

DRAFT UPDATED USAID BIODIVERSITY POLICY

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KEY TERMS

Biodiversity: The variability among living organisms (including people) from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.

Biodiversity conservation: The practice of conserving biodiversity; encompasses elements of protecting and sustainably using biodiversity.

Ecosystem: A dynamic complex of plant, animal, and microorganism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit.

Ecosystem services: The short- and long-term benefits people obtain from ecosystems. They include (1) provisioning goods and services, or the production of basic goods such as food, water, fish, fuels, timber, and fiber; 2) regulating services, such as flood protection, purification of air and water, waste absorption, disease control, and climate regulation; 3) cultural services that provide spiritual, aesthetic, and recreational benefits; and 4) supporting services necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services, such as soil formation, production of oxygen, crop pollination, carbon sequestration, photosynthesis, and nutrient cycling.

Equity: The process of ensuring consistent, systematic, fair, and just treatment of, and distribution of benefits and resources to all individuals, including those from marginalized and/or underrepresented groups. To ensure fairness, measures must be taken to compensate for historic, cumulative, and systemic (social, economic, political, and cultural) disadvantages that prevent individuals from operating on a level playing field. Equitable approaches are different from approaches in which resources are distributed equally to all persons or groups regardless of specific circumstances or needs. Equity is the process that needs to be followed to reach the outcome of equality.

Inclusion (social, economic, political, and cultural): The intentional process of positively transforming power dynamics to ensure that diverse individuals and communities from marginalized and/or underrepresented groups are able to take part in their societies. Inclusion can also be an outcome, when all the diverse individuals and communities, including those from marginalized and underrepresented groups, are no longer excluded based on their identities and are meaningfully able to take part in their societies, including in decision-making processes.

Inclusive development: An equitable development approach built on the understanding that every individual and community, of all diverse identities and experiences, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies. Their engagement throughout the development process leads to better outcomes. USAID promotes a nondiscriminatory, inclusive, equitable, and integrated development approach that ensures that all people have access to a country's services, opportunities, and legal protections, and are able to take part in their societies. This approach requires a concerted effort to include those who face discrimination, marginalization, underrepresentation, and/or have been made vulnerable. These intentional and proactive efforts ensure that all individuals are fully included and can actively participate in and benefit from development processes and activities with the goal of achieving equal outcomes for all.

Locally led development: The process in which local actors—encompassing individuals, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, and governments—set their own agendas, develop solutions, and have the capacity, leadership, and resources needed to make those solutions a reality.

Natural resources: Any biological, mineral, or aesthetic asset afforded by nature without human intervention that can be used for some form of benefit, whether material or immaterial. Examples include forests, oil, water, air, soil, wildlife, and other forms of biodiversity.

Natural resource management: The management of natural resources such as land, water, air, soil, plants, and animals, with a focus on how management affects the quality of life for present and future generations. Natural resource management falls under the umbrella of nature-based solutions and includes biodiversity conservation.

Nature: All life on Earth, together with the geology, water, climate, and all other inanimate components that comprise the planet. Biodiversity is the part of nature that is alive.

Nature-based solutions: Actions to conserve, manage, and restore ecosystems (including managed systems such as agricultural lands) that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively.

Nature-positive: Halting and reversing biodiversity loss, through measurable gains in the health, abundance, diversity, and resilience of species, ecosystems, and processes.

Nature-related risks: Potential threats posed to an organization (including to development programming) linked to their and wider society's dependencies on nature, which result from the degradation of nature, including its biodiversity, and the loss of ecosystem services that flow from it.

Transformative change: A fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic, and social factors, including paradigms, goals, and values.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Biodiversity—the enormous variety of all life on Earth—is the foundation for human development. Biodiversity provides food, water, clean air, a stable climate, and livelihoods, supporting over half of global Gross Domestic Product. Good governance of biodiversity in turn supports peace and security for billions of people. Biodiversity also has intrinsic, cultural, and spiritual value for people around the world.

But biodiversity is in crisis. One million species are threatened with extinction, many within decades. If greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced, ninety percent of marine species may go extinct. Deforestation is turning large swaths of tropical forests from carbon sinks into carbon sources. And one fifth of wetlands have disappeared from the Earth. These devastating losses have occurred despite decades of work and local successes.

And yet biodiversity has shown that it can bounce back if given the chance. Humanity’s relationship with nature can shift from one of unsustainable resource extraction based on a purely instrumental value system to nature-positive, equitable development that encompasses diverse values of nature.

In this pivotal moment, the United States must offer leadership and bold action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. As the international community works to achieve new global targets for biodiversity by 2030, USAID is well positioned to catalyze the “transformative change” needed to rise to this challenge.

The updated Biodiversity Policy reflects this need for transformative change and envisions a future in which **biodiversity is conserved so people and nature can thrive**. It provides a blueprint for how the Agency will work to achieve nature-positive, equitable development across societal systems. Crucially, this Policy deepens USAID’s appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature and the diverse ways in which people value nature, and recognizes that human development and survival are inseparable from the health of biodiverse ecosystems.

VISION:

Biodiversity conserved so people and nature can thrive

GOAL 1:

Conserve biodiversity in priority places

GOAL 2:

Catalyze nature-positive, equitable development

PRINCIPLES:

Locally Led Development

Support biodiversity conservation actions that are locally led, owned, and implemented

Equity & Inclusion

Partner with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and foster the leadership of women, youth, and additional marginalized and/or under-represented groups on biodiversity conservation

Cross-sectoral Approaches

Integrate biodiversity conservation and other development goals and approaches, and manage nature-related risks across sectors

Climate Resilience & Nature-based Solutions

Strengthen the resilience of biodiversity and elevate nature-based solutions to climate change

Private Sector Engagement

Partner with the private sector to reduce drivers of biodiversity loss, increase financing, and expand the scale, impact, and sustainability of biodiversity conservation

Policy Engagement

Leverage the convening power and technical expertise of USAID to advance international, regional, national, and municipal policies that promote biodiversity conservation

Evidence & Learning

Apply evidence and learning, including Indigenous and local knowledge, to enhance biodiversity conservation practice

INTRODUCTION

These are extraordinary times in the history of the planet. Humankind now possesses greater access to food and energy, scientific knowledge, and technology than ever before. Simultaneously, the world is experiencing unprecedented rates of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. These destabilizing planetary conditions threaten human and ecosystem health, food and water security, livelihoods, and lives—impacts that are felt unevenly across populations and compounded by high levels of global inequality (Chancel et al., 2022). The magnitude of this challenge calls for an ambitious approach to biodiversity conservation that is shared across development sectors and stakeholders, leverages key opportunities while reducing threats, and encompasses transformative shifts in societal systems.

