

Competing Narratives of Nature-based Solutions

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Narratives do political work

Narratives shape how we understand the problem, and therefore how we understand the solution (and the stewards of the solution).

Narratives determine whose knowledges matter, and shape the inclusion (and the exclusion) of various actors and their worldviews in policy and practice.

Forsyth and Walker (2008). *University of Washington Press*
Hajer (1995). *Clarendon Press, Oxford*



Focus questions

What are the dominant narratives surrounding “NbS”?

What do they tell us about participation and inclusion in NbS discourses?

How can we frame NbS in ways that better support calls for transformative change?



What are the dominant narratives
surrounding “NbS”?

Competing NbS narratives

Leveraging the Power of Nature: Dominant narrative

- NbS are multifunctional, powerful, and must play a critical role in addressing global challenges, especially climate change
- Held by NbS proponents: international organizations, large environmental NGOs, national governments, and the private sector

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Dangerous Distraction: Alternative narrative

- NbS are being co-opted as a means to continue with what is seen as the unsustainable, unjust status quo
- Held by NbS critics: local and Indigenous organizations, explicitly justice-orientated organizations and collectives

A coastal landscape featuring a sandy beach, green vegetation, and a wooden post in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the image.

What do NbS narratives tell us about participation and inclusion in NbS discourses?

Reinforcing power dynamics

- Constructed narratives are reflecting and reproducing existing fault lines in global environmental governance
 - *Leveraging the Power of Nature* (dominant narrative) = actors with more access to decision-making, and who benefit from status-quo power dynamics
 - *Dangerous Distraction* (alternative narrative) = actors who have historically been excluded from decision-making, and denied access to status-quo power

Example: ‘The Problem with Nature-based Solutions’, *Atmos*

“What we saw referred to as ‘nature-based solutions’ was a co-optation of Indigenous worldviews but also a new strategy meant to facilitate the erasure of Indigenous-led movements, solutions, and demands necessary for us to continue to do what we’re already doing well,” said Janene Yazzie, the southwest regional director for NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to the land back movement.

Example: Global Youth Position Statement on NbS



Global Youth Position Statement on Nature-based Solutions, www.nbsyouthposition.org

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Key messages include:

- NbS is an exciting opportunity to address climate, biodiversity, and inequality in interconnected ways
- Perceived dominant NbS narrative overemphasises carbon sequestration and offsetting
 - *“big polluters continue to have privileged access and disproportionate leverage in the NbS discussion”*

(Based on results from a multilingual consultative survey of +1000 youth from 118 countries)

Global Youth Position Statement on Nature-based Solutions, www.nbsyouthposition.org





How can we frame NbS in ways
that better support calls for
transformative change?

Where do we go from here?

- Transformative change requires major shifts in the underlying values and worldviews that shape our models of governance, our economies, and the ways we relate to nature (IPBES, 2019)

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Pathways forward:

- Meaningfully address criticism *Dangerous distraction* presents
- Shift in the framing of the private sector: away from leaders and innovators, and towards responsibility and accountability
- Clear prioritization of the rights and leadership of Indigenous peoples and local communities

NbS narratives must address power

- NbS is gaining real momentum in policy and in practice. This has tangible, on-ground implications
- If NbS narratives are replicating power imbalances, NbS research, policy, and practice may do so as well

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- If NbS narratives are replicating power imbalances, NbS research, policy, and practice may do so as well
- Without addressing power, NbS cannot contribute to transformative change



Thank You!

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