

Urban and Peri-urban Nature-Based Solutions

A Call to Action for
Rwanda and the Region

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Proceedings of the Urban & Peri-Urban NBS Forum

— March 2-4, 2026, Kigali, Rwanda —



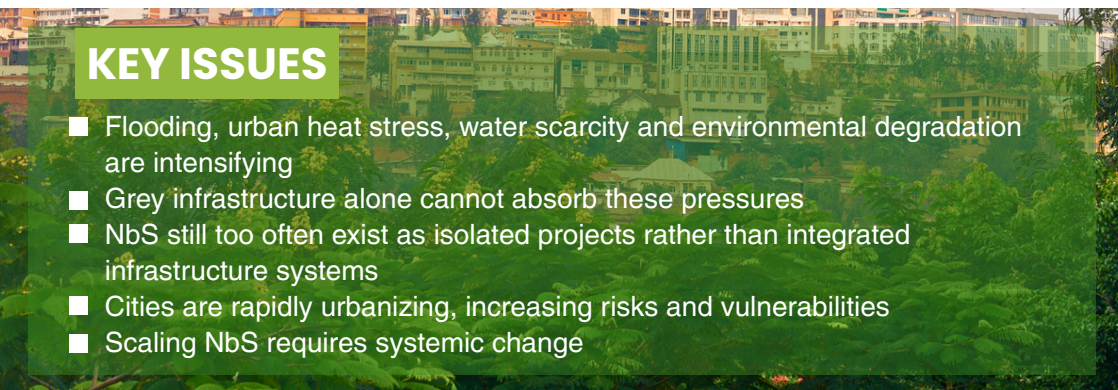
THE CHALLENGE

Nature-Based Solutions are not an environmental add-on — they are strategic infrastructure. Rwanda and its partners have the foundations, the evidence and the momentum to move from pilots to systemic urban transformation. The choices made now will shape the resilience of cities for generations to come.

Africa's cities are growing fast — and climate change is accelerating the risks they face. Flooding, urban heat stress, water scarcity and environmental degradation are intensifying across the continent. Traditional grey infrastructure alone cannot absorb these pressures.

Rwanda is no exception. As Kigali expands and secondary cities grow rapidly, the decisions made today will define the resilience and liveability of these cities for decades. Yet across rapidly urbanizing regions, Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) — restored wetlands, green corridors, urban forests, nature-sensitive drainage — still too often exist as isolated projects rather than integrated components of urban infrastructure systems.

Scaling NbS requires systemic change: stronger governance, bankable project pipelines, inclusive community stewardship and robust monitoring. **Moving from ambition to action is the defining challenge.**



KEY ISSUES

- Flooding, urban heat stress, water scarcity and environmental degradation are intensifying
- Grey infrastructure alone cannot absorb these pressures
- NbS still too often exist as isolated projects rather than integrated infrastructure systems
- Cities are rapidly urbanizing, increasing risks and vulnerabilities
- Scaling NbS requires systemic change



WHY NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS?



Mau Forest, Kenya | Photo ©: Patrick Shepherd/CIFOR

NbS are not simply environmental interventions.
They are infrastructure that simultaneously delivers:



