

Act now on wetlands for Agenda 2030

All major global policy agreements conclude:

Wetlands are vital ecosystems in the landscape and are indispensable to achieve a sustainable and secure world.

Wetlands and Sustainable Development

Wetlands link and regulate water in our landscapes, from mountains to the sea. They act as water sources, sinks and purifiers. They protect our shores, help make cities and settlements safe and resilient and help recover after disaster strikes. They are Earth's greatest natural carbon stores. They support abundant and unique nature. They are vital to reverse land degradation and desertification. They are centres of economic growth, and the engines for the local economy. They are the sources for plentiful food and fish, clean drinking water and sanitation services.

Yet, 64% of wetlands have been lost since 1900 through drainage and conversion and much of those that remain are under growing pressure from economic and infrastructure development that has failed to value their role. This makes people and nature vulnerable.

The world needs landscape scale and system approaches that take full account of wetlands interactions and the full range of benefits these provide to society and nature. Such approaches are cost-effective, flexible and 'no regret' options.

Global policy commitments on wetlands have been made for a number of interlinked purposes

Now global policy frameworks acknowledge this and give all countries the responsibility to mainstream the protection and restoration of wetlands or freshwater systems and their services as a vital strategy for a sustainable and secure world:



United Nations
Framework Convention on
Climate Change



UNISDR

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction



UNCCD United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification



Convention on
Biological Diversity



It's time to transform our world...

SDG Goals and targets where wetlands play a key role	The central role of wetlands to meet this Goal	Priorities for Action
 <p>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.</p>	<p>Wetlands combine rice and fish production in Asia. Seasonal wetlands on river floodplains are the lifeblood of smallholder farming while providing resilience against floods and drought in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Drainage, water diversions and pollution in wetlands reduces food security of especially the rural poor. Increasingly intensified agricultural management has a high water demand and hence wetlands are targets for conversion and land grabs. Poor wetland and water governance and management facilitate over-exploitation.</p>	<p>Safeguarding and restoring wetland agro-ecosystems is needed to sustain and improve food production, and increase adaptive capacity to climate risks. Effective approaches include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustain and restore flow dynamics to Sahelian floodplains • integrate mangroves into aquaculture ponds in South-east Asia • regulate for responsible soy and palm oil production that avoids wetland drainage and pollution
 <p>6.4 By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.</p> <p>6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.</p> <p>6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers, lakes.</p>	<p>Wetlands are the integrating ecosystems in the landscape that store and regulate water flows.</p> <p>Ensuring supplies of freshwater will require an improvement in the condition and extent of key wetlands.</p>	<p>Safeguarding and restoring high mountain lakes, peatlands and floodplains, is needed to reduce droughts downstream.</p> <p>To become sustainable, investments in WASH services need to use landscape scale assessments and measures that will safeguard water sources and avoid compromising ecosystem functioning.</p>
 <p>11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.</p>	<p>Alone or in combination with traditional infrastructure wetlands protect cities and communities against inundation and flooding from the sea and rivers, reducing loss of life and damage to property. Coastal wetlands such as mangroves and saltmarshes dissipate wave power. Floodplains, lakes and peatlands retain and detain floodwaters, reducing flood peaks reaching urban areas and communities. Wetlands supply freshwater for domestic use, irrigation of crops and sources of protein.</p>	<p>Over-reliance on engineered infrastructure solutions to development means that more cost effective, multifunctional natural infrastructure solutions are overlooked. Incorporation of wetlands in urban planning, minimising encroachment on wetlands and rehabilitating wetlands in cities and their surrounding landscapes, reduces water risks and safeguards valuable wetland services.</p>
 <p>12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.</p>	<p>When sustainably managed, wetlands can be the engines of local economies. Production systems requiring drainage exist all over the world, but the situation is most dramatic in South-east Asia where palm oil and pulp production drives land drainage, leading to alarming GHG emissions, floods, fires, poverty and health hazards and biodiversity loss.</p>	<p>Accelerated global action to safeguard and rewet peatlands is urgently needed. Peatlands can be cultivated on a small scale with crops adapted to the wet soil conditions – a practice known as paludiculture.</p>

Investments in wetlands are needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG Goals and targets where wetlands play a key role	The central role of wetlands to meet this Goal	Priorities for Action
 <p>13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.</p>	<p>Around 90% of disasters are water-related and the poorest people are disproportionately vulnerable. Fragmentation and loss of wetlands is increasing the severity of water-related hazards along river systems, in deltas and along coasts. Located at the interface of land and water, wetlands are crucial for risk management. Wetlands in good condition help regulate the water cycle, by reducing peak flood flow, storing excessive precipitation, recharging groundwater and serving as a buffer against storms and saltwater intrusion.</p>	<p>Safeguarding and restoring wetlands like floodplains, mudflats, saltmarshes and mangroves and adaptive management of deltas, helps to safeguard the prosperity and resilience of vulnerable communities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> restored mangrove belts can protect coasts against high waves and storm surges. well-functioning floodplains slow the flood pulse and reduce flooding downstream.
 <p>14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.</p>	<p>Coastal wetland ecosystems like estuaries, mangroves, lagoons, seagrasses, coral reefs and kelp forests serve as nurseries for both inshore and offshore fisheries and they support the rapidly expanding coastal tourism industry. Coastal wetlands are facing dramatic development pressures worldwide.</p>	<p>Protection, rehabilitation and restoration of coastal wetlands as an integral part of fisheries management, economic development and flood risk management schemes is a cost-effective and adaptive solution. Building with Nature (see www.ecoshape.nl) is an effective approach to counteract erosion and increase resilience along heavily modified coasts.</p>
 <p>5.1 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>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.</p>	<p>Since 1900 more than 64% of wetlands have been lost through drainage and conversion, and much of the rest have been degraded. Nature that depends on freshwater is in a major decline. As wetlands are lost, people are deprived of their well-being and chance for development. The poor, women and girls are the most affected. Desertification is accelerating as natural wetlands diminish and land subsidence caused by wetland drainage leads to loss of productive land through flooding and saltwater intrusion.</p>	<p>Reversing the trend of wetland loss and degradation through improvement of policies, investments and practices is essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Priorities for concerted action by governments, industry and civil society include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding Arctic wetlands Protecting and rewetting peatlands Safeguarding and restoring arid and semi-arid wetlands Reversing river fragmentation and restoring floodplains Safeguarding high mountain wetlands Ecosystem-based approaches to delta and coastal management

