Catalyzing innovation: governance enablers of nature-based solution success stories

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There is growing recognition that using the properties of nature can help provide viable and cost-effective solutions to a wide range of societal challenges, including disaster risk reduction. However, nature-based solution (NBS) realization depends critically on the legal, institutional, social, political and financial conditions – that is, the governance framework - that enable the NBS policy process. Drawing from three case studies in Nocera Inferiore (Italy), Munich (Germany) and Wolong (China), we identify key governance enablers of successful NBS - that is, the contextual pre-conditions, policy processes and institutions that proved helpful or even essential for the initiation, planning, design and implementation of NBS. Results show that the most critical enablers involved governance innovation in three areas: polycentric governance (novel arrangements in the public administration that involved multiple institutional scales and/or sectors), NBS co-design (innovative stakeholder participatory processes that influenced the final NBS) and financial incentives (financial incentives for community-based implementation and monitoring of NBS). Further enablers for realizing NBS, as demonstrated in the three cases, include environmental advocacy coalition groups, along with their individual champions, and a major triggering or modelled event, which opened a window of opportunity to advocate for a nature-based or hybrid green-blue-grey solution. Findings show that the transition from grey solutions to NBS can be justified with, and contribute to, multiple global agendas and targets, including disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, halting biodiversity loss and sustainable development.