Biodiversity is the living part of nature, alongside water, climate, geology, and other components of the planet, which support human life. According to the most recent global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES, 2019), human actions have significantly degraded seventy-five percent of the Earth's land and forty percent of the oceans. Agricultural expansion, timber extraction, and urbanization are the primary contributors to land use change and are often associated with air, water, and soil pollution, resulting in negative impacts on biodiversity and human health. One fifth of global wetlands have been lost since 1700 (Fluet-Chouinard et al., 2023), and with them their ability to reduce flooding, purify water, and provide fish and other wildlife habitat. One million species around the world are threatened with extinction, many within decades, including 500,000 terrestrial species that do not have enough natural habitat left for long-term survival. In the marine context, almost ninety percent of species are at risk of extinction if greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced (Boyce et al., 2022). Species loss has cascading effects on ecosystems and the goods and services they provide for people, and results in loss of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge for communities worldwide. At the same time, fossil-fuel based economic systems continue to drive greenhouse gas emissions, which have already led to global warming above 1°C relative to pre-industrial times (IPCC, 2018), further stressing species and undermining the integrity of ecosystems (Costello et al., 2022).

Collectively, these trends illustrate a picture of twin crises—biodiversity loss and climate change—that are re-shaping the context in which USAID works and threatening development gains, with the impacts disproportionately felt by communities that are socially, politically, geographically, and economically marginalized (Pörtner et al., 2021). The World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Risks Report describes the global risk of biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse as “severe consequences for the environment, humankind, and economic activity due to destruction of natural capital.” Already, nature's declining capacity to regulate environmental processes is expected to undermine progress toward 80 percent (35 out of 44) of the assessed targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to poverty, hunger, water, cities, climate, oceans, and land (Butchart et al., 2019). The evidence clearly shows that nature-related risks pose undeniable threats to USAID's goals to reduce poverty and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous world (Box 1).

In the face of so much current and projected loss, simply reducing harm within systems—economic, financial, political, social—as they currently operate will not be enough. Instead, scientific experts and policy makers around the world are calling for “transformative change” to fundamentally transform society’s relationship with the global environment and meet ambitious global targets for biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development (IPBES, 2019; CBD, 2021; UNFCCC, 2015; IPCC, 2018; UN GA, 2015). They note the critical importance of moving beyond business-as-usual approaches or even incremental efforts (Shin et al., 2019), especially as biodiversity is rapidly declining despite decades of conservation efforts (Leclère et al. 2020). This call for transformative change mirrors that of Indigenous Peoples who have been sounding the alarm for decades (Etchart, 2017). Action by all sectors and stakeholders, and intentional new ways to transform economies, policies, paradigms, and mindsets in support of biodiversity conservation are urgently needed.

It is in this context of a worsening biodiversity crisis and calls for transformative change that USAID has updated its Biodiversity Policy. Building on the Agency’s [2014 Biodiversity Policy](#) and the [2023 USAID Policy Framework](#)’s commitment to shared progress based on “bold and transformative steps,” this Policy reflects both a deep understanding of the role that healthy natural systems play in achieving the Agency’s development goals and the need to transform societal systems¹ in order to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change together. Biodiversity has shown that it can bounce back if given the chance, and there are many encouraging examples to build upon (e.g., Deinet et al., 2013; Correia et al., 2017; Ledger et al., 2022). With this Policy, USAID will take action across sectors to catalyze development that nourishes rather than depletes nature in order to realize a free, peaceful, and prosperous world *in which both people and nature thrive*.

¹ Societal systems include governance, financial, food, public health and veterinary, energy, transport, and urban systems, among others.

Box 1. Nature-related risks to development

Nature-related risks are potential threats posed to an organization or program linked to their and wider society's dependencies on nature, and result from the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services (TNFD, 2023; NGFS, 2023). Examples of nature-related risks to development include reduced agricultural productivity due to pollinator loss and increased conflict due to resource scarcity (IPBES, 2016; Vesco et al., 2020). As noted by the World Economic Forum in their Nature Risk Rising report, nature-related risks have far-reaching impacts on economic growth and human well-being (Herweijer, et al., 2020).

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's Target 15 specifically calls for reducing "biodiversity-related risks to business and financial institutions," and the private sector is already taking action. For instance, the Green Finance Institute's Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures, the Network for Greening the Financial System, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have already developed nature-related risk assessment frameworks (TNFD, 2023; NGFS, 2023; OECD, 2023). Assessing nature-related risks to development programming is an important component of a comprehensive approach to risk and resilience at USAID and to advancing transformative change.

BACKGROUND

Biodiversity Conservation at USAID

USAID is the largest funder of international conservation in the U.S. Government and has been supporting biodiversity conservation for more than 30 years. In March 2014, USAID launched its first-ever Biodiversity Policy with the vision to conserve biodiversity for sustainable, resilient development. The 2014 Policy had two goals: (1) to conserve biodiversity in priority places, and (2) *integrate biodiversity as an essential component of human development*. Critically, the Policy elevated biodiversity conservation as an international development issue, rather than solely an environmental issue, and focused on integrating biodiversity conservation and other development sectors—such as food security, governance, and health—primarily at the programmatic level. The Policy also modified the Agency’s Biodiversity Code—which guides the use of biodiversity funds appropriated from the U.S. Congress—to help ensure the rigor of programming. Finally, the Policy identified a set of Missions to be prioritized for biodiversity funds, staffing, and technical assistance, i.e., “Tier One” Missions.

Since the launch of the 2014 Biodiversity Policy, USAID has worked to conserve biodiversity in more than 60 countries around the world. On average, USAID improved the conservation of over 100 million hectares per year since 2014, an area the size of Texas and New Mexico combined. A 2023 assessment² found that the Agency leveraged more than US\$375 million in private sector funding for biodiversity conservation through the establishment of over 100 public-private partnerships since 2014. When comparing the three years before and after 2014, the assessment also found that USAID increased the number of biodiversity activities co-funded with other sectors from 55 percent to 68 percent. This suggests that integrated programming increased in support of Goal Two. The Agency also increased funding, staffing, and technical assistance for Tier One Missions and had high compliance with the requirements of the Biodiversity Code.

Biodiversity conservation at USAID is supported by the U.S. Government’s [2022 National Security Strategy](#) and the Department of State and USAID’s [Joint Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#), which recognize that environmental degradation threatens governments’ ability to meet basic human needs and contributes to

political, economic, and social instability. Numerous other USAID strategies and policies discuss biodiversity and natural resources (Appendix I), though the degree of mainstreaming biodiversity considerations is extremely variable across these guiding documents. At the activity level, biodiversity conservation interventions and nature-related risks to development are not routinely considered outside of environment programming at USAID. The Agency also engages in international policy fora related to biodiversity conservation,³ providing technical expertise to interagency delegations and support for countries to implement national biodiversity conservation commitments and strategies.