Climate resilience

flood regulation, urban
cooling, watershed protection



Green jobs

2–5× more employment per dollar
than grey infrastructure



Biodiversity restoration

and **improved water quality**



Local entrepreneurship

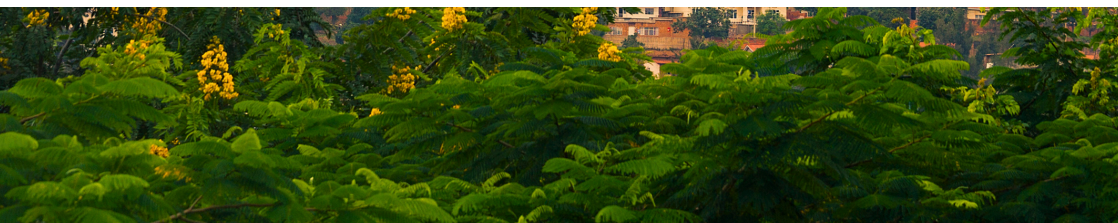
and ecosystem service
markets



Healthier, more liveable
urban environments



Social inclusion with women
representing up to 60% of NbS
participants



NbS IN PRACTICE



The Forum on Urban and Peri-Urban Nature-Based Solutions (Kigali, March 2–4, 2026) was a turning point. It united governments, cities, development partners, researchers, civil society and the private sector around a shared diagnosis:

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NbS are not simply environmental interventions — they are integral components of infrastructure systems capable of delivering multiple benefits across climate resilience, economic development and social well-being.

Urban and Peri-Urban NbS Forum, Kigali, March 2026

The Forum generated concrete alignment on what must change: stronger policy coordination, bankable project pipelines, integration of NbS into spatial planning, empowered local authorities, green job creation and robust monitoring. It also demonstrated that Rwanda is well positioned to lead — regionally and globally.

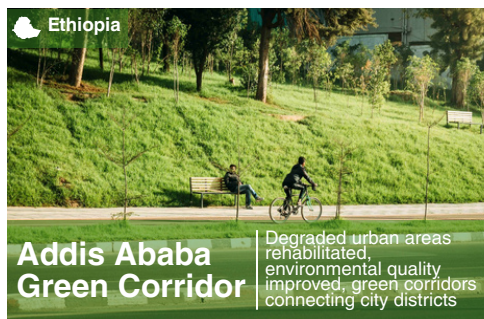


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STRATEGIC THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FORUM



Governance & institutional alignment

Nature provides the solutions. Governance unlocks them.

- Policy coordination
- Cross-sector alignment
- Cost-benefit tools
- Bills of quantities for NbS



Financing & investment readiness

The gap is in project preparation as much as in funding.

- Bankable project pipelines
- Ecosystem service valuation
- Blended finance
- FONERWA



NbS in urban planning

Planning with nature, not around it.

- Master plan integration
- Watershed-scale approaches
- Regenerative infrastructure
- Technical guidelines



Inclusive participation & GESI

People make NbS work.

- Early community engagement
- Gender-responsive design
- Youth stewardship
- Local ecological knowledge



Green jobs & local economy

NbS are not a cost : they are an investment.

- 2–5× more jobs than grey infrastructure
- Vocational training
- Green entrepreneurship
- Ecosystem service markets



Monitoring & knowledge systems

What gets measured gets scaled.

- Multi-dimensional indicators
- GIS & digital tools
- Adaptive management
- Cross-city knowledge sharing

6 TRANSFORMATIONS THE AGENDA FOR ACTION

1 FROM PILOTS TO SYSTEMS

NbS must be embedded in spatial planning, master plans and watershed strategies across Kigali and secondary cities.

- Integrate NbS into urban planning frameworks
- Move from isolated projects to system-wide approaches

3 FROM GRANTS TO INVESTMENT PIPELINES

Scaling NbS requires stronger project preparation and financing mechanisms.

- Develop bankable NbS project pipelines
- Strengthen feasibility analysis and ecosystem service valuation
- Leverage financing instruments such as FONERWA

5 FROM ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

NbS can drive green jobs, entrepreneurship and local economic development.

- Link NbS to employment and vocational training
- Support ecosystem service markets and green businesses
- Build on existing initiatives and institutions (e.g. RICA)

2 FROM FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE TO COORDINATION

Aligning institutions is critical to scale NbS effectively.

- Strengthen coordination across ministries, agencies and local authorities
- Develop cost-benefit tools and bills of quantities for NbS

4 FROM PROJECTS TO COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP

Communities, women and youth must be involved from the outset.

