

# FACTSHEET

## HOW BUSINESSES CAN SUPPORT NATURE TO PREVENT FUTURE PANDEMICS

As COVID-19 has illustrated, emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) can impose a huge cost on global economies and public health. The default approach for managing pandemics is based on containment and control after a disease has emerged, rather than on reducing the drivers of pandemic risk to prevent them before they emerge. Businesses need to consider how they can contribute to the reduction of future pandemic risk by drastically re-evaluating their relationship with nature.

By investing in more nature-based solutions - both locally and in their supply chains - businesses can immediately start to increase their resilience, secure responsible finance, and contribute to reducing the global risk of future pandemics. Such investment will also bring additional benefits around reducing carbon and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

### What does science tell us?

Evidence shows that the majority of EIDs are from zoonoses (meaning that they were transmitted to humans by animals and insects); 60% of infectious diseases originate from animals<sup>i</sup>, and 70% of emerging infectious diseases originate from wildlife<sup>ii</sup>. Previous public health emergencies, such as HIV, Ebola, Yellow fever, and Zika virus also originated from rainforests.

The threat of a new pandemic will not disappear as we emerge from COVID-19. Research has estimated that there are more than 1.6 million unknown viral species in mammals and birds, 840,000 of which could pose a risk to humans<sup>iii</sup>. There are also approximately 30,000 coronaviruses that have not yet crossed from animals to humans<sup>iv</sup>.

Deforestation and landscape fragmentation have been identified as directly enabling the transmission of zoonotic infections. The trade in wildlife and intensification of livestock farming also contributes to climate change and rising temperatures<sup>v</sup>. Increased risk of pandemic is therefore a direct result of human encroachment into and erosion of natural wildlife habitat for economic exploitation.

### Why should businesses care?

In addition to the devastating human impact of the pandemic, there is also a clear financial imperative for businesses to take action.

The majority of economic activity is either directly or indirectly dependent on nature – to the cost of approximately US\$44 trillion<sup>vi</sup>. The failing health of the planet will directly impact the sustainability of economic activity.

## \$8-16 trillion

Global cost of COVID-19 pandemic by the end of 2021 <sup>vii</sup>

## \$10 trillion

Cost of continued biodiversity loss to the global economy by 2050 <sup>viii</sup>

Conversely, research has shown that the estimated cost of preventing future pandemics would be equivalent to around 2% of the predicted cost of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>ix</sup>.



### “COVID-19 IS NATURE SENDING US A MESSAGE. IN FACT IT READS LIKE AN SOS MESSAGE FOR HUMAN ENTERPRISE, BRINGING INTO SHARP FOCUS THE NEED TO LIVE WITHIN OUR MEANS.”

Inger Anderson, UN Environment Director

#### What can businesses do to support nature recovery?

All business can have an impact through:

- reducing business travel
- responsible sourcing through supply chains and their services
- operating sustainable procurement that supports circular economy

There are also number of critical sectors which are more immediately impacted and can play a leading role in advocating for change. They include:

- **Agriculture, food and drink:** Businesses can encourage suppliers to adopt better production practices and transparent land-use planning processes, including conservation of protected areas, to ensure production does not further harm natural environments and indigenous communities. The production of soya beans which has been identified as especially harmful<sup>8</sup>. Good farming practices, such as reducing factory farming and avoiding overgrazing, can also reduce the likelihood of zoonoses outbreaks.
- **Finance and insurance:** As investors, lenders, and insurance underwriters are becoming increasingly aware of nature-related risks, there is an opportunity for the sector to incentivise nature recovery. This could be by encouraging businesses to consider the risk associated with unsustainable business practices and requiring them to demonstrate how good practice could help integrate or “mainstream” the economic cost of pandemics into consumption, production, and budgets. Financiers could help generate new green corporate bonds to mobilise resources for biodiversity conservation and pandemic risk reduction and insurers could incorporate the sustainability and pandemic risk reduction action

into policies to help counter the risk of future outbreaks.

- **Construction, facilities management, and developers:** Building back responsibly is an opportunity to put the environment at the heart of planning and development to create resilient places for people to live and work. New developments can follow better land management principles and incorporate nature-based solutions such as: Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, green roofs, planting urban trees and restoring habitats. This can help maximise land use for the benefits society needs in a way that is more sustainable, mitigates climate change and its impact, as well as averting the destruction of habitat elsewhere in the UK and across the globe.

#### What employees can do to support nature recovery?

At a personal level, there is a lot that your employees can do to support nature recovery, including:

- **Eating sustainably** - move towards a more plant-based diet, eat locally, and support responsible producers.
- **Reducing waste** – we produce so much waste from plastic to food. Rethink what you are purchasing, recycle/upcycle where you can, and do your bit to eat more leftovers. BITC’s [Lifting the Lid on Waste](#) provides useful guidance on this.
- **Travelling responsibly** - many of us turned to walking and cycling during the lockdown for exercise, to run errands, or just to enjoy nature.

Businesses should encourage all of their employees to adopt these behaviours as much as possible. Supporting your employees to reconnect with nature will also bring added wellbeing benefits for your people. More guidance for businesses can be found in our [Guide to Living Sustainably in Lockdown](#).

#### How can Business in the Community support you?

# HOW BUSINESSES CAN SUPPORT NATURE TO PREVENT FUTURE PANDEMICS

As with other aspects of the environment and wider responsible business issues, BITC can help your business with Nature Stewardship by:

- Raising awareness through briefing material, self-assessment, and support toolkits particularly around the analysis of supply chain and procurement models that support a circular economy.
- Help with adopting the recommendations of the Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) reporting. Our Advisory team can help you conduct a TCFD readiness assessment and provide recommendations to

help you understand where the largest gaps are and what you need to do next. We can also help you obtain a view of what your peers and wider sector are doing and provide recommendations on good practice and shaping or improving your disclosures.

To find out more about how BITC can support you in these areas, contact your relationship manager today

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## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> Salyer, S. et al. "Prioritizing Zoonoses for Global Health Capacity Building-Themes from One Health Zoonotic Disease Workshops in 7 Countries, 2014-2016." *Emerging infectious diseases* vol. 23,13 (2017): S55–S64.

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<sup>iii</sup> Kerlin, K. (2018), Ambitious Global Virome Project could mark end of pandemic era [online], available [here](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Forbes (2020), 'Deforestation and climate change could unleash a mind-boggling number of coronaviruses' [online], available [here](#).

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<sup>vii</sup> IPBES (2020) Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

<sup>viii</sup> WWF (2020), Global Futures: Assessing the global economic impacts of environmental change to support policy-making.

<sup>ix</sup> Dobson, A., et al. (2020), Ecology and economics for pandemic prevention, *Science*, 24 July 2020: Vol. 396, Issue 6502, pp. 379-381

<sup>x</sup> Asher, C., (2019), Brazil soy trade linked to widespread deforestation and carbon emissions [online], available [here](#).