² 2023 Assessment of the 2014 USAID Biodiversity Policy (link forthcoming)

³ USAID participates in the following international fora related to biodiversity conservation: Convention on Biological Diversity, International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, UN FAO Committee on Fisheries, UN FAO Committee on Forests,

Trends in Biodiversity Loss

Despite some successes at local scales (Box 2), global levels of biodiversity loss remain unprecedented in magnitude and speed (IPBES, 2019). Most of the international community’s 2020 biodiversity goals (the “Aichi targets⁴”) were not met (CBD Secretariat, 2020) due to poorly defined and monitored metrics and inadequate investment and accountability (Green et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2021). At a global scale, there is consistent loss of biodiversity at all levels, including lower population abundances, reduced genetic diversity, decreased diversity of ecological communities, and species extinctions (Purvis et al., 2019). Loss of biodiversity is also pervasive across taxa and terrestrial, freshwater, and marine realms, with detrimental ripple effects for the organisms, ecosystem services, and communities that depend on them (Bogoni et al., 2020; Eddy et al., 2021). The abundance of freshwater vertebrate species—including the world’s frogs, fish, and salamanders—has declined by 83 percent in just 50 years (WWF, 2022). An estimated 40 percent of vascular plant species globally are threatened with extinction (Antonelli et al., 2020). The tropical regions of the world show the largest declines in biodiversity, with Latin America having lost 94 percent of its vertebrate populations between 1970 and 2018 (WWF, 2022). More than a quarter of mammals, over ten percent of birds, almost 70 percent of cycads, and over 30 percent of corals are threatened with extinction (IUCN, 2022).

UN Convention to Combat Desertification, UN Forum on Forests, International Tropical Timber Organization, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

⁴ The [Aichi biodiversity targets](#) were established by the United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity and consist of 20 specific targets to address and mitigate biodiversity loss across the globe by 2020.

Box 2. Long-term, locally led, cross-sectoral development benefits people and nature in Northern Kenya

Despite negative trends in biodiversity globally, local successes like USAID's approach in Northern Kenya provide a potential path forward for biodiversity conservation that is transformative. Since the late 1990s, USAID has invested almost \$32 million in community conservancies in Northern Kenya, a region rich in biodiversity but also historically subject to ethnic strife and insecurity. Through more than twenty years of support for community conservation, 43 independent community-owned conservancies are conserving wildlife, managing productive rangelands and fisheries, improving peace and security, and helping develop local economies across a landscape that covers seven percent of Kenya's landmass. Investments in biodiversity conservation, health, economic growth, education, water, and governance provide resources to thousands of marginalized households across the 43 conservancies.

The results of this long-term and sustained investment offer hope. As of 2023, elephant poaching in the region is at its lowest since 2003. Effective rangeland management across two million hectares has buffered the impacts of climate-induced drought on both wildlife and livestock. The presence of community rangers, in addition to peace training and meetings reaching almost 8,000 people, has promoted a culture of non-violent conflict resolution between different ethnic groups. Enterprise development such as eco-tourism provides economic benefits to thousands of conservancy members and attracted \$14 million in private sector investment in 2021. Further strengthened by national policies such as the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013 and Community Land Act of 2016, community conservancies are a rapidly growing movement that aim to cover 20 percent of Kenya's land by 2030.

Biodiversity Loss and Risks to Human Development

Widespread biodiversity loss poses nature-related risks to economic growth, food security, global health, peace and security, and gender equality by imperiling the life-supporting goods and services that biodiversity provides (Herweijer, et al., 2020). These include fresh air, clean water, food, fuel, flood protection, nutrient cycling, pollination, and carbon storage and sequestration. The risks are far-reaching. An estimated US\$44 trillion of economic value generation, or more than half of global GDP, is considered moderately or highly dependent on nature (Herweijer et al., 2020). More than three billion people worldwide live in land degradation hotspots that face decreased crop and livestock production (Le et al., 2016). The agriculture sector risks losing US\$235-577 billion in annual global crop output due to pollinator loss, with smallholder producers hit the hardest (IPBES, 2016). Nearly 500 million people depend on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods, and yet overfishing, pollution, poor management, and other factors are driving fisheries decline around the world (FAO, 2023; FAO, 2022). In addition to illegal fishing, other nature crimes like wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, and illegal deforestation rob income and food from the vulnerable and Indigenous communities that depend on these resources (Gore & Bennett, 2022). Biodiversity loss through land use change, agricultural expansion into natural habitats, and unsustainable trade and consumption of wildlife drive risk of infectious disease outbreaks

and pandemics such as COVID-19 and SARS, and it is estimated that 631,000–827,000 undiscovered viruses of animal origin could have the ability to infect humans (WHO, 2015; IPBES, 2020). Approximately one third of the global population depends on urban watersheds for their water supply; 40 percent of these watersheds show high to moderate levels of degradation, in part from the loss of natural vegetation and biodiversity that protect these critical water sources (Abell et al., 2017). As of 2019, more than 2,500 documented conflicts over water, food, fossil fuels, and land were occurring around the world (IPBES, 2019).

Resource scarcity, conflicts, and displacement caused by environmental degradation in turn deepen existing inequalities. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects women and girls through impacts like increased water collection time, impeded firewood and fodder collection, and reduced ability to cope with disasters and fulfill roles within the household, which harm women's health and that of their families. (UN Women, 2018). Relatedly, gender-based violence is often used as a means of reinforcing privileges and control over resources (Castañeda et al., 2020). LGBTQI+ people are often already excluded from using communal land and other natural resources critical for rural livelihoods, a dynamic that biodiversity loss may compound. Environmental degradation also disproportionately impacts Indigenous Peoples whose general health, cultural traditions, and livelihoods are strongly linked to the natural environment (Vecchio et al., 2022).

Threats to Biodiversity

The principal threats behind biodiversity loss are well known, have been consistent for decades, and are intensifying in extent and magnitude (Balvanera et al., 2019). As described above, the major threats to biodiversity include land and sea use change, species overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive species, which impact particular species, ecosystems, and geographies differently (IPBES, 2019). Land use change, primarily through expansion of farmland, poses the largest threat to biodiversity by destroying or fragmenting critical habitats for many terrestrial and freshwater species. Overexploitation is responsible for the majority of marine biodiversity decline, while pollution and invasive species have disproportionate effects on specific taxa (e.g., amphibians and invertebrates) and geographies (e.g., rivers and islands; IPBES, 2023). However, if global warming rises above 1.5°C, climate change is likely to become the dominant cause of biodiversity loss in the coming decades (IPCC, 2018) as species face mass mortality from heat stress, drought, and ocean acidification, and are forced to move to higher latitudes, greater elevations, and deeper ocean depths (Costello et al., 2022). The combined effects of multiple interacting threats are becoming increasingly pervasive (Geary et al., 2019; Sage, 2020). For instance, in addition to being a direct threat, climate change exacerbates other threats to biodiversity (Pörtner et al., 2021), and reciprocally, biodiversity loss through land use change, especially deforestation, is a major driver of climate change (IPCC, 2019).

