

Achieving Net Gain for People and Biodiversity



Credit: D. Palmar (www.photoscot.co.uk)

Who is this brief for?

This brief is for anyone involved with economic development projects (big or small) seeking No Net Loss or Net Gain of biodiversity (hereafter referred to as Net Gain). It introduces good practice principles for people when designing and implementing Net Gain.

What is Biodiversity Net Gain?

Net Gain means that overall, biodiversity is improved because of a development project. Achieving Net Gain requires implementing the mitigation hierarchy. This starts with avoiding biodiversity loss as far as possible, e.g. re-locating a project to avoid sensitive habitats. Then minimising any loss incurred before remediating damage, such as restoring habitat temporarily cleared for access roads. The final stage, as a last resort, is to offset any remaining loss with measurable gains elsewhere.

Achieving Net Gain also requires measuring losses and gains of biodiversity from a development project in order to demonstrate that, overall and over the whole life of the project, the gains are greater than the losses.



Credit: V. F. Griffiths



Credit: J. P. G. Jones

Why consider people for Net Gain?

For two main reasons. Firstly, Net Gain can easily affect how people use, depend on, and value biodiversity. For example, when Net Gain involves enhancing a forest but this stops local people from collecting subsistence resources such as fuel, food and medicine. Or when a development causes the loss of a well-loved public park but people living nearby are too far to benefit from the offset. Not accounting for these social impacts of Net Gain can have devastating consequences for people living near to the development site and any biodiversity offset.

The second reason is that Net Gain can generate substantial benefits for people such as improved air quality, reduced soil erosion and better flood prevention. So not considering people is a missed opportunity to generate much wider benefits from Net Gain, as well as its benefits for biodiversity.

Isn't this already covered by Environmental and Social Impacts Assessments?

Not always. Often biodiversity and social impact assessments are undertaken in isolation and miss these social impacts of Net Gain. Even when social impacts are considered, they are often poorly accounted for. Whereas fully incorporating the social impacts of Net Gain into project planning and impact assessments will generate truly sustainable and beneficial outcomes for both biodiversity and people.

What's the business case for addressing the social impacts of Net Gain?

The main commercial advantages are:

- Increased efficiencies in design and construction
- A smoother transition through the consent process
- Reduced risk to achieving Net Gain

Some financial institutions require their projects to address impacts on ecosystem service provision, which involves addressing the social impacts of Net Gain.



Credit: D. Rogers

When designing Biodiversity Net Gain, what's the best outcome for people?

Development projects achieving Net Gain should ensure that:

People's wellbeing is at least as good as before the development project and its Biodiversity Net Gain activities, and preferably better.

Wellbeing is a broad concept that encompasses materials, quality of life, relationships with family and friends, emotional and physical health, security, and feelings about one's community. Wellbeing indicators should be developed with the people directly affected by Net Gain, rather than using economic indicators that do not reflect their quality of life or what matters most to them.

Is assessing ecosystem services enough?

It's a good start, as ecosystem service assessments identify the material benefits that people obtain from biodiversity, and what they lose if that biodiversity is removed for a development project. However these assessments do not capture the broader aspects of people's relationships with biodiversity, e.g. people can lose their sense of security when their access to biodiversity is threatened. So assessing how Net Gain affects people's wellbeing is essential and far more effective when it comes to designing and implementing Net Gain for both people and biodiversity.



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Do people outweigh biodiversity?

It is not an either – or situation. This is about achieving Net Gain whilst ensuring that the people affected are no worse off, and preferably better off in terms of their wellbeing.

In practice this is about aligning objectives for people and biodiversity early within a project's lifecycle.

It's also about seeking win-wins such as people using natural resources without compromising the Net Gain objective, and about identifying and addressing any trade-offs between people and Net Gain.

What happens when people's values for a specific biodiversity feature cannot be compensated for when that feature is lost?

Just as with biodiversity aspects of Net Gain, there are some social values that, if lost, cannot be compensated for, such as cultural and spiritual sites. It's critical to identify these values early, and then avoid impacts to those biodiversity features. It is also critical to make explicitly clear to decision-makers that, if such biodiversity is affected, the outcomes for people will not be fair even if Net Gain of biodiversity is achieved.

Will it cost more?

Development projects involving ESAs will already be undertaking many activities to incorporate the social considerations of Net Gain. Together with early planning and budgeting, this ensures efficiencies when throughout a project's lifespan.

Where can I obtain more information?

This brief is based on international good practice principles for **Ensuring No Net Loss for People as well as Biodiversity**, which can be downloaded from [here](#). These 'people' principles of Net Gain provide a framework for developments to demonstrate that people's values for biodiversity have been incorporated into the design, implementation, and long-term maintenance and monitoring of Net Gain.

Who can do what?

Governments, financial institutions and commissioning agencies can stipulate adherence to the 'people' principles when setting targets for their projects to achieve Net Gain.

ESIA consultants can apply the 'people' principles in assessments and designs of Net Gain.

Consenting authorities and auditors can use the 'people' principles to check good practice for people has been applied through the lifespan of a development project and its Net Gain activities.

Contractors and maintainers can use the 'people' principles to demonstrate good practice during the construction and operational stages.

NGOs and civic societies can advocate for the 'people' principles in Net Gain developments.

Academia can collaborate with government, industry and other stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the 'people' principles, and refine and update them.

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