



# TOWARDS POST-2020 MOBILIZATION OF #6

## LOCAL AND SUBNATIONAL ACTORS : THE SPEARHEADS OF BIODIVERSITY SOLUTIONS IN MOTION



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As the “BIO2020 - Brazilian Perspectives on the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework” conference concluded, the Federal district and 26 cities including all states capitals of Brazil agreed to voluntarily submit their commitments for biodiversity by joining the CitiesWithNature<sup>1</sup> platform.

**“WE ARE LIVING THROUGH AN ERA OF ANTHROPOGENIC DAMAGE TO HEALTH AND SOIL, AND CITIES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF THEIR INHABITANTS AND FOSTER ECOSYSTEM SERVICES. WHILE THE STATE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, LOCAL AND SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE AN INSTRUMENTAL ROLE TO PLAY IN REPAIRING AND RESTORING THESE LOSSES.”**

Matheus Couto, UNEP-WCMC,  
São Paulo, 4 February 2020

As the UN decade of biodiversity draws to a close in 2020, all players try to draw the lessons from the current framework failures. Amid this widespread mobilization, the role of sub-state and non-state actors (NSAs) is crucial<sup>2</sup>. These include subnational governments, regional and local authorities, cities, municipalities, metropolitan areas, etc. The next Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) shall be held in 2021 in China, to adopt a new global biodiversity framework which should be implemented at all levels of governance. NSAs are not entitled to negotiate it but remain involved through the Global Partnership on Local and Subnational Action for Biodiversity<sup>3</sup> and are actively mobilized to translate global targets into local realities. A conference of these actors was held from 4 to 6 February 2020 in São Paulo, hosted by the Secretary for Infrastructure and Environmental affairs of the State of São Paulo and co-organized by ICLEI South America<sup>4</sup>, the “Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework – EU Support” initiative and Region4. Over 200 of their Brazilian representatives formulated their contributions at the BIO2020 conference in São Paulo. The outcome of the proceedings - the “São Paulo letter<sup>5</sup> – outlines their ambition and makes the case for their voices to be heard in the negotiations underway.



Emburá, São Paulo, Brazil

# 1. NSAS, KEY PLAYERS OF BIODIVERSITY ACTION

This publication identifies key highlights on the specific kinds of biodiversity action undertaken by NSAs and gives insights into their demands and proposals. Through this dialogue with sub-state and non-state actors, the São Paulo conference helped identify and highlight the specific interactions that NSAs<sup>6</sup> have with biodiversity.

## BIODIVERSITY AND VITAL RESOURCES: “NEXUSES” MEDIATED BY NSAS

Several “nexuses” emerged as priorities for the management, planning and implementation of policies linked to biodiversity.

### HEALTH, QUALITY OF LIFE AND BIODIVERSITY: ONE AND THE SAME COMBAT

Firstly—and it must be noted that these positions were expressed even before Covid-19 was declared a pandemic—health emerged as the first significant nexus. Indeed, biodiversity is an essential contributing factor to the quality of life enjoyed by urban populations. It has long been known that greater richness in biodiversity contributes to an overall reduction in stress, air pollution, heat islands and water pollution in cities (by filtering and purifying run-off).

Biodiversity is thus an essential resource that helps to maintain urban quality of life, provide vital ecosystem services and increase the attractiveness of cities. In fact, rural populations view this nexus in much the same light.

### WATER: A SHARED VITAL RESOURCE

Water resources and food supply management represent another crucial “intersection point” between urban space management by NSAs and biodiversity. It is no accident that this issue was brought to light in São Paulo, one of the most populated cities in the world<sup>7</sup>, which went through a severe water crisis in 2014, leading to water rationing and cuts throughout summer. While biodiversity conservation does not directly impact water supply to cities, policies that aim to protect nature also indirectly help conserve water resources.

On the one hand, they impact the quality of water by recycling the pollution load and preventing watershed contamination, and on the other hand, they impact the quantity of available water by fulfilling a natural storage function through a reduction in evaporation, run-off and soil erosion. Protecting biodiversity is thus a wise approach to managing these vital resources.

This also holds true for food supply management, particularly collective meals such as school feeding programmes, insofar as NSAs are often tasked with these. More generally, NSAs plan spatial management in their metropolitan areas and catchment areas. In this capacity, they play a key role in land use policies, which, in turn, determine biodiversity. The promotion of organic agriculture, for instance, plays a notable role in increasing drinking water quality (support for sustainable farming in catchment areas is a good example of a way to achieve this).