Drivers of Biodiversity Loss

The seemingly intractable threats to biodiversity are propelled by multiple interacting drivers—or root causes—that influence dynamics within societal systems. Drivers can include formal and informal institutions—or rules—such as values, norms, and governance systems; demographic and sociocultural factors; and technological and economic factors (Balvanera et al., 2019). Critically, drivers present key opportunities for interventions that can help transform societal systems and stem biodiversity loss. For

example, economic subsidies driving the destruction of nature total US\$1.8 trillion a year and span resource types such as fossil fuels, agriculture, water, forestry, and wild-caught fisheries. Eliminating these environmentally harmful subsidies would free up massive resources that could be redirected to conserving biodiversity at a large scale (Koplow & Steenblik, 2022). Notably, the drivers of biodiversity loss, and the opportunities to address them, are tightly linked to the ways in which nature is valued in economic and political decisions (IPBES, 2022a; Box 3).

Box 3. Incorporating diverse values of nature in development

Nature is all life on Earth, together with the geology, water, climate, and all other abiotic components that comprise the planet. Different worldviews and knowledge systems influence the ways people interact with and value nature, which can lead to different choices related to the conservation and management of biodiversity. Values of nature can relate to a sense of place or identity; contributions to survival and well-being; a physical, mental, and spiritual part of oneself; or an intrinsic value that exists independently of human needs. Experts caution that the dominant utilitarian, or instrumental, value of nature focused on natural resource extraction does not adequately reflect all the ways in which nature contributes to people's overall quality of life (Barton et al., 2022). Incorporating diverse values of nature into decision-making can help to more effectively capture nature's contributions to people and address drivers of biodiversity loss. For example, recognizing and respecting the worldviews and values of Indigenous Peoples enables policies such as natural resource governance to be more inclusive and holistic, which often leads to better outcomes for people and nature (e.g., Sze et al., 2021; Grantham, 2022; Pacheco & Meyer, 2022; Pascual et al., 2023). Importantly, values of nature are broader than just biodiversity and can include the ways that people value agricultural landscapes, rivers, and other components of nature.

USAID's Role in Transformative Change

The weight of the evidence clearly demonstrates that biodiversity loss is not just an environmental issue but an unprecedented, existential challenge to all of human development requiring bold and transformative action (Dasgupta, 2021). How can USAID promote the change that is needed? USAID must seize opportunities to address the root causes of biodiversity loss within complex, dynamic societal systems that contain many actors with competing incentives (Chan et al., 2020; Pascual et al., 2022). USAID must acknowledge and address inequities in development because the costs and benefits of environmental degradation are unevenly distributed across populations (Karlsson et al., 2020; van Ginkel et al., 2020; Pickering et al., 2021). USAID must work at multiple scales: from advancing policy and creating broad "coalitions of support" (Pascual et al., 2022) to supporting local communities and organizations to lead the way (Pereira et al., 2020). USAID must work with the private sector to address nature-related risks and unlock financing for biodiversity conservation at scale, as public funding is insufficient to halt biodiversity loss (Duetz et al., 2020). USAID must also continue to track its progress and adapt, incorporating metrics that reflect diverse values of nature and human well-being (Sterling et al., 2020), and that measure systems change. Finally, USAID must collaborate across sectors to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change together, and deliver on transformative change.

GOALS

USAID envisions a future in which **biodiversity is conserved so people and nature can thrive**. The Agency acknowledges the need to reframe humanity's relationship with nature, moving away from a purely instrumental value system based on the unsustainable extraction of natural resources, and towards one that recognizes nature's diverse values based on the many worldviews and knowledge systems represented in the communities with whom the Agency partners around the world.

USAID will work toward two mutually reinforcing goals in pursuit of this vision: (1) conserve biodiversity in priority places, and (2) catalyze nature-positive, equitable development.

GOAL ONE: Conserve Biodiversity in Priority Places

In pursuit of this goal and recognizing that certain regions of the world hold more biodiversity and are subject to higher environmental pressures, USAID will continue to focus on high-biodiversity countries and regions with the potential for positive change and where the Agency can support partner country development efforts. USAID will **support the conservation of priority sites, wild native species, and the genetic diversity within wild native species; contribute to national and regional development goals**, including National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans⁵ and Nationally Determined Contributions⁶; and **conserve biodiversity for the global public good**. The Agency will **undertake bilateral, transboundary, regional, and global programming**, which can include *in situ*, site-specific conservation work; targeted, high-priority *ex situ* conservation activities⁷; and efforts that address global and regional drivers of biodiversity loss. In support of Goal One, USAID may support efforts to expand land and marine areas under effective conservation, among other work, as partner countries work to achieve their Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets. Support for protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures should include participatory conservation planning principles that maximize taxonomic representation, ecological connectivity, climate resilience, and human well-being, while minimizing costs and impacts on communities. Governance systems that protect the rights of people living in and around protected areas should be promoted and robust social safeguards should be enforced.

USAID identified priority geographies at the country and regional levels (Table 1) through a dynamic, data-driven process that took into consideration technical and institutional criteria (See Appendix II). This will steer how the Agency allocates biodiversity funds and focuses efforts. At the regional and subnational level, USAID will make tactical and strategic decisions based on the best available evidence

⁵ National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) are the principal instruments for implementing the United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) at a national level. All countries where USAID has biodiversity activities are signatories to the CBD.

⁶ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are climate action plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts that each party to the Paris Agreement is required to establish and update every five years.

⁷ USAID may support *ex situ* conservation of wild, native species, and their germplasm, when the activity is being undertaken explicitly for the purpose of biodiversity conservation and meets all requirements for USAID biodiversity funds.

regarding biodiversity status, threats, drivers, and opportunities; host-government priorities; financial and programmatic feasibility; and other contextual factors, such as how climate change may affect an area.

