

Achieving “No Net Loss” for people and biodiversity in Uganda



WHO IS THIS BRIEF FOR?

This brief is for anyone involved with economic development projects (big or small) seeking ‘No Net Loss’ (NNL) of biodiversity.

It introduces good practice principles for people when designing and implementing NNL.

WHAT IS NO NET LOSS?

No Net Loss means that overall, biodiversity is not reduced (and ideally increased) because of a development project. Achieving NNL of biodiversity 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 gains elsewhere.

Achieving NNL also requires quantifying 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 equal to the losses (or ideally greater to achieve Net Gain).



WHY CONSIDER PEOPLE WHEN ACHIEVING NO NET LOSS?

There are two main reasons. Firstly, people use, depend on, and value biodiversity. So losses and gains in biodiversity from development projects can easily affect people. For example, people may lose access to a forest where they collect firewood, medicine and other subsistence resources that they depend on.

If these social impacts are not accounted for, actions towards achieving biodiversity NNL can have devastating consequences for people living nearby the development site and any biodiversity offset. Secondly, seeking biodiversity NNL can generate substantial benefits for people such as improved air quality, reduced soil erosion and better flood prevention, if it is done with these potential benefits in mind. So not considering people is a missed opportunity.

ISN'T THIS ALREADY COVERED BY ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS ASSESSMENTS (ESIAs)?

Not always. Often biodiversity and social impact assessments are undertaken in isolation and miss these social impacts of biodiversity NNL. Even when social impacts are considered, they are often poorly accounted for.

Fully incorporating social impacts of biodiversity NNL into project planning makes ESIAs more effective, as well as generating truly sustainable and beneficial outcomes for both biodiversity and people.



WHAT'S THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF BIODIVERSITY NNL?

The main commercial advantages are: increased efficiencies in design and construction, a smoother transition through the consent process, and reduced risk to achieving biodiversity NNL. Also some financial institutions require their projects to address impacts on ecosystem service provision, which involves addressing the social impacts of biodiversity NNL.

WHAT OUTCOME FOR PEOPLE SHOULD NNL PROJECTS AIM FOR?

Development projects achieving NNL should ensure that people's wellbeing is at least as good as before the development project and its biodiversity NNL activities, and preferably better. Wellbeing is a broad concept that encompasses material 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 NNL, rather than using simple economic indicators that do not reflect their quality of life.



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 could 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. through their sense of security).

Assessing how NNL affects people's wellbeing is far more holistic and so it is more effective when it comes to designing and implementing biodiversity NNL for people.



DO PEOPLE OUTWEIGH BIODIVERSITY?

No. This is about achieving biodiversity NNL whilst ensuring that the people affected are no worse off, and preferably better off in terms of their wellbeing.

This can be done by aligning objectives for people and biodiversity as early as possible, and seeking win-wins such as when people use natural resources without compromising the NNL objective.

It's also about identifying and addressing any trade-offs between people and biodiversity NNL.



SOMETIMES PEOPLE'S VALUES ASSOCIATED WITH A SPECIFIC BIODIVERSITY FEATURE CANNOT BE COMPENSATED FOR WHEN THAT FEATURE IS LOST, WHAT HAPPENS IN THOSE SITUATIONS?

Just as with biodiversity aspects of NNL, there are some social values that, if lost, cannot be compensated for. It's critical to identify these values, e.g. cultural and spiritual sites, and then as much as possible to avoid any impacts to the biodiversity underpinning these values. It is also critical to make explicitly clear to decision-makers that, if such biodiversity is affected, the outcomes for people will not be sustainable or equitable even if NNL of biodiversity is achieved.

WILL IT COST MORE TO APPLY THESE SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR NNL?

Development projects involving ESAs will already be undertaking many activities associated with these considerations. Together with early planning and budgeting, this ensures efficiencies when applying the considerations throughout a project's lifespan.

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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 <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/4ygh7/>. These principles provide a framework which would allow project proponents to demonstrate that the biodiversity NNL strategy has been designed and implemented with people's values for biodiversity in mind, in accordance with good practice.

WHO CAN DO WHAT?

Governments, financial institutions and commissioning agencies can stipulate adherence to the good practice principles for their projects. This especially regards the cultural aspects of Uganda's biodiversity, as this is a significant influence on people's wellbeing.

ESIA consultants can apply the principles in their assessment and design of NNL, and maintain good communication and coordination with local communities through district governments.

Consenting authorities and auditors can use the principles to check good practice has been applied through a development project's lifespan.

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



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