



UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Showcasing the power of Nature-based Solutions

23 March 2023, 15:00-16:30, New York Water House, 21st floor, 666
3rd avenue, New York

Organized by: EcoShape, Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)

On March 23, 2023, the New York Water House was abuzz with excitement as EcoShape and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO-TIO) hosted "Showcasing the Power of Nature-Based Solutions", a side event at the UN Water Conference and part of the New York Water Week. The event's aim was to highlight the potential for Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to identify potential barriers and enablers in implementing them.

The event brought together a diverse group of participants, including NBS practitioners, institutional representatives and other stakeholders from around the world. Through two panel discussions and a presentation on UN Restoration Flagship Project Building with Nature (BwN) Indonesia, they explored the obstacles and opportunities associated with implementing NBS and shared best practices and lessons learned from successful projects.

Nature-Based Solutions

Nature-Based Solutions refer to the use of natural systems and processes to address environmental challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss and water management. NBS have gained recognition as sustainable alternatives to traditional infrastructure that use natural landscapes to improve water safety and security.

The benefits of NBS for water management are numerous. For example, they can enhance water quality, regulate water flow, reduce the risk of floods and droughts and improve the resilience of water systems to climate change. Additionally, NBS can provide social and economic benefits and contribute to biodiversity protection. However, despite the inclusion of NBS in international agreements like the European Green Deal and the UN Global Biodiversity Framework, their implementation so far remains limited.

The panel discussions

The panel discussions featured NBS practitioners and institutional representatives who shared their experiences and insights on implementing NBS, including representatives from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, World Wildlife Fund, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Invest International, Partners for Water (part of RVO), Deltares, Van Oord and Arcadis. They covered a range of topics related to NBS implementation, including governance and institutional adoption, project management and monitoring and identifying barriers and enablers. Jane Madgwick, CEO of Wetlands International said: "We are in no doubt that if we are going to move quickly towards a safe and just world, it is necessary to put NBS first amongst the options for infrastructure. The best way to do that is in this kind of collaboration."

Thanks to the synergetic environment, the panellists were able share their successes and challenges with each other, enabling knowledge sharing and mutual learning.

The first panel consisted of practitioners discussing the main important Enablers that they see in implementing NBS. Boris van Zanten (World Bank), Matthijs Boersema (Ministry of Infrastructure & Water/Rijkswaterstaat & USACE), Edgar Westerhof (Arcadis), Viviana Franco Hernández (Van Oord) and George Peters (RHDHV) each highlighted one project/aspect in a short pitch, after which they further discussed on these matters. After a presentation on BwN Indonesia that already connected the Enablers and lessons learned from that project and the continuation of these efforts in upscaling in the BwN Asia program, more institutional and financial stakeholders joined the second panel. Robyn Colosimo (US Army),

Dennis van Peppen (RVO), Lara Muller (Invest International), Yang Villa (ADB) and Bart Geenen (WWF-NL) shared insights into both the challenges and potential solutions that they observe in their works to further implementation of NBS.

Key take-aways on implementing Nature-Based Solutions

Reflecting on an inspiring discussion, the key insights for implementing NBS are summarised below:

- Involve the multi-stakeholders throughout the whole process and bring them together around the table. From the private sector, financiers and investors, to contractors, locals and governments.
- Actively involve the community and local stakeholders by including them in the decision-making process, creating awareness of NBS's valuable benefits, asking for their local knowledge and giving them ownership of the NBS. They will have to maintain the NBS in the future.
- Make the stakeholders aware of the different (in-)direct benefits coming from the implementation of NBS and bring forward the economic benefits of the case.
- Understand and take into account the different systems that are involved, like the biophysical, local and institutional systems.
- Aim for an iterative process: learn and improve through implementation, doing the work and evaluation. When there is no capacity for a large project, start with a small project and develop the bigger ones over time.
- Aim for long-term benefits and take into account the maintenance and monitoring of the NBS.
- Put time and effort into capacity building amongst governments and local stakeholders. Not only to create awareness and knowledge on what NBS can deliver and create an enabling political environment for embedding NBS, but also to train them to operate and maintain the NBS.
- Connect across different disciplines, sectors and partners. It is all about collaboration and working together.

Game changer for achieving SDGs

Lara Muller, from Invest International, described the collective thought of the panel discussions clearly: "If there is one thing that NBS also today proved is that it is all about collaboration and multi-disciplinary partnership in order to make it happen. On the ground but also on a higher institutional level. Having financiers, technical people, everybody with the heart in the right place in order to make this happen." Maintaining this collaborative atmosphere, Nature-Based Solutions might be the game-changer in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

During the 'showcasing of the Power of Nature-Based Solutions' event, a promising coalition was formed for mainstreaming NBS. Read more about the collaborating organisations and their commitments on [Coalition for Mainstreaming Nature-Based Solutions launched - EcoShape](#)