GOAL TWO: Catalyze Nature-positive, Equitable Development

USAID will undertake a **whole-of-Agency approach** to catalyze nature-positive, equitable development, in order to achieve transformative change. USAID will go beyond threat reduction and do-no-harm to **identify and pursue opportunities to shift societal systems**—governance, financial, food, public health and veterinary, energy, transport, and urban, among others—in support of biodiversity conservation. For all sectors, this means **managing nature-related risks** to development and expanding the use of **nature-based solutions** as a means to achieve development goals across sectors. USAID will **strengthen internal capacity to mainstream biodiversity conservation** in both programming and policy (Box 4). Critically, USAID will **support partner countries and diverse local actors** to do the same. Beyond programming, USAID will use its convening power to **marshall collective action and broad coalitions** needed to address the twin crises of biodiversity and climate change together. USAID will also work to **mobilize the financial resources** needed for biodiversity conservation through actions such as promoting reduction of harmful subsidies and catalyzing public and private finance. USAID will center equity in this approach by partnering with and **fostering the leadership of local, marginalized, and/or under-represented groups** throughout, while upholding Indigenous rights and mitigating conflict risks. This goal builds upon years of integrated programming and the 2014 Biodiversity Policy’s Goal Two on integration to emphasize transformative change and broader ownership and mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation across sectors. The end result will be a development portfolio that works at a transformative scale to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

Box 4. What is nature-positive development?

USAID aims to promote transformative change by catalyzing nature-positive, equitable development. *Nature-positive* refers to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, through measurable gains in the health, abundance, diversity, and resilience of species, ecosystems, and processes (NPI, 2023). Nature-positive development pathways contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss by expanding the scale, impact, and sustainability of biodiversity conservation, especially by leveraging key opportunities to transform societal systems. A nature-positive approach aligns development funding and programming with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’s ambitious goals, targets, and vision of a world where “biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people” (CBD, 2021).

PRINCIPLES

The following principles are the guiding approaches and best practices that articulate how USAID will achieve its vision to conserve biodiversity so people and nature can thrive.

LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT: Support biodiversity conservation actions that are locally led, owned, and implemented.

Debate about what species and ecosystems to protect and where often overshadows the question of how biodiversity should be conserved and by whom. While coordinated efforts to address conservation are clearly needed, there is mounting evidence that conservation efforts led by local organizations and communities can be more successful than some managed by national governments or organizations (e.g., Schleicher, 2017; McNamara et al., 2020; Brondizio et al., 2021). Locally led conservation reinforces local values of nature and well-being, helps maintain cultural heritage, and strengthens capacity for local institutions—all of which promote the sustainability of biodiversity outcomes. In line with Agency targets on localization,⁸ USAID will work to increase funding directly to local partners⁹—including local organizations, private sector entities, researchers, and communities—working to conserve biodiversity. The Agency will move toward local leadership so that local actors are able to exercise their power in biodiversity conservation and ensure that local knowledge and expertise drive programming decisions (e.g. Jones et al., 2020), while taking care not to reinforce local power imbalances. Importantly, locally led biodiversity conservation must also be equitable and inclusive.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION: Partner with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and foster the leadership of women, youth, and additional marginalized and/or under-represented groups on biodiversity conservation.

Centering equity, inclusion, and gender- and youth-responsive action in biodiversity conservation is key to sustaining bold action for transformative change (Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2021). Environmental stewardship by Indigenous Peoples—who own and manage about a quarter of the Earth’s lands (Fa et al., 2020)—is more often associated with positive outcomes for both human well-being and nature (Dawson et al., 2021). Importantly, higher levels of economic and gender inequality are associated with negative impacts on biodiversity (Islam, 2015; Kubiszewski et al., 2023). Notably, biodiversity loss and climate change exacerbate inequities as their negative impacts fall predominantly on the world’s most marginalized and vulnerable populations (Pörtner et al., 2021), which pose barriers to transformative change (Chan et al., 2020). In response, USAID will continue to partner with Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and additional marginalized and/or under-represented groups to lead biodiversity conservation. USAID will also address systemic barriers to equitable inclusion, working with all members of communities, including men and boys (Box 5). USAID will support rights-based

⁸ The [USAID Policy Framework](#) outlines a commitment to increase the percentage of funding that flows directly to local partners to 25 percent by the end of FY 2025.

⁹ See ADS 303 for the definitions of local entities and locally established partners.

governance approaches that are integrative, inclusive, informed, and adaptive, especially through safeguards (including for gender-based violence); free, prior, and informed consent; and consultations. USAID will take a “[thinking and working politically](#)” approach during activity design in order to confront the entrenched power structures that drive mismanagement of natural resources. Recognizing the legacy of resource- and conservation-driven conflict, USAID will integrate the principles of conflict sensitivity to ensure conservation efforts are built on a solid understanding of localized social dynamics, mitigate the risk of aggravating conflict, and promote long-term peace outcomes. USAID will also strengthen the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within the biodiversity workforce to spur innovation and promote comprehensive solutions (Ostergaard et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2017).

Box 5. Equitable and inclusive biodiversity conservation

Achieving transformative change for a nature-positive future will require governance approaches that promote equity and inclusion (Visserenc-Hamakers et al., 2021). In practice, this means partnering with diverse stakeholders, especially Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women’s groups; fostering the leadership of marginalized and/or underrepresented groups; and recognizing different values of nature, land use preferences, and knowledge systems.

Indigenous Peoples in particular are unique partners in the conservation and management of natural resources given their collective attachment to, and rights over, territories, many of which have high levels of biodiversity (USAID, 2020). For protected areas, in their many forms, USAID applies four safeguards to promote equitable and inclusive development for local communities: (1) requiring community consultation (and free, prior, and informed consent for affected Indigenous Peoples, consistent with the USAID Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples); (2) assessing impacts of the area on affected communities; (3) training park rangers and other personnel to respect human rights and avoid intimidation and unnecessary use of force; and (4) creating and managing a grievance and redress mechanism.

Increasing the participation of women and youth in biodiversity conservation decision making contributes to stronger and more holistic solutions. For example, community forestry management groups that include women have better governance and conservation outcomes (Leisher et al., 2016). Young people often promote policies that consider the interests of future generations and can be “change agents” for sustainability (Vogel et al., 2022).

Marginalized groups may also include, but are not limited to, children in adversity and their families; older persons; persons with disabilities; LGBTQI+ people; displaced persons; migrants; Indigenous Peoples and communities; non-dominant religious, racial, and ethnic groups; people of castes traditionally considered lower; people of lower socioeconomic status; and people with unmet mental health needs. A diversity of these stakeholders should also be included in conservation activities to ensure that a plurality of visions, voices, and knowledge contribute to locally led and sustainable programming (Raymond et al., 2022).

CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACHES: Integrate biodiversity conservation and other development goals and approaches, and manage nature-related risks across sectors.

