

- [Home](#)
- / [NEWS](#)
- / [NATIONAL](#)

# Gov't, private agencies urged to 'invest in nature'

Biodiversity investment generates \$350B yearly in improved ecosystem services, could help eliminate future pandemics

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Biodiversity financing strategist Biofin Philippines has urged government and private agencies to “invest in nature” as this will generate globally \$350 billion per year in improved ecosystem services and contribute to elimination of pandemics.



As the International Day for Biological Diversity is celebrated this year, BIOFIN, a project of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), prodded policy makers to contribute to financing the Philippines' 13-year biodiversity plan.

The Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP), which started in 2015 and will last until 2028, will cost P24 billion yearly. A budget deficit of P19 billion yearly exists.

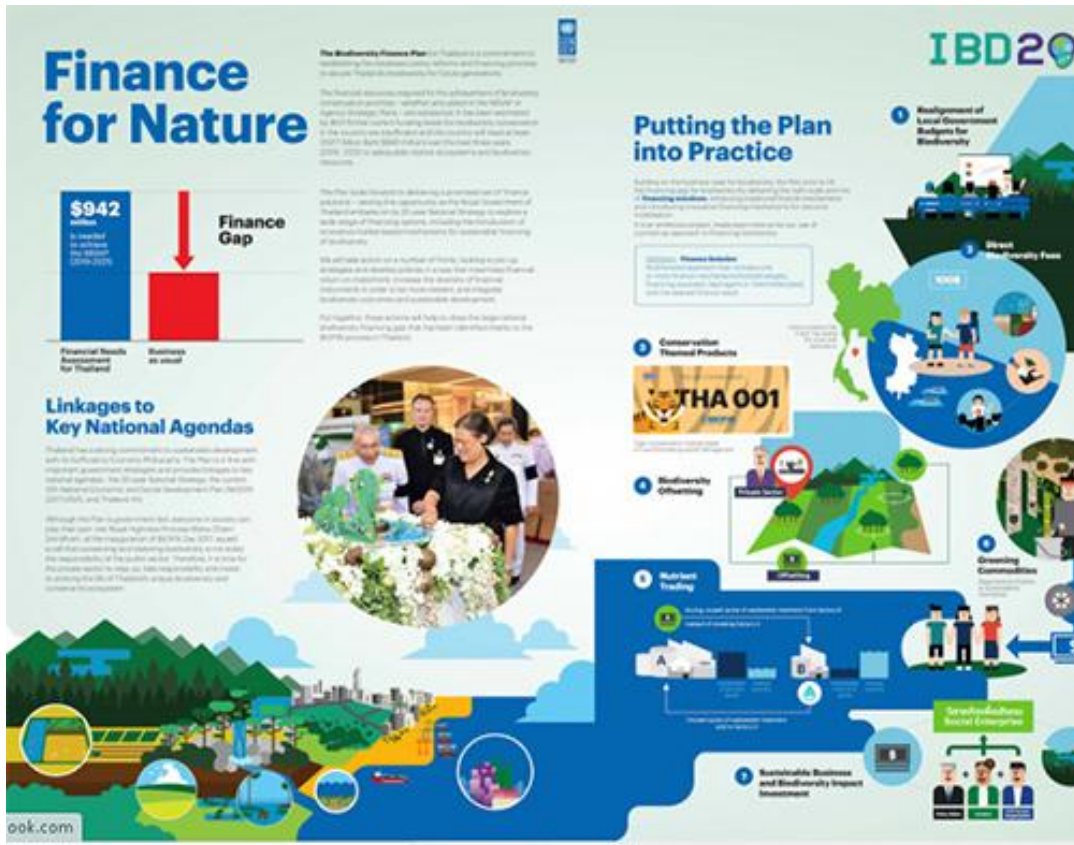
“According to Campaign for Nature, Protecting the world’s land and ocean resources outweighs financial costs at least five-to-one. Globally, this can lead to \$250 billion in increased yearly economic output, plus \$350 billion in improved ecosystem services annually,” said Angelique Ogena of Biofin.

