

## 6 RECOMMANDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING, PRESERVING AND RESTORING NATURE IN CITIES

DRAWN FROM GUATEMALA CITY'S METROPOLITAN GREEN BELT AND THE WESTERN URBAN NATURAL RESERVE IN SANTA FE, ARGENTINA.

Three quarters of the population in Latin America live in cities, which have been developed with no regard for the rich biodiversity which flourishes alongside them in the tropical climate. However, the way in which these cities are being designed and developed is starting to change, with nature now seen as a key asset in making them more inclusive and resilient to climate risks.

Some cities are now innovating and employing natural solutions to reduce risk, in the form of **nature-based solutions (NbS)**. Tree planting, the creation and restoration of green spaces, and adaptation to geographical conditions have become part of how communities are provided with services (such as food, health, leisure, water and air purification).

Thanks to its role in generating **positive social impacts**, nature has become a vital cornerstone in urban construction, and nature-based solutions (NbS) are now seen as a tool for transforming cities.

#### Learnings covered in this brochure

- Maintaining collective memory of disasters so that communities can take action, prevent and prepare for risks
- Involving ecology and environment experts in urban design
- Including environmental assessments and indicators as essential planning tools for greener cities
- The right to nature: offering equal access to green spaces, without compromising the protection of biodiversity
- Designing natural areas as a tool for integrating nature into the city
- Combining democracy and ecology by mobilising multiple urban actors at different territorial levels

## CONTEXT

Guatemala City and Santa Fe were established in areas that are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, due both to their climate and their geography. Guatemala City's Metropolitan Green Belt and the Western Urban Natural Reserve in Santa Fe, Argentina are both addressing the same challenges of urban resilience in the face of climate risks. At the same time, they are demonstrating that **integrating, preserving and restoring** nature in cities is as beneficial for people as it is for the flora and fauna that reflect the richness of the local ecosystems. In addition to the ecosystem services that nature can provide, these in the ways we think projects have prompted transformation in public policy and in how we think about cities.

Much can be learned from these two projects in planning the eco-friendly cities of tomorrow. They are providing real inspiration for other towns, stakeholders and leaders in the Global South.







#### Maintaining collective memory of disasters so that communities can take action, prevent and prepare for risks

Preserving collective memory of disasters is a key component of "risk culture". Remembering past events informs understanding of climate risks and preparation for future events, through the communication of best practices to adopt in an emergency. This is an effective tool for preparing communities to address risks and for increasing their resilience.

Making more room for nature in cities – by encouraging "green" infrastructure alongside "traditional" civil engineering – helps to reduce risk while also providing an opportunity to showcase landscapes and greenery that is often overlooked. This is more important than ever in the context of climate change.



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# Involving experts in the living world in urban design

Today, nature and biodiversity lie at the heart of green and sustainable urban development. This requires moving away from a "siloed" municipal institution approach, toward a cross-cutting organisation based on interdepartmental cooperation.

A key factor in the success of urban nature projects is the creation of a multi-disciplinary hub for handling issues around biodiversity, comprising a team of urban engineers trained in the management of natural areas and in urban ecology. It is therefore crucial to provide the institutions managing urban nature with adequate financial and human resources, and to ensure personnel continuity in these bodies irrespective of any changes in municipal teams.

Where it is not possible to draw on existing public bodies, an alternative is to call on external organisations, such as foundations possessing specific expertise in local biodiversity and understanding of the social and political challenges within the action sectors.





#### Environmental assessments and indicators are essential planning tools for greener cities

Providing for green and blue corridors in the city requires understanding of the temporal and spatial composition and variation in biodiversity, as well as its interactions and impacts on human activities, whether positive or negative.

Collecting data on biodiversity provides information on how it is changing. Close monitoring makes it possible to alert the authorities and citizens to any degradation of natural areas. Better understanding of the functioning and health of natural areas is also a way of putting nature conservation at the heart of political agendas.

Numerous tools exist for the monitoring of urban biodiversity and natural areas. Among these is citizen science, which in view of its educational value and high costeffectiveness offers great potential.



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#### The right to nature: offering equal access to green spaces, without compromising the protection of biodiversity

Contact with nature provides a sense of well-being, together with many cultural benefits. It's only recently that urban stakeholders have begun to recognise the services provided by nature. This recognition has been accompanied around the world by increasing demand and respect for natural areas.

Projects supported by the FFEM have shown that opening urban natural areas to the public has allowed residents to better understand their environment and has discouraged criminal activity and nuisance, while increasing footfall in parks. These projects have also demonstrated residents' interest in natural areas, and justified the raising of additional funding to continue to restore and enhance these areas with the support of civil society organisations.



### Designing natural areas as a tool for integrating nature into the city

Protection of nature and natural areas in cities is an effective tool for harnessing urban nature and contributing to more sustainable urban planning, particularly for cities in the Global South, some of which are currently at a preliminary stage of establishing planning documentation.

Protecting existing natural areas and identifying new places to develop biodiversity may help in the steering and controlling of urbanisation, in order to contain urban sprawl, defend the public interest, and foster common identity and shared values.

For urban nature projects to be truly effective, they must be accompanied by agile management plans that can be readily adapted to societal changes and are easily understood by residents. Opening these areas to the public, fully or partially, is often a good way to ensure that they are used rather than remaining empty.





#### Combining democracy and ecology by mobilising multiple urban actors at different territorial levels

The success of an urban nature project relies on political will, but also on mobilising all the city's stakeholders, at multiple territorial levels.

Involving the academic community in an urban nature project, both in designing and monitoring new spaces, offers a number of benefits. Projects are approached from different viewpoints when different environmentally-linked disciplines – such as psychology, law and anthropology – come into play.

Local democracy is a prerequisite for the success of an urban nature project, in the form of fair and inclusive public consultation processes and civil society participation at every stage of the project (including evaluation and capitalisation). Consultation must also involve the most vulnerable and less visible members of the public, such as women and children.



#### And tomorrow?

Understanding the interactions between cities and natural ecosystems is a springboard for improving on traditional planning models in the countries of the Global South. Through the many ecosystem services it provides, nature gives us a systemic view of how we can drive development while helping to protect the environment. It offers cities and international cooperation bodies the opportunity to approach urban planning differently.

It is vital to go further in mobilising direct finance for urban nature, recognising the value of this resource. This recognition could result in financing of actual projects, such as establishing a protected area, but importantly also in compensating cities for preserving natural areas rather than urbanising them.

Currently, financial and technical cooperation is largely based on North-South flows. However, given the concentration of rich biodiversity in the cities of the Global South, a South-South dynamic is to be encouraged. Experience-sharing and cross-capitalisation support cities in the South in taking action, by following the examples of their peers. South-North cooperation also appears to be a worthwhile future avenue for sharing experience, which is plentiful in the South.



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