



29 March 2021

Dear colleagues,

Our [last edition](#) in early February concluded, based on a review of Green Recovery tracking tools, that the **global response to COVID-19 to date has failed to deliver the bare necessary to protect the planet's climate and biodiversity and is far from supporting the transition to sustainability**. The new report [Are We Building Back Better? Evidence from 2020 and Pathways for Inclusive Green Recovery Spending](#) by Oxford's Economic Recovery Project and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) supports this analysis by revealing that **only 2.5 per cent of global COVID-19 recovery spending is likely to have "positive green characteristics,"** such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting natural capital.

Our BFB Briefing #07 was published on the same day as the [Dasgupta Review](#) on the economics of biodiversity. The report clearly shows that our unsustainable engagement with nature is endangering the wellbeing of current and future generations and puts our economies at risk. On 26 February, the UNFCCC published its initial [NDC Synthesis Report](#). Though much less explicit in its language and only a snapshot of global commitments to date, it paints the same picture. In the [words](#) of Secretary-General António Guterres, this summary of current climate commitments is a "red alert for our planet", and **2021 is a "make or break year"** to confront the global climate emergency.

In our debates around a Green Recovery, red flag reports such as these underline the urgent need to **take the concept from ambition to action**. It has become clear that the COVID-19 crisis provides a window of opportunity for broadening the implementation of integrated approaches that drive systemic changes. However, there is not only a lack of funding for Green Recovery measures, but also a lack of clear orientation, as there is only a limited range of tangible examples showing how a Green Recovery can be put into practice. Yet such tangible examples – with concrete results – are essential for mobilizing political support. Against this backdrop, we set out to **highlight examples of action towards a Green Recovery that have matured beyond the stage of announcements**. They aim to illustrate ways that actors around the world – in times of COVID-19 – seek to make sustainable, inclusive and resilient transformations a reality.

As it is too early to evaluate the impact and sustainability of a COVID-19 recovery measure, this briefing presents **Green Recovery "snapshots" which may serve as an inspiration for current planning efforts**. Many more examples from developing and emerging economies around the globe will be included in an upcoming study that will soon be published within the publication series *Green Recovery for Practitioners*. Even though some of the examples are **rooted in pre-pandemic efforts**, perhaps blurring the line of whether or not these can be labelled as "COVID-19 responses," they reinforce an important aspect: For planning and implementing Green Recovery measures, **there is no need to reinvent the wheel**. Existing Green Economy approaches already provide us with a range of opportunities for just and environmentally sustainable development that

generates economic prosperity through “green” activities. It is not the number of tools and approaches but their consistent and coherent application that we lack most, before the pandemic but also now, during the pandemic.

Accordingly, this briefing includes a number of **Green Recovery practices on the ground**. One is Costa Rica’s long-term sustainable development strategy and [Decarbonization Plan](#), which are undergoing review to include (Green) Recovery elements, another one is South Africa’s [Working for Water Programme](#) launched in 1995 and **scaled up as a recovery measure** following the financial crisis in 2008/2009. The example from South Africa highlights the importance of **learning from past crises** and recovery strategies. With the **development of cycling infrastructure**, the third snapshot illustrates that Green Recovery can be a catalyzer for “long-term structural reforms and a transformative shift towards sustainability, biodiversity protection, resilience and climate neutrality,” as stated in the guide [Green Recovery for Practitioners](#). So-called “pop-up” bike lanes enable COVID-19-safe urban mobility in many countries around the globe (with Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Peru featured in this briefing), while providing **multiple benefits** for urban climate and biodiversity as well as human health and well-being.

We hope you find this BFB Briefing insightful and encourage you to consult the upcoming study for a larger range of examples. Should you have other examples of measures that help us build forward better, we encourage you to share them with us, and in the “[Green Recovery from COVID-19](#)” Community Group of the Green Forum. As usual, we look forward to your feedback and thematic suggestions for future issues. The next BFB Briefing will look at approaches to systemic capacity building and Green Recovery learning.

Many thanks to our colleagues who reviewed and contributed to developing the featured Green Recovery snapshots.

Best regards,
IKI Projects BioFrame, CDCPIII, GET, SDG-RI & SPA*

#08 REALITY CHECK: SNAPSHOTS OF GREEN RECOVERY PRACTICES

The **Build Forward Better Briefings** have compiled the latest “green stimulus” news, measures and propositions by governments, multilateral organizations, academia, civil society and other actors at national and international level. They have shared insights on options and responses for a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In our issues #07 and #08, we take a more analytical approach. Following a year of intense international and national debates on how to shape the socioeconomic response to the pandemic, **we are conducting a reality check**. After taking a close look at selected Green Recovery trackers, this issue **highlights snapshots that may further inspire our readers to pave the way from Green Recovery ambitions to actions**.

