IUCN's written input to the High Level Political Forum 2018

An assessment of the situation at the global level and identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges (guiding questions (a) and (b))

Nature provides important benefits for humans and can enable a transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies and help overcome some of our most critical development challenges. It contributes to food and water security, can enable health benefits, and provide important elements of disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation strategies. While humanity as a whole depends on nature to deliver its services, especially poor and rural communities often rely directly on nature for their livelihoods. If we are truly aiming at leaving no one behind, we must ensure that the supportive functions of our planet are sustained.

However, the natural world is facing immense challenges. Research based on IUCN data has shown that the world is facing its sixth mass extinction with biodiversity being lost at an alarming rate. Various drivers put pressures on our environment, leading to its degradation and the loss of biodiversity.

According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the main drivers of extinction are linked to human behaviour and our current lifestyle, including:
- Agriculture (link to SDG2)
- Urban development (link to SDG11)
- Over exploitation (link to SDG12, SDG6, SDG9, SDG8)
- Climate change (SDG13)
- Pollution (SDG11)

Land degradation and conversion in particular threatens nature. Global land degradations is estimated at 25% - 30% of all land. Drivers of land degradation include over exploitation for agriculture and over harvesting of trees and other species. This degradation is costly. Evidence suggests that land degradation and conversion have led to the loss of between US\$ 4.3–20.2 trillion a year in the value of ecosystem goods and services. More directly, 1.5 billion people are affected by the world's estimated 2 billion hectares of deforested and degraded land.

These losses observed in biodiversity and land degradation can have a significant impact on the health and well-functioning of ecosystems. In order to truly benefit from nature, the environment with all its components needs to be protected, restored, where necessary, and be governed in an effective and beneficial manner. Only if we stop this deterioration, can we hope to achieve sustainable and resilient societies with all their needs met while lastingly safeguarding the natural world.

While there is knowledge on ways of how to address these challenges (see Annex 1 for lessons learned from IUCN), there remains a significant funding gap which would allow an adequate protection of nature. It is estimated that around USD 200 to 300 billion per year are needed for nature conservation (as part of the 2030 Agenda and beyond). Traditional funding sources are not sufficient and innovative means of funding, such as blended financing have not yet found their way to nature conservation. For example, a recent OECD report on blended funds and facilities (OECD 2018) mentions that the SDGs least targeted by funds and facilities are related to biodiversity and natural resources (SDG14 and SDG15).

With the current level of investment, not only SDG15 won't be achieved, but the necessary nature-based solutions to build sustainable and resilient societies e.g. related to food

(SDG2), health (SDG3), water (SDG6), cities (SDG11), or climate change (SDG13) won't be delivered.

Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is desired (guiding question (e))
The High Level Political Forum plays a crucial role in providing political guidance in order to ensure sustainable development. The following areas would benefit from political guidance by the HLPF:

1. *How can impactful financing be mobilized in a balanced manner across the SDGs?*

2. *How can synergies between the SDG goals and targets best be seized and any possible trade-offs be avoided?*

3. *What could governance frameworks at the national level look like that enable the adoption of informed and integrated policies?*

4. *Aware that some targets in the 2030 Agenda have a 2020 timeframe, what are the possible ways to ensure continuous and amplified action beyond 2020, maintaining policy coherence with any other global agenda setting processes having authority on the relevant topics?*

IUCN policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies (guiding question (f))
In order to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies, IUCN conveys the following recommendations to the HLPF:

Biodiversity is being lost at an alarming rate with dire consequences for our planet and human well-being.
➢ Recognize the biodiversity crisis and the risks it bears for the health of our planet and its people, stressing the imperative for urgent action and a speedy shift to sustainable practices.

Nature offers a variety of solutions to help address development challenges across the different SDGs, including SDG2, SDG3, SDG6, SDG11, SDG13, SDG14 and SDG15.
➢ Promote the sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems in order to enable nature to play this role and lastingly contribute to achieving the SDGs.

➢ Fully embrace nature-based solutions in the Ministerial Declaration as the preferred option for sustainable development, thereby:

✓ Highlighting that investing in nature-based solutions is investing in an accelerator that allows progressing on various SDGs and SDG targets simultaneously;
✓ Acknowledging the cost-effectiveness of nature-based solutions in lieu of or complementing engineered solutions; and
✓ Stressing the importance of managing land as a multifunctional asset: for example, managing agricultural land for food, water, climate change mitigation and other ecosystem services, simultaneously.