Achieving transformative change requires cross-sectoral integration across programming and policy (Chan et al., 2020; Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2021). Since the 2014 USAID Biodiversity Policy, integrated programming that includes biodiversity and other sector funds has increased at USAID. Building on this work and recognizing the existential threats to human development posed by biodiversity loss, USAID will promote shared vision, ownership, and action on biodiversity conservation. USAID will work to mainstream biodiversity considerations in programming and policy by employing nature-based solutions¹⁰ in development programming across sectors, managing nature-related risks as part of the Agency’s approach to risk and resilience, and ensuring biodiversity is considered in sector policies and strategies. Biodiversity-funded programming will continue to learn from and employ approaches from other sectors, especially as conserving biodiversity in priority places cannot be separated from meeting the needs of the people who live in those areas.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS: Strengthen the resilience of biodiversity and elevate nature-based solutions to climate change.

Biodiversity loss and climate change are linked in both their drivers and their solutions, and must be addressed together through a whole-of-Agency approach. USAID’s activities under Goal One contribute to the climate resilience of biodiversity, as maintaining the resilience of biodiversity and ecosystem services on a global scale depends on effective and equitable conservation of approximately 30-50 percent of land, freshwater, and ocean areas (IPCC, 2023). In addition to site-based conservation, USAID will employ climate-resilient biodiversity programming approaches that build on climate risk management to assess and manage climate risks to species and ecosystems early in activity design. Critically, USAID will elevate nature-based solutions for climate¹¹—such as mangrove conservation, watershed management, and natural infrastructure—as key tools to absorb carbon, improve the resilience of human communities, and reduce disaster risk.

PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT: Partner with the private sector to reduce drivers of biodiversity loss, increase financing, and expand the scale, impact, and sustainability of biodiversity conservation.

The transition to a nature-positive future is unlikely to be achieved without full engagement from the private sector. The private sector both contributes to and is vulnerable to biodiversity loss, given that the deterioration of nature creates significant risks to businesses (WEF, 2023). From local enterprises to

¹⁰ Though “nature-based solutions” is often used as shorthand for “nature-based solutions for climate,” these approaches can address a range of societal challenges. See the [USAID Biodiversity Integration Case Studies](#) for integrated programming examples that use biodiversity conservation as a nature-based solution to achieve development goals across sectors.

¹¹ Nature-based solutions for climate mitigation are also referred to as “natural climate solutions.”

multinational corporations (e.g., agriculture/agribusiness, extractives) to financial institutions, the private sector plays a central role in how biodiversity is integrated into economic development. USAID will engage the private sector on reducing drivers of biodiversity loss (e.g., supporting sustainable supply chains) and on best practices to manage nature-related risks to development, which affect both the public and private sectors. The Agency will work with investors and financial institutions to unlock funding for conservation to address the funding gap in biodiversity finance (Deutz et al., 2020), which is critical for delivering transformative change. USAID will also engage with the financial services sector to detect suspicious transactions and disrupt illicit financial flows related to nature crimes. To improve biodiversity programming, the Agency will leverage the private sector's agility, technical expertise, and ability to scale by engaging them as key partners in implementation.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT: Leverage the convening power and technical expertise of USAID to advance international, regional, national, and municipal policies that promote biodiversity conservation.

Policy instruments that address drivers of biodiversity loss, especially perverse economic incentives, can help shift complex societal systems in favor of biodiversity conservation (Chan et al., 2019). These may include legal and regulatory instruments, rights-based instruments and customary norms, economic and financial instruments, and social and cultural instruments¹². At the Mission level, USAID will identify and pursue key policy opportunities to advance biodiversity conservation, such as the Regional/Country Development Cooperation Strategy (R/CDCS) process¹³ and required I 18/I 19 Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Analysis (I 18/I 19 Analysis)¹⁴, as well as the USAID multilateral development bank review process. Using its convening power, USAID will advance policy dialogues and coordination on conservation with policy actors at global, regional, national, and local levels. The Agency will work to mainstream biodiversity across governments' overall development portfolios and in national accounting systems. USAID will ensure that biodiversity conservation and development considerations are given due attention in international policy deliberations, within both environment and non-environment fora, including agriculture and trade.

EVIDENCE AND LEARNING: Apply evidence and learning, including Indigenous and local knowledge, to enhance biodiversity conservation practice.

USAID relies on credible and salient evidence to ensure programmatic and policy interventions are more likely to be effective and to allocate resources to address the biodiversity crisis efficiently and equitably. USAID will support implementation science approaches (e.g. Ferraro, 2009)—where scientific

¹² These categories of policy instruments are those used by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (<https://www.ipbes.net/policy-instruments>)

¹³ The Regional/Country Development Cooperation Strategy (R/CDCS) is a five-year strategy at the country or regional level that is results-oriented and fosters partnering with host countries to focus investment in key areas.

¹⁴ Section 118 and 119 of the Foreign Assistance Act mandate country-level analyses that support the integration of conservation actions into Missions' R/CDCS's. See the Requirements section for additional detail.

research is embedded in program implementation—to generate evidence on what interventions work, why, and for whom. The Agency will work to ensure data generated from its biodiversity activities is comprehensive, high quality, transparent, and accessible—particularly to local researchers and users. USAID will also systematically manage these data to promote learning across activities and over time and will conduct longitudinal monitoring of key sites as feasible. USAID will intentionally integrate Indigenous and local knowledge into data collection and analysis while protecting data sovereignty and intellectual property. The Agency will promote participatory and inclusive approaches to data collection, analysis, and sharing that integrate local and culturally-grounded visions of nature and human well-being, strengthening local research capacity along the way. To align with more ambitious goals related to transformative change, USAID will explore approaches to track changes in complex societal systems. USAID will also conduct a policy implementation assessment to measure implementation progress against the Biodiversity Policy’s stated goals as well as a mid-term review to assess any need to update content based on new evidence.

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LEARNING

USAID's biodiversity conservation work is supported by a U.S. Government policy environment that values evidence and learning. Cutting across various U.S. Government and Agency-wide guiding frameworks¹⁵ is a commitment to fostering an organizational learning culture based on asking decision-relevant questions, following the evidence, and acknowledging and learning from failure¹⁶. Given this support, USAID is uniquely positioned to fill critical evidence gaps that will improve the effectiveness of the Agency's biodiversity programming and advance the practice of conservation overall. With over 100 activities currently being implemented in over 60 countries around the world, USAID's biodiversity portfolio acts as an "implementation laboratory" that can be used to understand the conditions under which different development and policy interventions result in better outcomes for people and the planet.

