

Proteus action area: Aligning corporate action for biodiversity and people

The plans proposed in this document will be reviewed with Proteus partners during the Proteus Annual Meeting 2026, and subsequent engagements, to guide work under Proteus across its 2026-2030 phase.

All work on this topic will be governed by an ethics process and panel, within UNEP-WCMC but independent of the team delivering Proteus, as a safeguard against potential negative outcomes for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other rights holders and stakeholders that may be negatively affected by the activities of the businesses we work with.

The challenge

Business operations and supply chains affect both biodiversity and people, often in interconnected ways. Business impacts on biodiversity and people's wellbeing can be negative or positive. They may adversely affect or violate human rights, or respect and promote them. Impacts happen in different ways in different sectors. For example, mines may contaminate land and water relied on by people in the surrounding region, renewable energy infrastructure may be sited in landscapes valued by communities, agricultural and forestry production landscapes may support local livelihoods or food security, and supply chains may rely on ecosystems managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Across sectors, there are needs to better align management of impacts on biodiversity and people, including through co-design between businesses and affected people including Indigenous Peoples and local communities. As part of this, historical exclusions of rights holders from development decisions must be acknowledged and rectified.

In many instances, businesses have separate internal processes and specialist teams for managing their impacts on biodiversity and on people, which often respond to legislation and standards that treat these as distinct issues. This has resulted in siloed approaches that fail to account for the interconnections between biodiversity and people. Businesses face risks when impacts on biodiversity trigger conflict with rights holders and stakeholders. These risks can translate to opposition, protests and litigation, which in turn can result in reduced social license to operate alongside specific operational disruptions, project delays, and cost overruns, among other impacts. Well aligned approaches can create opportunities and help manage trade-offs. Effective and meaningful engagement with rights holders, stakeholders, and Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) holders increases the likelihood that biodiversity actions will succeed in the long term and creates business value, including through helping secure social license to operate and reducing the risk of community opposition.

Efforts to address siloed decision making on biodiversity and people have been underway for some time in both the public and private sectors, and there is a body of literature on this topic. Some businesses, including Proteus partners, are increasingly recognising the interconnections between biodiversity and people in their management policies and practices. In addition, an increasing number of case studies are becoming available illustrating when engagement with different groups of people on biodiversity has shaped business approaches. However, effective alignment of corporate approaches on biodiversity and people remains uncommon. There is an opportunity to take lessons learned from existing success stories, across sectors, and scale their implementation.

What is needed?

Business decisions frequently require balancing development priorities with biodiversity and the needs and values of people. These include decisions about siting and design of infrastructure, consent and approval processes, sourcing, biodiversity offsets and restoration projects, conservation partnerships, and benefit sharing for use of natural resources or genetic information. An integrated approach presents opportunities to deliver value for the business, biodiversity and people.

To support more effective decisions, *biodiversity specialists* need to recognise the opportunity for synergies between approaches to biodiversity and people. This is consistent with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly Section C which addresses considerations for its implementation including the rights and contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, different value systems, a human-rights based approach, gender equality, and the interlinkages between biodiversity and health. *Social performance specialists* also need to recognise the interconnections between people and biodiversity. The IPBES Values Assessment (e.g. chapter 2) can support social performance specialists in understanding the diverse values related to biodiversity that different groups of people experience and hold. In different contexts, these will overlap with concepts like ecosystem services, nature's contributions to people, stewardship and responsibility, cultural significance, and intrinsic value, among others. The IPBES Business and Biodiversity Assessment highlights opportunities for taking on board ILK in business practice.

Working together, the specialists responsible for biodiversity and those responsible for social performance need to guide their businesses to take integrated approaches to these topics, underpinned by meaningful engagement with rights holders, stakeholders, and ILK holders including robust Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes. Approaches for biodiversity are most effective when they align not only with national legislation, lender requirements, and corporate commitments, but also with the rights and values of people who live with, depend directly on and otherwise interact with that biodiversity. Synergistic approaches on biodiversity and communities will deliver business value through stronger community partnerships, more durable outcomes, and increased efficiency.

In many cases, companies lack practical guidance on how to incorporate the perspectives and knowledge of different groups of people into their biodiversity decisions in a consistent and transparent way. This guidance is needed to give business specialists increased confidence to meaningfully engage with different value perspectives in biodiversity management approaches. Guidance needs to present practical best practice approaches, connected to tangible opportunities and risks for business. In addition, it needs to include case studies illustrating how principles are applied effectively in practice. This is especially important where conflicts arise between the values of different people and biodiversity priorities from other perspectives.

What will Proteus do?

We will seek to catalyse aligned delivery of positive impacts for biodiversity and people in corporate biodiversity management approaches, underpinned by appropriate engagement and use of ILK. This goes beyond avoiding negative impacts to delivering positive impacts for biodiversity and people at and around the locations impacted by business operations and value chains.

We will provide knowledge resources, decision support tools and capacity building to companies. These will draw from the expertise of UNEP-WCMC, which includes research into connections between nature and Indigenous Peoples on behalf of TNFD, engagement with diverse value perspectives in policy processes

such as under the CBD and IPBES, and facilitating collaborative ecosystem assessment processes. It will also draw on the practical experiences of Proteus partners and other leading companies.

We will work with partner companies to identify priority decision contexts where there is an opportunity for stronger alignment between biodiversity and people. These may include impact assessments, mitigation plans, biodiversity offsets, conservation partnerships, and sourcing from landscapes that support livelihoods.

We will engage in:

- Guidance development – for example to support appropriate co-design of biodiversity management actions and incorporating ILK and locally relevant value perspectives into biodiversity assessments, action plans and monitoring approaches.
- Convening – for example to collect and share business case studies on working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to design and deliver biodiversity actions in practice, navigating trade-offs and conflicting values where they occur.
- Implementation support – working with partner companies to embed leading practices and lessons learned from case studies into their business approaches.