Governments should further be called on, encouraged and invited to take into account the following elements in their implementation of the SDGs at the national level:

➢ Fully maintain the integration of the various dimensions of sustainable development and the indivisibility of the 2030 Agenda throughout the implementation process at the national level.

➢ Carry out regular assessments of the natural environment in order to identify critical areas requiring immediate intervention through conservation action and to create evidence based national policies, drawing on IUCN's standards, tools and methodologies.

➢ Fully integrated environmental considerations into any relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral policies, in particular concerning disaster risk reduction, urban planning, land use planning, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, food and water security and infrastructure plans.

➢ Adopt a landscape approach when developing integrated urban policies aware of the linkages between cities and their surrounding ecosystems, and adopting a similar lens when addressing protected areas and World Heritage sites.

➢ Design adequate national accounting frameworks that integrate environmental and economic accounting programmes, starting with accounting for natural and environmental assets.

➢ Commit to significantly increasing investment into nature conservation as a cost effective solution to progress on the 2030 Agenda overall and adopt financing of the SDGs in a manner that respects their equality and indivisibility.

➢ National investment planning processes incorporate the analytical means to consider and choose nature-based solutions options when relevant and optimal using a sustainability lens. Financial institutions must be incentivised, through appropriately framed risk analysis, to invest in or provide financing into nature-based solution schemes.

➢ Establish solid multi-level and stakeholder-inclusive natural resource governance mechanisms through appropriate national laws and policies.

Guiding questions of the ECOSOC President's template :
(a) an assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global level *(main section)*;
(b) the identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges *(main section)*;
(c) valuable lessons learned on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies *(annex 1)*;
(d) emerging issues likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies *(annex 1)*;
(e) areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required *(main section)*;
(f) policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies *(main section)*.

Annex 1: Specific experience by IUCN in response to guiding questions (c) and (d) of the ECOSOC President's template.

1. A glimmer of hope: valuable lessons learned on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies (guiding question (c))

IUCN's work over the last 70 years has provided a series of valuable lessons that relate to the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.

a. **Conservation of nature works**

While biodiversity loss has continued to increase over the past decades, IUCN's work has shown that protection and restoration of nature works. Conservation actions are having significant impacts in reducing biodiversity loss, or restoring degraded ecosystems. However, they are not yet implemented at sufficient scale to stabilise and ultimately reverse current trends.

There are specific success stories linked to SDG15.5 where conservation action has saved a number of animal species from extinction, including the Saiga antelope, the Giant Panda in China or the American Bison.

Restoration initiatives have also had success (SDG15.1/SDG15.2). For example, in 2011, the German Government and IUCN started the Bonn Challenge, which was endorsed in 2014 by the UN Climate Summit. It is a global effort to restore 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030. This global effort based on the forest landscape restoration (FLR) approach has already managed to achieve over 160 million hectares in pledges to the Bonn Challenge.

Protected areas are a key tool for conservation. As of March 2018, terrestrial protected areas covered just under 15% of global land (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN March 2018).
However, IUCN's work over the past decades has also shown that simply designating protected areas is not sufficient to achieve conservation outcomes. Protected areas need to be set up in the right areas, and, in addition, IUCN's work has shown that the effectiveness of protected areas for nature conservation depends on them being well-governed, well-designed and well-managed.

IUCN's Green List programme is in line with these findings and aims to encourage, achieve and promote effective, equitable and successful protected areas in all partner countries and jurisdictions. It is based on the recently launched IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas standard, which assesses a protected area by four components: good governance, sound design and planning, effective management and successful conservation outcomes.

Nature conservation also relies on well informed action that is based on sound scientific findings. IUCN mobilizes various important tools and standards which can help governments, assess their natural ecosystems in order to identify critical areas requiring immediate intervention through conservation action, to ensure their long-term support for sustainable development, including:

- [The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#)
- [The Key Biodiversity Areas Standard](#)
- [World Database of Protected Areas](#)
- [The IUCN Red List of Ecosystems](#)
- [The Green List of Protected Areas](#)

b. Nature offers cost-effective solutions for a number of societal challenges.
Nature-based solutions are defined by IUCN as "actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits". Some of the key societal challenges that nature-based solutions can help effectively address, while also promoting biodiversity (SDG15) include water security (SDG6), food security (SDG2), disaster risk reduction (SDG11), human health (SDG3), and climate change (SDG13).