To support the Biodiversity Policy, there are three overarching learning needs and evidence gaps that USAID seeks to address. First, while the global evidence base is generally strong for understanding the *problem* of biodiversity loss—i.e., the status and trends of global biodiversity¹⁷—there are significant evidence gaps with regard to the *solutions* to address it. USAID needs to better understand the effectiveness of commonly-used interventions in its biodiversity portfolio (e.g., alternative livelihoods; Roe et al., 2015) and flow-down consequences on ecosystem services and human well-being, in order to improve the design and implementation of programming and policies. The lack of evidence for the effectiveness of many conservation approaches is thought to result from underinvestment in counterfactual-based studies such as impact evaluations that can attribute programmatic and policy interventions to environmental outcomes with a reasonable degree of confidence (e.g., Ferraro, 2009; Baylis et al., 2016; Ribas et al., 2020; Faust et al., 2023), in contrast to other development sectors that have embraced this approach (Sabet & Brown, 2018). Indeed, the assessment of the 2014 USAID Biodiversity Policy found that of the 93 evaluations of USAID biodiversity activities going back to 2014, *only one* evaluation of a small activity chose to use a counterfactual-based design that was able to draw conclusions about impact. Biodiversity conservation has been slow to adopt more rigorous impact evaluation designs for several reasons, including the complexity of activities that aim to achieve multiple objectives at multiple scales, small sample sizes when working across large ecosystems, spatial spillover effects, and lack of funding and capacity (Baylis et al., 2016). However, counterfactual-based studies in the environment field are growing, with many recent examples (e.g. Jones et al., 2020) and

¹⁵ USAID contributes to the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018 requirements to develop evidence to support policymaking and strategically plan for evidence building and data management while upholding a commitment to scientific integrity. Toward this aim, the Agency developed the [2022-2026 Agency Learning Agenda](#) that is aligned with the [USAID Policy Framework](#) and supported by the [2020 USAID Evaluation Policy](#), the [USAID Scientific Research Policy](#), and the USAID Policy on Fostering a Culture of Scientific Integrity (link when cleared).

¹⁶ See the [USAID Risk Appetite Statement](#).

¹⁷ Due to unequal allocation of taxonomic monitoring efforts, it should be noted current figures of biodiversity loss are likely underestimations of the true status of global biodiversity (e.g. Borgelt et al. 2022 estimates that over half of species currently classified as data deficient by the IUCN Red List are in fact threatened with extinction).

methodological advances to overcome some of the barriers to empirical studies of conservation effectiveness (e.g. Schleicher et al., 2019; Huntington et al., in review). As part of its overall approach to biodiversity evaluations, USAID will increase support for implementation science approaches that pair program implementation with the scientific research process of impact or mixed-method evaluations,¹⁸ leveraging its vast biodiversity portfolio to understand what programmatic and policy interventions work, why, and *for whom*.

Next, there are evidence gaps related to the practical operationalization and measurement of transformative change to address the biodiversity crisis. The growing literature on transformative change has mostly focused on *what* needs to change (e.g., energy systems, transport systems, financial systems, etc.) rather than *how* and *for whom* (Bentz et al., 2022). The complexity and dynamic nature of socio-ecological systems makes this particularly challenging, although there are efforts underway to make transformative change actionable and measurable (e.g. Dupuis et al., 2023; Penca, 2023), while integrating complexity and context-dependence. Efforts to understand how to achieve transformative change will require a shift away from tracking only traditional development outcomes and goals to tracking a *process* that may unfold over longer time frames and require different indicators that are closely aligned with more ambitious outcomes. Because there can be significant gaps between how nature is valued by different actors (Sterling et al., 2020), locally and culturally-grounded visions of nature and human well-being, in all its varied dimensions, can be used to build theories of change and monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems that facilitate measuring progress towards transformative change. Using systems approaches that draw from the theories, methods, tools, and approaches of systems thinking and complexity, and utilization-focused, developmental, and principles-focused evaluations (Patton et al. 2019) can help address critical questions such as 1) *Which are the most efficacious points of intervention across drivers and threats?*, 2) *Which targets or intervention points are most likely to change system dynamics or outcomes?*, and 3) *When should drivers become targets in themselves?*

Lastly, there are evidence gaps related to understanding the impact of USAID's biodiversity portfolio as a whole on the status of biodiversity where the Agency works. The assessment of the 2014 Biodiversity Policy was unable to draw conclusions about whether or not the Agency had an overall positive impact on biodiversity outcomes. To do so requires systematic and long-term monitoring of biodiversity data in the areas where USAID implements biodiversity programming, ideally compared with valid control sites (generated synthetically or otherwise). With advances in technology that make monitoring biodiversity easier and cheaper (e.g., geospatial data, passive monitoring approaches; Sugai et al., 2019), there are opportunities to leverage innovative approaches to data monitoring and partner with scientific organizations already engaged in these efforts.

¹⁸ [USAID's Scientific Research Policy](#) (page 6) defines research to include implementation research (i.e. impact evaluations). "Mixed-method evaluations" refer to evaluations that combine impact evaluation and performance evaluation methodologies.

REQUIREMENTS

Biodiversity Code

Biodiversity funds have specific requirements that are articulated through the four key criteria of the Biodiversity Code. Biodiversity conservation can also be supported by a range of other funding streams at USAID, including Feed the Future; Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance; Adaptation; Sustainable Landscapes; Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene; Global Health; and Women’s Economic Empowerment. For co-funded activities, the requirements of the Biodiversity Code *only apply to the work funded with Biodiversity funds*.

The Policy provides some modest improvements to the Code, including new language noted in italics below. These changes expand the threats-based approach to also include identification of opportunities that can contribute to transformative change and equitable, nature-positive development. Note that these opportunities may be far upstream of biophysical change in the short-term and are linked to those biodiversity outcomes through the theory of change. The changes to the Code will also help ensure that activity design and selection of strategic approaches are informed by the evidence base. Wherever possible, the Agency will also prioritize investments in long-term, sustained programming.

USAID Biodiversity Code (for biodiversity-funded activities):

1. Activities must have an explicit biodiversity objective; it isn’t enough to have biodiversity conservation result as a positive externality from another activity;
2. Site-based activities must have the intent to positively impact biodiversity in biologically significant areas;
3. Activities must be identified based on an analysis of threats to biodiversity, drivers of these threats, opportunities for conservation, and an evidence-informed theory of change; and
4. Activities must monitor indicators associated with the stated theory of change for biodiversity conservation results.

Each year, USAID/Washington reviews Biodiversity-funded activities for consistency with the Code. Note that the Code criteria represent a minimum standard of compliance for activities supported with Biodiversity funds, not the full articulation of biodiversity conservation best practices.

Geographic Priorities

While biodiversity conservation is important in all of the geographies where USAID works, the Agency has identified a set of “Tier One” Missions to be prioritized for Biodiversity funds, staffing, and technical assistance (Table I). Collectively, these Missions will receive more than half of Agency biodiversity funds each year.