The other critical reason for investing in nature is human health itself. When watersheds and forests—the habitat of wild animals — are destroyed, direct interaction between humans and the wildlife that carries diseases unknown to man becomes imminent.

“The International Day for Biological Diversity puts us at the center of conservation efforts in the fight to save biodiversity amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” said Ogena.

“Seventy-five percent of emerging infectious diseases in humans originate from zoonotic pathogens. That is enough reason to revisit and reprioritize resources toward the improvement of natural resources management especially in protected areas to prevent future pandemics.”

Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), co-implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the Philippines, seeks to raise awareness on the economic and ecological values of PAs (protected areas).



The campaign aims to increase BIOFIN’s revenue by establishing partnerships with the private sector and other agencies that can have a common mission to support PAs. BIOFIN is pushing for a proposed Presidential Proclamation to proclaim June 2021 to May 2022 as the “Year of the Protected Areas” and June of each year as “Month of Protected Areas.”

Both are in support of Republic Act 11038 or the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Law (NIPAS).

“Nature is a reliable provider of our daily basic needs such as clean water for drinking, air for breathing and other resources such as medicine, jobs, and climate change mitigation to create a more resilient nation,” said Ogena.

“If we zoom in to the ecosystem and species levels, national parks are at the top tier when it comes to natural wealth and therefore the most in need of protection and sustainable management.”

According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, a global network of protected areas can store at least 15 percent of terrestrial carbon, boosting the value of conserving protected areas to new heights.

Nature-positive solutions follow a holistic approach, which is highlighted in an opinion piece written by the biodiversity finance legislative champion, Rep. Josephine Ramirez-Sato.

Sato, representative of the lone district of Occidental Mindoro, aims to “spur ideas to generate resources and jobs for conservation of nature.”

“This will help in the allocation and implementation of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF)’s P1.3 trillion stimulus and recovery package,” according to Sato.

Part of the stimulus package equivalent to P650 billion has been allotted for the Enhanced Build, Build, Build Program. This includes construction of climate-smart and resilient infrastructure where biodiversity and ecosystem enhancement can be mainstreamed.

“The stimulus package is heavy on economic provisions and budget appropriations to enable the country to recover faster, but with proper environmental considerations,” Ramirez-Sato said in her opinion piece.

“Nature-positive solutions can create stable jobs and protect our planet,” she added. Sato suggests a seven-step approach to build back greener from the pandemic. These are: 1) Include Protected Areas (PAs) and key biodiversity areas (KBAs) as key elements of nature-based solutions; 2) Invest more in PAs and KBAs; 3) Fast-track the passage of biodiversity conservation-related policies; 4) Embrace Agrobiodiversity; 5) Leverage partnerships and private sector engagement for PAs; 6) Strengthen human resources; and 7) maximize technology and citizen engagement.

“Our actions now to address the pandemic should not amplify the risks of future outbreaks and crises. The UN World Health Organization predicts that ‘reducing the environmental and social factors people are exposed to, nearly a quarter of the global health burden could be prevented.’”

Post-COVID19 recovery plans must be inclusive and sustainable, taking into prime consideration biodiversity conservation and financing to prevent future pandemics. Moving forward to the 'new normal,' business as usual is no longer an option.

Putting the environment at the core of what all agencies do should be the new paradigm of doing business so building back can be greener and better from this pandemic. While the economic losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to exist, both public and private sectors should also pay attention to long-term solutions – one of which is investing in nature. Such investment will take quite some time before returns are realized in the form of an equitable, environmentally sound, and sustainable growth.

As an old saying goes, "Whatsoever man sows, he shall also reap."

<https://manilastandard.net/news/national/356579/gov-t-private-agencies-urged-to-invest-in-nature-.html>