SDG6 – nature-based solutions for water security
Nature plays a crucial role in achieving SDG6. Good water management and water-related ecosystems protection is a pre-requisite for water security.

Nature-based solutions for water (also called natural infrastructure)(SDG6.6), such as rivers, wetlands and lakes, provide essential services for water security, including, clean water supply, water purification, nutrient recycling or water storage. Natural water infrastructure also contributes to slope stability, soil fertility, air quality control and habitat and biodiversity provision. Investing in natural infrastructure, together with engineered infrastructure, can optimise performance and financial benefits.

Therefore this natural infrastructure underpins all targets of SDG6, and investment in those nature-based solutions generates benefits also for food security (SDG2), gender equality (SDG5), sustainable cities (SDG11), ocean conservation (SDG14) and terrestrial ecosystem conservation (SDG15). In addition, natural water infrastructure is a nature-based solution for climate change resilience (SDG13) and is essential for low carbon, climate resilient economies.

The [IUCN WISE-UP](#) project has demonstrated how benefits from natural infrastructure directly support hundreds of thousands of livelihoods. For example in the Tana River basin in Kenya, on average, the benefits accruing from natural infrastructure are currently worth more than US$ 170 million per year, mainly to subsistence smallholder farmers and pastoralists in the Lower Tana basin.

A study from 2011 estimates that [natural infrastructure](#) can provide USD 29 trillion annually in natural water infrastructure services. Alone the water storage service offered by the Miyun watershed forest in China for Beijing's drinking water is estimated at USD 1.9bn annually in a different study. Investing in nature-based solutions for water security can enable cost-effective solutions.

SDG 11 – nature-based solutions for cities
In our current understanding of the interrelation between nature and cities a big focus is put on the negative foot print urban development and life has on the environment. However, this limits our view to the negative side (SDG11.6) and does not relate to the bigger picture included in SDG11.

An increasing focus needs to be put to the values of natural assets for cities. Nature-based solutions can often be applied in cities and contribute to water security (as described above) or are of importance for disaster risk reduction (see below) thus linking to 11.5 and 11.B or for the health of its people through green spaces (target 11.7).

IUCN is working with a number of [partners](#) to demonstrate the benefits of implementing nature-based solutions for climate and water resilience in cities through its [Grow Green project](#). A number of pilot cities are participating in this exercise to contribute to the evidence base of nature-based solutions for cost effective replicable urban climate and water

resilience strategies and actions. It also creates awareness and capacity building with cities around the world for integrating the value of nature in urban planning and development.

The IUCN URBES project has provided a framework to raise awareness for the value of nature in cities. These included focusing on the role of biodiversity and ecosystem services in urban landscapes, their valuation (both monetary and non-monetary), their integration into urban planning and management, sustainable land use change and the translation of scientific knowledge into local action. The project resulted in more than 50 scientific publications, policy briefs, factsheets and short videos. The knowledge gained through this research will be vital for restoring ecosystems in urban areas and increasing urban resilience.

However, in order to fully operationalize nature-based solutions, we need to, in line with target 11.A, see cities and urban development as part of the wider landscape. Protected natural areas in proximity of cities ensure the deliverance of solutions such as for water security, flood protection and health benefits and at the same time build important refuges for wildlife. Understanding these linkages between cities and their surrounding landscapes and natural ecosystems is essential.

SDG 11 – nature-based solutions for disaster risk reduction
In addition, nature-based solutions are also viable elements of disaster risk reduction strategies (also called ecoDRR). The IUCN project *Ecosystems Protecting Infrastructure and Communities (EPIC)* demonstrated the role of nature in protecting people and societies from disasters in Chile, China, Thailand, Senegal and Nepal.

