

Rewilding Wellbeing & Equity

7th July 2021

Naturenomics™ Dialogues vol. 2: 16th June – 7th July 2021

Beyond the GDP

Globally today, an area's growth and development is measured largely through economic indicators such as GDP and economic growth rates, or social development indexes such as the Human Development Index. The overwhelming focus on economic indicators has meant that growth and development has focused primarily on driving economic growth, with severe costs to the environment and climate.

With the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, more efforts have been channeled into including indicators of ecological health in indices, to measure and track the overall sustainability of current growth and development. However, only 29 of the SDG index's 322 indicators shows relate to the use of natural resources, biodiversity protection and climate action. Its ability to trace the relationship and influence of environment on lives beyond natural resource use is limited. A new approach is needed. Degrading natural capital today borrows time and growth from future generations. A better measure for growth must capture not only the purely economic value of natural capital, but also its links and potential for social inclusion: it must radically redefine human wellbeing and growth, to recognize the role nature plays in economic, social and cultural wellbeing and foster greater interdependence between these three aspects.

Rewilding Development

Recognizing the value of nature, there are growing calls to protect 30% of the world's lands and oceans to preserve biodiversity and keep our planetary systems functioning. The role of indigenous people and rural communities in this, however, is rarely mentioned. But a growing body of research indicates that indigenous people have a critical role to play for biodiversity – not just managing, but enriching and enhancing natural assets through their practices.

Indigenous people and rural communities, however, are rarely included in the decision-making processes for either biodiversity protection or rewilding. Despite their historical contributions and stewardship, their knowledge and skills are undervalued and despite their vulnerability to ecological and climate threats, these communities rarely have a voice in designing interventions that could enhance their wellbeing. Participatory systems are needed, not only to give communities a voice, but to supply the specialist skills they need to manage natural assets as people on the frontlines of climate & ecological risks.

Experiments in participatory budgeting in European cities like Madrid offer unique insights for rural communities in the Eastern Himalayas. The rewilding economy of the Eastern Himalayas has great potential to enhance natural capital and natural assets, creating immense value for rural communities that can be invested in delivering universal basic assets such as healthcare and education. Participatory natural asset management and budgeting could strengthen communities' ability to define wellbeing and set development priorities in a flexible, responsive manner.



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OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the key social & economic challenges facing rural & indigenous communities in the Eastern Himalayas
2. Explore alternatives to the GDP for integrating ecology, economy, social and cultural wellbeing indicators
3. Explore alternative perspectives on wellbeing, particularly indigenous perspectives on wellbeing and aspirations in the Eastern Himalayas
4. Define what stewardship & managing natural assets entails and how rural communities could take on these roles in the Eastern Himalayas
5. Discuss the potential of the rewilding economy and natural capital in creating access to universal basic assets
6. Discuss the pros and cons of participatory budgeting, its applications to ecological budgets and the role it could play in rural communities driving their own development meeting their aspirations and wellbeing

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What are the alternative definitions of progress & wellbeing? What are the means that exist to measure these alternative definitions & how well do they recognize the role of ecology, often critical in rural wellbeing?
2. What could an alternative measure of wellbeing and human growth look like?
3. How do we include rural & indigenous communities in decision-making processes for biodiversity & natural assets – protection and rewilding?
4. How do we develop rewilding programmes that have equitable outcomes and where benefits primarily accrue to rural and indigenous communities in proximity to these ecosystems?
5. Could participatory ecological budgeting for natural capital create stronger voice & participation for rural communities in defining their development priorities and investing in their communities?
6. Can participatory rewilding & ecological budgeting create greater sustainable and equitable outcomes for the Eastern Himalayas?



Rewilding the Future

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Green is in. As the world gears up to set key climate goals at COP26 in Glasgow this year, countries and corporations are racing to institute new policies to limit carbon emissions and invest in sustainable business models and practices. Countries like China and the US have outlined ambitious programmes to ramp up government spending to aid a complete renewable energy transition while creating jobs for their economies and strengthening their GDP.

For climate vulnerable regions like the Eastern Himalayas, even a 1.5 C rise will transform its climate, impacting everything from its water sources, to the crops that can be grown, its biodiversity and by extension, the lives of the 246 million people living there. Climate resilience is poor: people lack access to resources that could help them weather these changes. For a primarily agrarian community, swift action is not a choice, it is a necessity, beginning with its rich natural assets.

The Eastern Himalayan region suffers from the historical problem of being natural capital rich, but money poor. As the world sets goals for the future of climate and biodiversity, the Eastern Himalayan region must seize this opportunity to take the lead on a new future for people and biodiversity.

Last year, at the 8th Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, the Balipara Foundation held multiple conversations on the theme of **Ecology is Economy**. Building on these conversations and the key outcomes from this forum, this series of the Naturenomics™ Dialogues will explore and debate the theme of **Rewilding the Future**: moving beyond rewilding as a means of restoring the complexity of our natural ecosystems, to restoring the interdependence between our natural, social and economic systems by building a new, natural capital economy participatorily led and stewarded by indigenous and rural communities. This is the first step on the path to equitable climate resilience for people and biodiversity in the Eastern Himalayas.

Through this series, we explore the role that our rich forests can play in our wellbeing and resilience, in mitigating climate threats and its social repercussions, how to create an equitable ecological budget and how a rewilding economy could help communities achieve greater agency over setting their own development and wellbeing priorities beyond the limitations of the GDP. These key themes will serve as an introduction to the critical themes and conversations of the 9th Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, as we continue to explore the idea of **Ecology is Economy** and shape the future of the Eastern Himalayas, its people, biodiversity and economy.



BALIPARA FOUNDATION

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ABOUT THE NATURENOMICS™ DIALOGUES

The Naturenomics™ Dialogues is a digital offshoot of the the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum. It aims to bring together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to debate pressing issues and opportunities for action in ecology, economy & community-centred conservation with a focus on the Eastern Himalayan region – India's North East, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and China.

The Naturenomics™ Dialogues is part of a broader initiative to pivot our flagship forum, the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, to meet the challenges of the “new normal” through digitization.

The Naturenomics™ Dialogues will return next month, to explore new themes and questions, some raised over these sessions, for creating Rural Futures in the Eastern Himalayas.

ABOUT THE EASTERN HIMALAYAN NATURENOMICS™ FORUM

The Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum is a global, interdisciplinary platform that brings together businesses, communities, the development sector, conservationists and academics to foster knowledge sharing, and generate grassroots actionable solutions to create Rural Futures across the Eastern Himalayas. Since 2020, the Forum has focused on the theme of **Ecology is Economy** for the region's future.

First instituted in 2013, the Forum has evolved and branched out into regional forums, the first of which was held in Sikkim in 2019, followed by a forum in Bhutan in 2020. The Forum held 12 digital editions of the regional forums in 2020 across all the states and countries of the Eastern Himalayas, and in 2021, held physical forums in Bangladesh and Manipur.



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Participants



20+
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100+
Discussion
Topics

9TH
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NATURENOMICS™ FORUM
7-11 DECEMBER 2021