This briefing is a **collaborative product by several GIZ IKI projects**.¹ Many thanks to our colleagues who reviewed and contributed to developing the featured Green Recovery snapshots.

All previous issues of the BFB Briefing (#01 Monitoring, #02 Cities, #03 Tourism, #04 NDCs and LTS, #05 Risk Governance, #06 Biodiversity, #07 Reality Check: Trackers) can be accessed [here](#).

¹ Support Project for the Design and Implementation of the New Global Biodiversity Framework (BioFrame); Capacity Development for Climate Policy in Southeast & Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia, Phase III (CDCPIII); Green Economy Transformation in Cooperation with the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (GET); Private Business Action for Biodiversity (PBAB); Support Project for SDG Review and Implementation Processes (SDG-RI); Support Project for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement (SPA).

Costa Rica: Mainstreaming Green Recovery into national planning and policies

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate Green Recovery into long-term strategies • Achieve a Green Recovery by exploiting synergies between the decarbonization plan and the sustainable development agenda
Sectors & Fields	Multi-sectoral approach, mainly: Transport, Agriculture, Forestry, Energy, Tourism
Actors involved	Federal government, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), World Bank (WB), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), European Union (EU)
Initiated in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2019 (National Decarbonization Plan) • 2021 (<i>Plan Estratégico Nacional</i>)

While some countries opted for the development of distinct and comprehensive (green) recovery plans to overcome economic setbacks caused by the pandemic, Costa Rica aims at a **Green Recovery that results from the implementation of existing long-term decarbonization and sustainable development strategies**. The country works towards an integrated, systemic approach facilitating the exploitation of synergies between different strategies.

In early 2019, Costa Rica [announced an economy-wide plan to decarbonize by 2050](#) that is structured along ten axes corresponding to its major emission sources, including transport, industrial and agricultural production, and the national electricity system. This [National Decarbonization Plan](#) was formally submitted to the UNFCCC as the country's long-term strategy. Beyond serving as a blueprint to achieve **net-zero emissions by 2050**, it is a basis for sectoral development plans of ministries. A [cost-benefit analysis of decarbonizing the economy supported by the IDB](#) shows the significant **post-pandemic recovery potential** that the National Decarbonization Plan's implementation entails: the study's central scenario indicates a **US\$41 billion net benefit** between 2020 and 2050.

The Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN) presented a [long-term sustainable development strategy](#) in March 2021 (*Estrategia Territorial para una Economía Inclusiva y Descarbonizada CR 2050*) that is based on the National Decarbonization Plan and coordinates intersectoral public policy. This strategy centered around **digitalization, decentralization, and decarbonization ("3D")**, sets the basis for the upcoming *Plan Estratégico Nacional (PEN 2050)*. It reflects the federal government's commitment to a [Green Recovery from the COVID-19 crisis](#), focused on adaptation planning, food security measures, green and blue job creation, as well as sustainable production and consumption. Concrete recovery measures as included in the MIDEPLAN's sustainable development strategy comprise efforts to counteract the hyper-concentration of economic activity and innovation in the San José Greater Metropolitan Area, attempting to **narrow the geographic wealth gap**. By investing in rural areas, a shift away from an economy solely based on tourism and agriculture to more diversification is planned. Envisaged economic activities for the rural areas' immediate future are forestry and the setup of cement, iron and steel industries. With this relocation to rural areas a **shift to a circular economy** is planned. It remains to be seen whether the circular approach can significantly lower ecological impacts of heavy industries. By 2050, regions like Golfito-Golfo Dulce are intended to be present in further sectors like the high-tech industry, biotechnology, and the knowledge and orange economy.

In accordance with the two described national strategies, **various other Green Recovery measures** are implemented across different sectors. These include a [plan for an electric train line](#) and a ["More Women, More Nature"](#) program, investing in women-centered forest protection, reforestation and regeneration. To support the implementation, Costa Rica has taken two multi-year loans of [US\\$230 million from IDB](#) and [US\\$300 million](#) from the World Bank. The funds will be used to **strengthen the management and monitoring of climate action, conserve and restore ecosystems, and encourage electric energy** moving towards e-mobility and e-public transport. This is an important step towards decarbonized transport, as [98% of Costa Rica's electricity supply](#) is generated from renewable energy sources, while the transport sector remains responsible for a large share of the country's carbon emissions.

Costa Rica’s ambitious, integrated approach bears **high potential for coherent and efficient policy making**. However, **it remains to be seen whether a truly Green Recovery can be achieved**, since the implementation of the two national strategies is still in its initial stage.