EPIC Nepal successfully demonstrated that eco-safe roads, a nature-based solution to DRR, are cost-effective and locally adapted. Compared to conventional earthen roads, eco-safe roads, while slightly more expensive to constructed (conventional USD 8'000-15'000 vs. eco-safe USD 15'000-20'000), have significantly lower annual maintenance cost, especially during years with heavy monsoon (conventional: USD 30'000-50'000 vs. eco-safe: USD 10'000-20'000). This approach is the result of the establishment of ecosystem-based and a locally adapted roadside soil bio-engineering approach for reducing landslide instabilities and erosion while providing livelihood benefits to the communities living in landslide-prone areas; thus increasing their resilience.

In Chile, EPIC demonstrated that healthy forest ecosystems can play an important role in protecting infrastructures and communities from avalanche and landslide hazards. The policy advocacy approach used has generate multiple opportunities to integrate and influence policies and planning instruments by mainstreaming the Eco-DRR concept into the Chilean government lexicon, e.g. in the National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change in Biodiversity, National Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

Nature-based solutions for disaster risk reduction are increasingly being taken into consideration to improve the resilience of urban areas, as they provide cost-effective solutions.

SDG 15 – enabling nature-based solutions
SDG15 builds the foundation for the existence of nature-based solutions. Beyond the examples mentioned above, nature can contribute to many more solutions for societal challenges. For example, human health can improve from contact with nature through outdoor recreation.

In food security, nature-based solutions can involve managing pollinator habitats supporting agricultural production, protecting local varieties or wild genetic resources, or managing ecosystems to regulate hydrological flows to provide irrigation water.

Nature-based solutions can also be highly cost-effective approaches relating to climate change. For example, a recent comprehensive assessment of nature based climate solutions (Griscom et al. 2017 PNAS) shows that they can provide more than one-third of the climate mitigation needed between now and 2030 to stabilize warming to below 2 °C, at costs competitive to climate mitigation in other economic sectors.

Lastly, investing in nature-based solutions is also investing in an accelerator that allows progressing on various SDGs and SDG targets simultaneously. As shown above, conserving a specific ecosystem does not only provide one type of service but provides multiple benefits. For example for clean drinking water (SDG6), a conserved/restored ecosystem could simultaneously contribute to reducing disaster risk (SDG11/SDG13) or to mitigate climate change (SDG13), while providing biodiversity benefits (SDG15).

c. The right governance structures and a clear policy framework is key in order to sustainable manage biodiversity and ecosystems.

Despite a plethora of legal instruments related to the environment, from international to communal level, ecosystems and natural resources continue to decline at an alarming rate.

IUCN considers it of prime importance to clarify and improve governance issues, for example to ensure equitable and fair distribution and use of natural resources. Because those most directly dependent on natural resources are often the poorest in the region, improving governance is an important factor in securing livelihoods and promoting sustainable natural resource use and conservation. In addition, conservation success depends on effective and equitable governance, comprised of strong and appropriate legal frameworks that are well implemented and tailored to have a meaningful impact. In designing governance systems, it is essential to consider effectiveness and efficiency of governance interventions, using tools such as the Framework for Assessing and Improving Law for Sustainability developed by IUCN.

Through the Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF), IUCN is developing an overarching framework to improve action on natural resource governance in IUCN projects and programmes; strengthen knowledge and action on natural resource governance; and promoting the NRGF as a conservation standard for the broader conservation and natural resource community.

IUCN's work on integrated water resource management is addressing several of these governance aspects and has shown a number of lessons learned, linking also to food security (SDG2), biodiversity and ecosystems (SDG15) and peace and justice (SDG16), among other SDGs.

Water governance must include stakeholders from all relevant sectors, including energy, agriculture, environment and natural resources management and health. IUCN's SUSTAIN-Africa initiative strengthens water governance while demonstrating inclusive green growth, as for example, in the region around the Katuma river in Tanzania. Until recently, this river was on the verge of drying up, mainly due to illegal abstractions by smallholder farmers and irregular and reduced rainfall due to climate change. As part of SUSTAIN-Africa, a rapid water assessment was undertaken by SNV in collaboration with Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and the Lake Rukwa Water Basin (LRWB) to assess the situation. It was concluded from the results that a multi-faceted approach of stakeholder engagement was needed, in combination with awareness raising and the implementation of sustainable farming practices as critical to restoring the river's flow. The solution coming from the multi-stakeholder task force was to construct efficient but low-cost irrigation structures with a self-financing strategy to provide water to smallholder farmers in the affected areas. Today

farmers pay for irrigation water but at a much lower cost than before, while the flow of the Katuma river has seen significant improvements benefitting livelihoods and ecosystems.