## THE CAPABILITIES OF NSAS MAKE THEM CORNERSTONES OF BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

### DIRECT AUTHORITY ON SPATIAL MANAGEMENT

In addition to the planning functions they exercise, NSAs are also directly responsible for the management of spaces that are vital to biodiversity conservation: urban spaces, including parks and gardens; and protected areas managed by the federal state or municipality, which often account for a large surface area of the country.

The importance of protected areas and reserves in biodiversity conservation is well-known, alongside the global goals to increase coverage of these protected areas and the adoption of regulations benefiting their conservation. In reality, environmental restoration initiatives and expenditure are undertaken by sub-state and non-state actors in varying but non-negligible proportions. This is obviously an important concern in Brazil, a country in which deforestation continues but where initiatives to naturally restore and reforest the land are also underway, as in the Mata Atlantica area.

In this manner, NSAs often bear the ultimate responsibility for facilitating concrete action on the conservation of biodiversity spaces.

### ENTITIES POSITIONED AT THE HEART OF THE ECONOMY

Many biodiversity stakeholders at the São Paulo conference pointed out the key role played by economic factors in biodiversity conservation. Subsidies, tax exemptions or taxes and pricing instruments used to either promote or discourage certain economic activities, appeared to be major contributing factors to positive or negative biodiversity trends. Land taxes and property incentives were highlighted as key determinants to managing urban sprawl and soil sealing.

Financial support provided by local authorities to sustainable farming, forestry and regenerative ecological agriculture, which helps conserve natural resources, primarily water, also plays a significant role.

More broadly speaking, sub-state and non-state actors highlighted their role in fostering a circular

<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2ThuNLp>

<sup>2</sup> Rankovic, A., Maljean-Dubois, S., Wemaere, M., Laurans, Y. (2019). An Action Agenda for biodiversity: Expectations and issues in the short and medium terms, IDDI, Issue Brief N°04/19.

<sup>3</sup> <https://bit.ly/2yIQkQI>

<sup>4</sup> ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network connecting over 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. For the specific goal of protecting biodiversity, the network maintains the platform “Cities with Nature” in association with The Nature Conservancy and IUCN.

<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/2TOa8v6>

<sup>6</sup> Non-State Actors

<sup>7</sup> Population of 12.18 million people



White-headed marsh tyrant  
(*Arundinicola leucocephala*),  
Mato Grosso, Brazil

bioeconomy by organizing co-operatives and developing products and value chains that cater to local demands.

#### **THEIR ROLE AS INTERMEDIARIES BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE**

NSAs are, by their very nature, well positioned to organize co-operation between institutions at various levels. They ensure communication between municipalities, associations, neighbourhood services, regional and sub-regional organisations as well as states in federal countries. They are responsible for developing land-use plans and in particular for ensuring landscape connectivity between different spaces such as protected areas and reserves protecting traditional peoples' and communities' territories, private areas, urban parks, afforestation and green infrastructure, etc. They are also the primary points of interaction for the private sector, public authorities and civil society organisations.

This co-ordination between stakeholders of all kinds and at all levels is both a distinctive feature and a necessary function of sub-state and non-state actors, which can be leveraged for the benefit of nature conservation policies.

and intercropping with grasses. We have seen examples of programmes initiated by the state of São Paulo to support the creation of forest corridors. These corridors help maintain the quality of soil and become a breeding and migration ground for various plant and animal species, while also helping landowners comply with the requirements of the Forest Code on legal reserves, thereby helping to increase their land value.

#### **DEPLOYMENT OF FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES**

Consequently, NSAs invest a lot of their efforts and financial means in policies for the restoration of natural environments. Even though consolidated data on the precise share of NSAs and the states in biodiversity expenditure is not available, it certainly appears that NSA budgets are increasingly being mobilized towards policies aimed at nature conservation. The same can be said for the human and technical resources mobilized towards these programmes, insofar as they require technical staff trained in green space maintenance and planning closer to the field.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: A KEY PATH FORWARD**

The key role played by environmental education in adapting to the global challenges of the future has been universally emphasized. By helping to spread and awaken a global awareness of the myriad impacts that human beings have on their natural environment, education, training and environmental awareness are a prerequisite to the implementation of policy targets such as those which will be adopted by the COP 15 within the framework of the biodiversity convention. In several countries, environmental education is a capacity and field supplementary to general education, which is organized or supported by NSAs in step with national programmes. Some examples of such actions are school excursions, educational events and training programmes, specialized instructional materials and aids provided to teachers and financing for dedicated environmental education initiatives.

Likewise, NSAs are also responsible for fostering social partnership and citizenship science as well as for encouraging the dissemination and extension of scientific and technical knowledge among civil society, particularly through vocational training online, open databases for the disclosure of biodiversity information and the promotion of local and traditional knowledge.