Takeaways

- Integrating Green Recovery elements into existing decarbonization plans facilitates policy coherence, increases efficiency and effectiveness and strengthens sustainability.
- Identifying interconnections between different development frameworks such as climate adaptation strategies, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the 2030 Agenda can help pointing out existing synergies and preventing policies from conflicting with each other. This allows for an increased efficiency in the use of financial and/or human resources and a smooth implementation (see this [analysis on policy coherence](#) published in January 2021).

South Africa: Preserving water and biodiversity whilst creating employment

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing invasive plants by 22% annually to stabilize water cycles, biodiversity and ecosystem services • Employment for and empowerment of marginalized populations in rural areas
Sectors & Fields	Biodiversity, Water
Actors involved	National government departments, municipalities, conservancy groups, private companies, landowners, local communities
Initiated in	1995
Implementation status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 20.000 and 40.000 jobs created annually. Served as inspiration for further public works programs with environmental focus • Further expansion announced for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

Long before COVID-19, the South African government has set course on using synergies in tackling the socio-economic challenge of unemployment and a major threat to local ecosystems and water cycles. **Invasive plants** cover about 1% of the country’s landmass, ousting indigenous species, [altering the course of wildfires](#) and [consuming about 7% of the country’s water](#) – at the expense of other plants and animals and thus the country’s biodiversity. These processes also have socio-economic consequences, as they negatively affect ecosystem services, such as food harvesting or ecotourism. In 1995, the public [Working for Water](#) program (WfW) was initiated. In cooperation with local communities, government departments, private businesses and research institutions, WfW employs people to clear invasive plants through mechanical and chemical means, as well as bio-control measures. It thereby pursues the dual goal of **creating employment and development opportunities for marginalized communities** in rural areas as well as **preserving biodiversity and reducing water stress**.

The program's ability to create local jobs has ensured its popularity. From the beginning, increasing the livelihoods of marginalized communities with special targets for women, youth and people with disabilities has been a cornerstone of WfW, which also implements HIV and Aids projects and other initiatives. Following the financial crisis of 2008/09, the government chose to scale-up WfW. In the same period, as South Africa emerged as a pioneer within the Green Economy discourse, the program’s delivery strategy was adapted to reflect the goals of an **inclusive green economy**. With a yearly budget of 1.8 billion Rand (100 million €) and about [40,000 people](#) employed in 2018, WfW has not only been expanded, but has also become the **spearhead of a series of ‘Working for’ programs** that have followed (Wetlands in 2000, Fire in 2003 and Land in 2010) and constitute a part of South Africa’s [Expanded Public Works Program](#). 25 years after its start, the government [has announced](#) to further expand WfW in the context of the National Recovery Plan.

A [report](#) by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) underlines the **environmental and economic value of the program** beyond the employment dimension, as every Rand spent controlling invasive species is estimated to save 8 to 3,000 Rand in damages to ecosystems prevented. While the program provides an example of how the protection of ecosystems and ecosystem services can be aligned with employment opportunities, it also indicates **potential trade-offs** between these two aims. [Experts](#) have [criticized](#) that WfW prioritizes the number of created jobs over the effectiveness of these jobs in combatting invasive species. Although the program had removed [2.5 million hectares](#) of invasive plants until 2018, their overall population has continued to increase. The SANBI [report](#) concludes that the program would therefore benefit from improved planning and monitoring, which, according to the authors, is deprioritized out of the fear that the funds spent would be at the expense of the number of jobs created.

Despite its limitations, WfW is an exceptional program that has for 25 years been realizing large-scale employment options as well as the protection of ecosystems – and providing valuable insights for future projects.

Takeaways

- Combatting invasive plants is a labour-intensive measure that can generate job opportunities for a large low-skilled workforce, especially in rural areas. With a targeted focus on specific groups, they can boost employment opportunities for marginalized people.
- The protection of ecosystems also has economic benefits, not only by providing employment and income, but also by reducing ecosystem damage and related abatement cost.
- In order to balance existing trade-offs between socio-economic targets and the effectiveness of ecosystem protection, data collection and monitoring are essential.

Mexico, Argentina, Colombia & Peru: Improving cycling infrastructure for healthy people and cities

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emissions reduction in the transport sector • Socially distant urban mobility to limit the spread of COVID-19 • Improving public health (and reducing the risk of a severe COVID-19 course) • Cost-efficient infrastructure solution compared to infrastructure for cars
Sectors & Fields	Urban planning (infrastructure), urban mobility (transport)
Actors involved	Federal and local government departments, IADB, GIZ, bikeNcity consultancy
Initiated in	June 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to redesign the means of urban mobility and has demonstrated the importance of individual options for commuting in urban areas. During the last year, cities worldwide have become both [more resilient and more sustainable](#) with mobility systems built around cycling. In Latin America and the Caribbean, [CO₂ emissions by transport increased by 50% between 2000 and 2016](#). With such strong emphasis on transport by car and bus, the pandemic has opened a window of opportunity to innovate and shift towards more sustainable, low emission means of transport that, in addition, support physical distancing requirements and improve health conditions.