The roles of women in the governance of shared waters are further under-recognised and under-supported and IUCN's BRIDGE project is proactively integrating women's participation through its Champions programme and by supporting initiatives that train and empower women such as with Agua Sustentable in Lake Titicaca.

Lastly, IUCN's work on water has shown that such stakeholder-inclusive, multi-level transboundary cooperation and planning mechanisms foster solutions that are more equitable and sustainable. Multi-level water diplomacy builds cooperation on natural resource management and economic development but also strengthened resilience and reduced the risks of conflict (SDG16). Establishing regional policies and legal frameworks on transboundary water cooperation lays the groundwork for sharing multiple benefits not only from water but also regional trade and peace and security benefits. Effective and adaptive water cooperation at all levels builds climate change resilience and is essential for low carbon, climate resilient economies.

IUCN's gender work overall has shown that gender gaps across the environmental sectors jeopardize effective, efficient and equitable sustainable development and conservation outcomes, including the targets under SDG 5, but also cross cutting issues under the SDGs. IUCN is collaborating with UN Environment to further identify gender data gaps across the environmental sector, including especially as they affect SDG-related implementation. Targeted recommendations will aim to enhance SDG indicators, consider support to improve national action and data collection, and synergize information toward achievement of the SDGs.

Another area of IUCN's work linked to improving governance is wildlife crime (15.7). Wildlife loss to criminal poachers is a global problem, and the solution needs to address the full trade chain. Legal frameworks need to provide appropriate penalties, taking into consideration different motivations and circumstances of offenders, and manageable procedures. Investigators and prosecutors must take a strategic approach to target kingpins rather than petty offenders. IUCN works with prosecutors and judges to better understand and implement wildlife-related legislation, and has developed a database of wildlife related case-law, WILDLEX. The involvement of local communities is further important in tackling illegal wildlife trade. The First Line of Defense in Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade (FLoD) is an initiative of IIED and IUCN, which uses an action research methodology to interrogate and construct theories of change around reducing illegal wildlife trade through community voice and active engagement.

IUCN's work further demonstrated that results achieved can only be sustained when a supportive national policy framework is created. IUCN is thus working on integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning (SDG15.9) for example in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Here, IUCN is supporting national and local governments to shift development planning paradigms from commodity-based to ecosystem services based and climate friendly. This led to new local and national planning frameworks being issued to assist planner, which integrate ecosystems services and climate change.

Through the work carried out by IUCN, it has become apparent that a wider landscape view needs to be adopted when developing adequate policies. In this regard, IUCN supports Integrated Spatial Planning in various countries. This adopts such a wider view of the spatial dimension across urban and rural space (as compared to traditional urban planning), including marine space, and the wide range of sector policies, from economic development (land and resources), transportation, agriculture, climate change, environmental protection, nature conservation, and energy development to health and culture. It aims for common

objectives and coherent processes across sectors and vertical levels (national to local) in preparation, participation, and implementation.

Since 2014, IUCN is working with partners in [Vietnam on integrated land use planning](#), to generate political consensus to change the rice policy by helping to facilitate a high-level dialogue called the Mekong Delta Forum (MDF) between the Ministries, the South West Steering Committee, the 13 provincial governments of the Mekong Delta, among others. The resulting strategy involves a ten-year transition away from the third rice crop into flood-based agricultural livelihoods, through viable flood-retention land uses that would be supported by farmers. The floodplains' natural flood absorption restoration will also reduce flood risks as well as moderate downstream salinity intrusion.

2. Emerging issues likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies (guiding question (d))

There are a number of emerging issues that are likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies, including:

Climate change leading to increased:
o Land degradation
o Water scarcity
o Extreme weather events

Population:
o In need of additional water
o Need for more food/change in diets towards meat and other environmentally most detrimental options as income increases
o Leading to increased urbanization

Economic growth:
o Infrastructure
o Unsustainable practices

These emerging issues, if not addressed holistically through the SDGs could lead to the continuation/adoption of unsustainable practices, which can further amplify the biodiversity crisis, undermining the health of the planet, increasing the scarcity of resources and linked risk of conflict, thereby negatively affecting building sustainable and resilient societies.