st draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: 2. Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10. By 2030, ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, increasing the productivity and resilience of these production systems.

