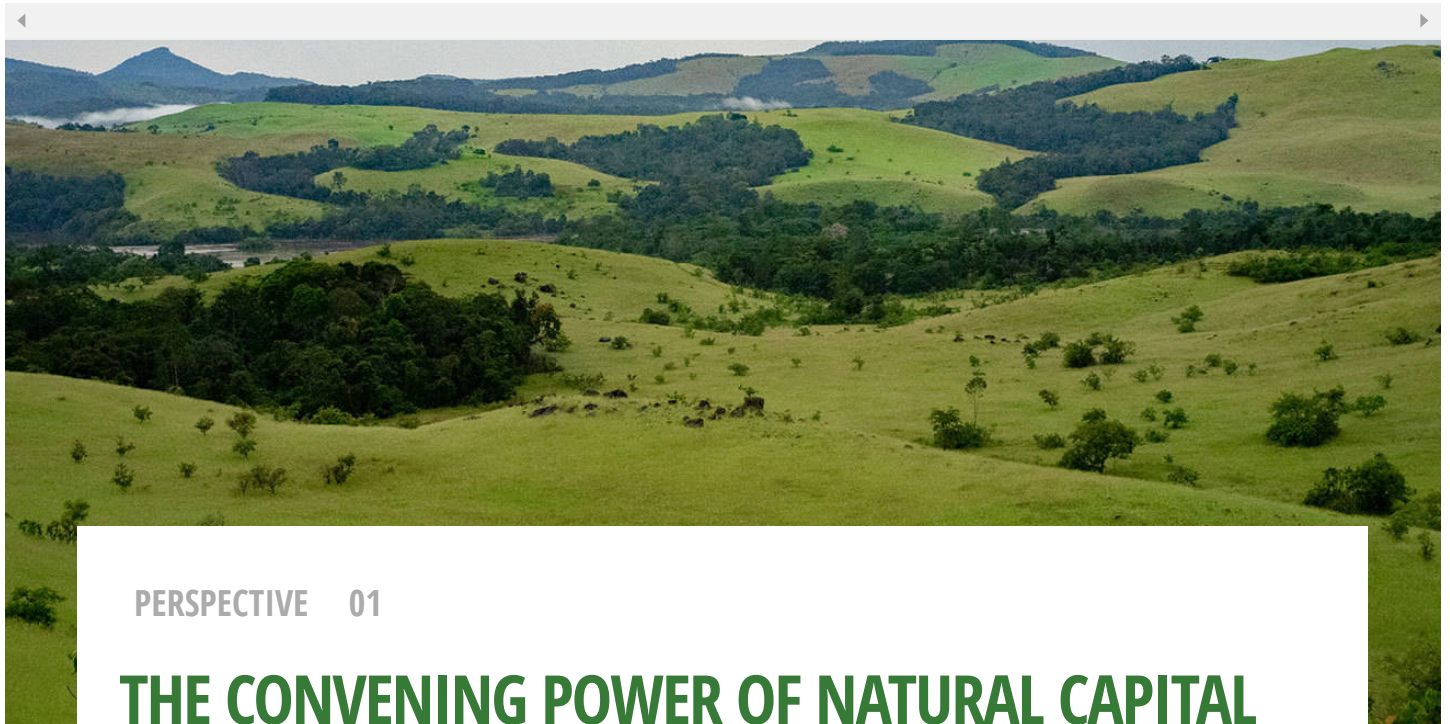




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PERSPECTIVE 01

## THE CONVENING POWER OF NATURAL CAPITAL

### WRITTEN BY



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In Africa, we face a continuous conundrum of balancing environmental stewardship and much-needed economic growth. At this critical moment during which the escalating economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the challenge of already crippling debt-burden, it is clear Africa needs to create a new, sustainable investment and development model at scale.

We believe that the fundamentals of such a model entail taking a conservation-led investment approach that simultaneously protects biodiversity, ensures socio-economic development and mitigates against climate change. And it must be supported by innovative financial instruments that recognise the value of natural capital.

Protecting Africa's forested landscapes will be a key component of a new sustainable development model that contributes to achieving global net-zero emissions. Forests can provide over 20% of the climate mitigation needed before 2030, but currently account for less than 3% of climate funding<sup>1</sup>. The Central African rainforest is the



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600,000 hectares.

Capital markets will play a key role in protecting equatorial Africa's forest landscapes through financing sustainable development, provided that viable investment opportunities present themselves. This requires a combination of technical know-how, deep regional and sectoral experience and expertise, philosophical and cultural alignment between project proponents and a capacity for financial innovation.



**Protecting Africa's forested landscapes will be a key component of a new sustainable development model that contributes to achieving global net-zero emissions. Forests can provide over 20% of the climate mitigation needed before 2030, but currently account for less than 3% of climate funding**

Against this backdrop, The African Conservation Development Group is pioneering a working model that connects capital markets to climate-smart, integrated land-use development at scale. Our 730,000 ha Grande Mayumba project in southern Gabon is one of the continent's largest natural capital-focused developments. Its intent is to protect critical biodiversity and provide significant regional socio-economic uplift – whilst in the process ensuring that the landscape avoids the emission of over c. 200 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over the next 25 years.

The Grande Mayumba Sustainable Development Plan, developed in partnership with the Gabonese Republic, designates 29% of Grande Mayumba for reduced impact logging in existing forestry areas and 13% for mixed agriculture on largely degraded grasslands, while 30% of Grande Mayumba's forestry concessions will be withdrawn from commercial forestry and proclaimed as a conservation area, due to its high biodiversity value. This means over 220,000 ha of the 730,000 ha land area will be permanently set aside for conservation, including representative forest and savannah ecosystems, as well as marine and freshwater environments.



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Ten years of systematic land-use planning in conformity with national priorities underpins the development of Grande Mayumba, which is a 'model' for the implementation of Gabon's Sustainable Development Law. Over the next 5 years, Grande Mayumba is investing upwards of USD 200 million in agribusiness, forestry and timber processing, eco-tourism, logistics services, together with municipal infrastructure including the road networks, housing, electricity, water, sanitation, healthcare and educational services necessary to support the influx of up to 30,000 people into Mayumba town and the surrounding area.

Measuring the long-term impact of our investment and development programmes is a fundamental principle of our approach and meticulous ongoing measurement of carbon and biodiversity is being undertaken by technical experts. Through the newly formed forestLAB research hub, our Group has partnered with the London School of Economics' Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the University of Stirling to help monitor the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the project and to devise new solutions for natural capital investment and development.



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and fostering resilience whilst ensuring long term, sustainable economic growth.



**We believe that by taking a natural capital-focused and integrated approach to land-use investment and development, we will generate the necessary socio-economic and environmental benefits that Africa so urgently needs.**

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup><https://blog.globalforestwatch...>

<sup>2</sup>Marion Pfeifer & Deo D. Shirima (2021) "Inventory hints at the future of African forests"  
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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Alan Bernstein is a pioneer of conservation-led development, having founded, invested in and successfully scaled a series of award-winning sustainable development enterprises in Africa, ... [Read full bio](#)

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