#### **STRENGTHENING AND ENABLING THE FULL DISCLOSURE OF DATABASES: AN AREA OF IMPROVEMENT**

While we have noted that NSAs are characterized by their function as intermediaries between different levels of governance—from local to territorial to state at the federal level—this can

## **2. NSAS AT THE HELM: BIODIVERSITY APPROACHES AND TOOLS**

A number of tools and techniques were highlighted as approaches that NSAs deploy and execute well, and these represent innovative approaches to biodiversity-oriented policies.

#### **PAYMENTS FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES: TOOLS FAVOURED BY NSAS**

Firstly, NSAs create, develop and manage a large number of the payment mechanisms for ecosystem services. Most often, these are instruments that compensate forest or agricultural landowners for adopting or maintaining production practices that help conserve biodiversity, protect natural resources and provide vital services for towns and municipalities in the region. There are several examples of NSAs paying forest or agricultural landowners in catchment areas along rivers or around springs from which drinking water is sourced, so that they adopt or maintain sustainable practices in these areas. In sustainable forestry, these include replanting of trees, planting cover trees to avoid leaving the soil bare and phasing out the use of chemical products.

Sustainable agriculture practices can include conversion to organic farming, agroforestry, cultivating practices that limit leaving the soil bare



Alameda Von Martius  
Parque do Estado, São Paulo

<sup>8</sup> “The role of Protected Areas in Latin America and The Caribbean, on the way to Post-2020 Commitments”:  
<https://bit.ly/35WOo8C>

Cover page picture:  
BIO2020, 4-6 February 2020, São Paulo. Ingrid Coetze (ICLEI), Socorro Neri, Mayor of Rio Branco (State of Acre), Marcos Penido, Secretary for Infrastructure and Environment, São Paulo State Government, Rodrigo Perpetuo, Executive Secretary, ICLEI South America

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represent both an asset and a weakness. As described earlier, one of their strengths is their unique capacity to combine different types of action and at different levels, which is crucial for biodiversity conservation. The fact that NSAs are often also the authorities responsible for environmental compliance and inspection is another asset. Very often, administrative decisions aimed at supervising, monitoring, inspecting, authorizing or sanctioning the actions of economic actors with regard to biodiversity are taken at their level.

As a result of this function, they produce and maintain significant databases containing information regarding green space intervention areas, registries of all kinds, economic and social information required for licencing (building permits, for example), tax and incidental tax data, and data on industrial and agricultural production chains as well as on the extractive industry such as mining, etc. It has often been noted that this potential has been considerably underused by stakeholders.

Creating and ensuring the interoperability of these databases, setting up information sharing networks and monitoring institutions capable of using this information to produce relevant political signals while ensuring fiscal and business secrecy are all crucial to better environmental reporting and thus represent a capacity which needs to be developed urgently.

### 3. GUIDANCE FOR THE POST-2020 FRAMEWORK GOALS

On the basis of the key points described in this document, the recommendations arising from the São Paulo Conference can be summarized as follows:

- + Ensure that the **goals, targets and mechanisms** adopted at the COP 15 are the **most “actionable”** possible i.e. drafted in the form that corresponds most closely to their execution modalities.
- + Recognize the **centrality of partnership arrangements between public players, the private**

**sector and social organizations**, adapted to local needs, as in the case of ecosystem service payments, as well as that of the socio-economic functions fulfilled by NSAs.

+ Take due account of the **role played by environmental restoration measures** in achieving final goals, define acceptable criteria to leverage their position as allies in ensuring the restoration of biodiversity, and build on the scientific research and technological means necessary for their implementation.

+ Adopt guidelines for the **integration of public biodiversity policies at different levels of governance**, as for financial and technical assistance mechanisms and reporting by NSAs on their respective contributions, in both the upcoming convention framework and in national biodiversity action programmes.

+ Recognize the **essential function fulfilled by protected areas**<sup>8</sup> and other land use management tools in the implementation of goals.

**“WE HAVE COME THIS FAR THROUGH THE CONCERTED EFFORTS OF RESEARCHERS, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, ACADEMIA AND ORDINARY PEOPLE CONCERNED WITH THE ENVIRONMENT. BUT THIS ISSUE IS GAINING GREATER RELEVANCE TODAY BECAUSE THERE IS A RISING AWARENESS WITHIN THE LARGER SOCIETY, WHICH REPRESENTS A PARADIGM SHIFT.”**

Patrícia Iglesias, CEO of the environmental agency of the state of São Paulo (CETESB)

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