Tier One Missions:

- are expected to draw upon the findings of the 118/119 Analysis to identify biodiversity as a priority in their R/CDCS, ensuring that biodiversity is covered in sufficient detail to define strategic direction, particularly with respect to key threats and drivers of biodiversity loss;
- are expected to request sufficient Biodiversity funds to maintain and/or expand current programming to positively impact biodiversity;
- can expect to be prioritized for placement of Foreign Service Environment Officers; and
- can expect to be prioritized for biodiversity technical assistance from USAID/Washington.

Additional operating units will also receive Biodiversity funds in any given year. The process by which the Agency identifies Tier One Missions and other operating units that receive Biodiversity funds is described in Appendix II. Importantly, the priority places referred to in Goal One span all USAID operating units regardless of whether they receive Biodiversity funds, as conservation in priority places can be achieved with other sector funding as well.

Related Analyses

118/119 Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Analysis¹⁹

In accordance with the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961 and as amended by Sections 118 and 119, *all* USAID Missions are required to periodically complete a 118/119 Analysis in preparation for their R/CDCS. The 118/119 Analysis provides an important tool for transformative change by providing information on the state of tropical forests and biodiversity that can help identify nature-related risks to development and mainstream biodiversity considerations in USAID programming and policy. Consistent with an ambitious, whole-of-Agency approach, Mission technical offices and program offices are key players in the development of the 118/119 Analysis and the implementation of its findings. Through the 118/119 Analysis, technical offices can assess linkages between biodiversity and their sector goals and identify nature-related risks that may undermine their programming, which can then be addressed during the R/CDCS process or activity design.

In addition to sharing 118/119 Analysis findings widely within the Mission, these findings can be shared with host-country counterparts. This will help to inform national priority setting and biodiversity mainstreaming in government programming and planning, including national food security and nutrition plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, and national accounting systems.

Environmental Impact Analysis and Regulation 216

In accordance with FAA Section 117 and 22 CFR 216, USAID performs environmental impact assessments (EIAs) of all its development programming. The EIA process ensures that the environmental consequences of USAID's activities and facilities are identified and modifications are made to minimize

¹⁹ For more information on the 118/119 process, see [Foreign Assistance Act Section 118/119 Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Analysis Best Practices Guide 2.0](#).

their effects on biodiversity. The regulation also requires that USAID conduct its programming in a manner that is sensitive to the protection of threatened and endangered species and their critical habitats. The EIA process differs from the process of managing nature-related risks; the EIA deals with managing and mitigating the *impacts of USAID's activities* on nature, whereas managing nature-related risks relates to managing and mitigating the *impacts of other actors' activities* on nature, which can undermine USAID's programming goals.

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CONCLUSION

The next ten years present a critical window for addressing the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. USAID must seize this opportunity. Embracing complexity, USAID will identify and act on key opportunities to address the root causes of biodiversity loss alongside inequities in societal systems. USAID will support inclusive and locally led biodiversity conservation and policy and private sector engagement. USAID will ensure approaches to biodiversity conservation are resilient to climate change and apply nature-based solutions for climate and other development goals. USAID will draw upon the evidence base for action and robustly measure the effectiveness of its efforts, understanding that how and what the Agency monitors must reflect local values and voices. Importantly, this work will be shared across sectors in a whole-of-Agency approach to mainstreaming biodiversity considerations and addressing the nature-related risks that threaten development. Through these efforts, in ten years USAID will have conserved biodiversity in some of the most biodiverse places on Earth and made essential progress toward a more nature-positive and equitable future in which people and nature thrive.

TABLE I. List of Tier One Biodiversity Missions

Brazil
Colombia
Ecuador
Mexico
Peru
USAID South America Regional

India
Indonesia
Philippines
Papua New Guinea
Vietnam
USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Kenya
Madagascar
Mozambique
Tanzania
USAID Central Africa Regional

APPENDIX I: Biodiversity and Natural Resources in USG Strategies and Policies Across Sectors

In addition to the USAID Biodiversity Policy, U.S. Government strategies and policies across sectors recognize the contributions of biodiversity and natural resources to security and stability, economic growth, and other development goals. The [2022 National Security Strategy](#) warns that deteriorating natural resource conditions threaten governments' ability to meet basic human needs and contribute to political, economic, and social instability. The Department of State and USAID's [Joint Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#) calls for sustainable economic growth that conserves biodiversity and combats climate change in order to foster a strong, sustainable, and inclusive global economy.

At USAID, the [2023 USAID Policy Framework](#) aims to help countries withstand the effects of a changing climate by prioritizing nature-based solutions and the conservation of biodiverse forests, wetlands, and peatlands. The U.S. Government's [Global Food Security Strategy](#) and [Global Water Strategy](#), and USAID's [Climate Strategy](#), [Environment and Natural Resource Management Framework](#), [Economic Growth Policy](#), [Resilience Policy](#), [Private Sector Engagement Policy](#), [Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights & Governance](#), [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy](#), [Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), and [Youth in Development Policy](#) all discuss biodiversity and/or natural resources, though the degree of mainstreaming biodiversity considerations is extremely variable. At the activity level, biodiversity conservation goals and interventions and nature-related risks to development are not routinely considered outside of environment programming.

APPENDIX II: Geographic Prioritization Process

To identify Tier One Missions to be prioritized for Biodiversity funds, staffing, and technical assistance, USAID conducted a thorough review of existing global biodiversity datasets²⁰. Countries and regions that are among the most globally significant for biodiversity and where the threats to biodiversity are exceptionally high, across terrestrial, freshwater, and marine habitat types were prioritized. The global importance of these areas for providing humanity with a range of nature-linked benefits at local, regional, and global scales was also confirmed.

Countries were then ranked based on the number of Global 200 ecoregions contained within them in each of three habitat types: terrestrial, freshwater, and marine. For each habitat type, higher-ranked countries contained a greater number of ecoregions of that type within their borders relative to lower-ranked ones. Next, a subset of these countries that were among the highest-ranked (in the top 20 ranks) for at least two of these three habitat types was identified. Global marine datasets to identify additional globally important marine areas were also assessed. Threats to biodiversity for this subset of countries were then ranked and the list narrowed further, retaining the countries with the highest threat ranks.

The list was further revised through comparison with country rankings based on the Global Benefits Index for Biodiversity and consultations among USAID biodiversity experts, which included considerations of technical and USAID institutional criteria. These criteria included countries where USAID has a demonstrable comparative advantage based on long-standing, successful biodiversity programming and/or countries or regions where there may be a strategic interest in programming.

²⁰ Key datasets used for this assessment included World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 ecoregions, Global Environment Facility's updated (as of 2017) Global Benefits Index for Biodiversity (a country-specific score that seeks to measure the potential global benefits from biodiversity-related activities in a country), and additional global biodiversity importance, threats, and benefits datasets published or updated between 2016 and 2022.

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