In July 2020, GIZ's "Cities and Climate Change" program in Mexico assisted the implementation of a [pop-up bike lane in Leon city](#), in partnership with the sustainable urban mobility and public space consultancy bikeNcity. Inspired by the positive response to the measure by the public, the partners supported further municipalities in implementing pop-up bike lanes through [technical assistance in the design process, operation, communication strategy, and monitoring and evaluation](#). To make biking more attractive to the

citizens, a social media campaign (“Huellas Activas”) was launched and targeted incentives for cycling were created such as promoting the bike sharing scheme ECOBICI or including the sale of bicycles as an essential business during lockdown. According to the Mexico City Ministry of Mobility, [bicycle trips increased by 221% between March 2020 and January 2021](#), whilst public transport and private car trips decreased by up to 50%.

In November 2020, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) drew lessons learned from the Mexican experience in their [guide on how to set up pop-up bike lanes](#). During the pandemic, **Mexico City has begun the construction of 54 kms of cycling lanes**, **Bogotá has created an 84 kms network**, **Lima added 46 kms and Buenos Aires announced plans for 60 kms**. The processes of planning and implementing pop-up bike lanes were [characterized by fast decision making, and trial and error approaches](#). Implementation was realized through low-cost interventions, using available building materials such as cones, concrete barriers and street markings. The focus on key routes for commuters and routes into community centers was critical to ensuring residents’ needs were met and bike lanes were accepted.

Looking at the **impacts**, the [Mexican government has highlighted the environmental, economic and public health benefits of cycling](#), emphasizing the connections between **reducing emissions and air pollution**, **improving public health** (overall and specifically lung health) and **decreasing the risk of a severe COVID-19 illness course**. Research by the [Umweltbundesamt](#) demonstrates that cycling infrastructure is extremely **cost effective** compared to infrastructure for motorized transport (costs for car infrastructure per passenger per km in Germany are estimated at EUR 7 cents, compared to only EUR 0.5 cents for bicycles). According to [IISD](#) research, investments in cycling infrastructure are also an **opportunity to create green jobs**, because bike paths need to be constructed and maintained, while increased bike use implies more jobs in retail, manufacturing, tourism, and services. [Investments in cycling tourism](#) for instance could create jobs and provide regional holiday options amidst the international travel restrictions. Importantly, they contribute to more sustainable behavior and awareness raising about more sustainable mobility options.

It is important to note that of the new bike lanes that have emerged during the pandemic, few are planned to be permanent (of the cities mentioned above, only Buenos Aires’ plans are permanent). Drawing on recommendations by the [Vision Zero Challenge](#), an initiative supporting road safety in 24 cities in Latin America and the Caribbean, linking cycling infrastructure to wider long-term development objectives, **intermodal connectivity** (e.g. [linking bike lanes with railway stations](#)) and **giving local authorities the operational and financial resources to turn successful temporary measures into permanent infrastructure**, are critical for achieving long-term changes in the sense of a truly sustainable Green Recovery.

As an immediate response to the pandemic, pop-up cycling infrastructure is a solution to urban mobility problems exacerbated by COVID-19. In the long term, these **temporary infrastructure measures offer an opportunity for citizens to experience the benefits and for cities to test the impacts and evaluate the effects on the urban mobility systems** before turning them into permanent features.

Takeaways

- Cycling infrastructure has connected environmental, social, health and economic benefits.
- Communication strategies to familiarize the population with the emerging infrastructure and encourage widespread usage are crucial for their acceptance.
- Integration into cities’ transport networks, along key commuting routes with intermodal connection points, is imperative for the durability of the projects in the long run.
- Monitoring and evaluation processes of temporary cycle infrastructure offer the chance to assess its impact before turning the pop-up infrastructure into permanent features.

Outlook

This reality check after one year of Green Recovery debates underlines once more: There is still a long way to go to towards a truly “green” COVID-19 recovery. Examples such as the ones presented above show what a Green Recovery can look like in practice. Many initiatives certainly have trade-offs and cannot be replicated in every context. Nevertheless, they can serve as an inspiration and their implementation can teach us valuable lessons. For a larger range of snapshots, we encourage you to look out for the upcoming study within the publication series *Green Recovery for Practitioners*. Furthermore, if you know of inspiring examples for building forward better, we encourage you to share them with us, and in the [“Green Recovery from COVID-19”](#) Community Group of the Green Forum.