Recommended approaches for implementation of the SDGs:

Wetlands are a focus for innovation, for example in connection with coastal engineering and flood defence, water management and management of agri-ecosystems. We have developed and are witness to many innovations of approach and pilot initiatives that demonstrate solutions to achieve sustainable development at a small scale. Currently there are some initiatives which attempt to scale up small scale pilots that transform whole landscapes.

In these examples, joined up action by different sectors is key to realization of successful outcomes. Local community action and private sector investment

needs to be underpinned and supported by technical knowledge, an enabling policy environment and sufficient environmental and social safeguards.

It is vital to bring actors together to share knowledge, facilitate dialogue, broker solutions, advise governments on policy adjustments and enable local community participation. We have found that institutional, policy and financial barriers to integrated approaches are very often the main bottleneck to replicating and scaling up the impact of these successes.

We therefore recommend to:

1. Incentivise integrated, inter-sectoral approaches to implementing the SDGs across whole landscapes; and
2. Recognize and support the role of civil society to help drive synergies in SDG implementation forward by brokering and facilitating integrated approaches.

Some innovative approaches that we use to transform the world:

Reverse land degradation, enhance livelihoods and climate adaptation

Partners for Resilience (PfR) is working in ten countries to reduce disaster risk. In the last 5 years PfR has strengthened the resilience of millions of vulnerable people to cope with different types of hazards and whose livelihoods are affected by droughts, floods and other hazards which partly result from degraded ecosystems and a changing climate. PfR combines the skills of humanitarian, development and environmental sectors in carrying out vulnerability assessments to disasters and in the formulation of risk reduction strategies, resulting in increased community resilience and bottom-up influence of policies and investments on water-related disasters at different geographic scales.

www.partnersforresilience.nl



Helping local women to 'live with the floods' in the Mahanadi Delta, India

Use innovative financing strategies to leverage long-term investment in areas critical for SDGs where the business case is less clear

Rehabilitation of Sahelian floodplain wetlands is a critical part of the solution to desertification of the drylands. For more than a decade, Wetlands International has applied our “Bio-rights approach” which provides communities with support for sustainable livelihoods measures in return for their engagement in rehabilitation of the wider landscape. Communities pay back their loan with interest, and upon successful delivery of conservation services, the loans revolve into future rounds of lending. Incomes are also raised from increased economic benefits derived from recovering ecosystems. The Bio-rights approach is a promising means to catalyse the implementation of several SDGs in remote, poverty-stricken regions where populations have a high dependency on the natural resources of ecosystems. More information: www.wetlands.org/publications/biorights-in-theory-and-practice

Wetland restoration to mitigate climate change

Wetlands International and its partners are developing a Strategic Plan for peatland restoration and sustainable management in Mongolia. Mongolia’s peatlands preserve permafrost and other water reserves in its riverine and highland landscapes which prevents desertification and supports livelihoods and biodiversity downstream. They are also the most productive pastures and important carbon stores. Their current rapid loss leads to disasters for people and their cattle during long periods of droughts. Funded by the Asian Development Bank, Wetlands International collaborates with the Mongolian government and international knowledge institutes to implement a rapid assessment study, build capacity of key stakeholders at the national and local levels, and identify national priority actions for sustainable peatlands management in Mongolia. This approach can be replicated in other peat-rich countries. More information: www.wetlands.org/publications/briefing-paper-accelerating-action-to-save-peat-for-less-heat



Enabling communities to safeguard and restore Sahelian wetlands



Local people rely on Mongolia's peatlands

A woman wearing a traditional conical hat and a plaid shirt is working in a mangrove field. She is surrounded by numerous vertical wooden stakes driven into the water, which are used for planting mangrove saplings. The water is calm, and the sky is clear. In the background, another person can be seen working further down the field.

Put in place low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure

Dutch-based water engineering firms have joined forces in the pre-competitive space to invest in developing and sharing knowledge about Building with Nature solutions to vulnerable coasts and deltas. We help to identify opportunities, raise resources, develop the enabling policy environment, engage and empower local communities, coordinate collaboration and communicate the results. More information: www.wetlands.org/casestudy/building-with-nature-indonesia and www.ecoshape.nl

Use market and investment opportunities to catalyse SDG implementation and synergies

Permian Global, an investment firm, is working with Wetlands International to establish a global portfolio of long-term Ecosystem Restoration Projects through which they will protect and rehabilitate wetlands (especially targeting peat swamp forests) for their ecosystem, livelihood, biodiversity and carbon values, so contributing to several of the SDGs. Permian will leverage finance through the carbon credit markets - verified credits generated through emissions reductions will be sold through the voluntary carbon market and emerging compliance markets. www.katinganproject.com

Building with Nature solutions to
reduce coastal erosion in Java

**How Wetlands International
helps make this happen**

**Wetlands International works
in collaboration with civil
society groups, corporates and
governments in all regions of the
world, from local communities
to global NGOs, companies,
research institutions and inter-
governmental conventions to
safeguard and restore wetlands.**

**Support us and work with us for
nature and people. It's urgent!**

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