- Promote participatory and inclusive approaches
- Engage local actors, CSOs and professional networks
- Strengthen long-term stewardship of ecosystems

6 FROM MONITORING TO INTEGRATED KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Robust monitoring systems are essential to scale and sustain NbS.

- Develop standardized indicators and digital monitoring tools (GIS, satellite data)
- Strengthen cross-institutional data sharing
- Support adaptive management and learning

12 PRIORITY ACTIONS



PHASE 1

1 Governance alignment

Strengthen coordination across MININFRA, the Ministry of Environment and REMA to enable cross-sector NbS implementation

2 Capacity building

Train city planners, engineers, environmental specialists and local authorities in NbS design and implementation. During the Forum, the World Bank and the European Union (Enabel) launched a capacity building workshop to empower districts in identifying viable NbS projects — with activities planned in the months ahead.

3 Planning integration

Support cities and districts in embedding NbS into master plans, watershed strategies and climate adaptation frameworks, backed by practical guidelines and planning tools

4 Data systems

Expand environmental monitoring and spatial data access to support evidence-based decision-making

5 Project pipeline

Develop well-structured, investment-ready NbS proposals through technical assistance from WRI, GIZ, the European Union, the World Bank, GGGI and IISD

PHASE 2

6 Investment mobilization

Deploy financing through FONERWA, international climate finance and development finance institutions to fund flood mitigation, watershed protection, urban greening and biodiversity restoration

7 Urban and territorial integration

Embed NbS into development programs across Kigali, secondary cities and districts, through the implementing agencies responsible for infrastructure and environmental management: RHA, RTDA, REG, WASAC, NLA and REMA

8 Green jobs

Link restoration and urban greening programs to employment opportunities for youth and local communities

9 Community stewardship

Sustain participatory planning and local ownership to ensure long-term effectiveness

PHASE 3

10 Full integration

NbS embedded within urban planning frameworks, climate adaptation strategies and national infrastructure planning as standard components of resilient infrastructure

11 Monitoring and evaluation

Integrated frameworks tracking long-term ecological recovery, climate resilience and socio-economic outcomes

12 Knowledge and regional collaboration

Platforms connecting cities, districts, researchers and development partners to share experiences and replicate success across the region

ROADMAP FOR IMPLEMENTATION (2026–2030)

2026–2027 **1**

2027–2028 **2**

2029–2030 **3**

PHASE 1

Enabling foundations

- Governance alignment across MININFRA, Ministry of Environment, REMA
- NbS integrated into master plans and district development frameworks
- Investment-ready project pipeline developed (WRI, GIZ, EU, World Bank, GGGI, IISD)
- Capacity building: cost-benefit tools, bills of quantities for NbS
- Environmental monitoring and spatial data systems expanded

PHASE 2

Scaling implementation

- NbS scaled across Kigali, secondary cities and districts
- Financing mobilized via FONERWA, climate finance and blended models
- NbS linked to green jobs for youth and local communities
- Participatory planning and community stewardship embedded
- Cross-institutional monitoring systems operational

PHASE 3

Institutionalization

- NbS fully integrated in urban planning and national infrastructure strategies
- Long-term ecological, social and economic outcomes tracked
- Knowledge platforms connecting cities, districts and regional partners
- Rwanda established as regional model for nature-positive urban development

EVERY ACTOR HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

The tools, the knowledge and the will to transform urban development with nature already exist. What is needed now is coordinated action:

National institutions

strengthen policy coordination, align governance frameworks and create enabling conditions for NbS to scale across sectors.

Cities and districts

embed NbS into master plans, infrastructure investments and climate adaptation strategies from the outset.

Development partners

sustain support for project preparation, investment readiness, financing and knowledge exchange.

Communities and civil society

remain active stewards of restored ecosystems, ensuring long-term sustainability and equitable benefit-sharing.

The future of cities will be built with nature, or it will not be resilient.



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Based on the Urban and Peri-Urban NbS Forum Call to Action,
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