



PRESS RELEASE

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NUS CNCS and XPRIZE launch new Biodiversity Impact Partnership

Singapore, 21 November 2024 — The Centre for Nature-based Climate Solutions (CNCS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) is partnering XPRIZE to bring revolutionary conservation technologies from the XPRIZE Rainforest competition – a five-year competition that was launched in 2019. This Biodiversity Impact Partnership, which will be launched at this year’s COP29, aims to enhance biodiversity monitoring, conservation, and nature-based solutions across the region.

In 2023, Singapore proudly hosted the XPRIZE Rainforest semi-finals at the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. Teams of scientists and robotic engineers had 24 hours to demonstrate cutting-edge solutions to detect biodiversity in complex tropical rainforest ecosystems. Six teams advanced to the Amazon rainforest in Brazil for the finals, where they competed for a US\$10 million prize (S\$13.9 million) by presenting enhanced technologies to revolutionise rainforest conservation.

Building on their achievements in the XPRIZE Rainforest competition, these technologies are now entering an impact phase, focused on real-world scaling and implementation across Southeast Asia’s rainforests. The technological advancements achieved in this phase will enable rapid biodiversity assessments and gathering of ecological insights at potentially larger scales.

Adopting a holistic multi-pronged approach, the Biodiversity Impact Partnership aims to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss by drawing on expertise across NUS. It will leverage the University’s breadth of expertise from Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, Department of Biological Sciences at the Faculty of Science and Department of Geography at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The partnership will also foster cross-faculty collaboration among students and researchers across NUS to address biodiversity loss, climate change and public health issues in a comprehensive and impactful way.

Another key objective of this partnership is to forge strategic and impactful collaboration within the Southeast Asian region through joint research efforts, scaling up biodiversity and conservation efforts through technology. NUS CNCS actively partners academic institutions, government agencies, and non-profit organisations in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, and remains committed in strengthening the regional research network for nature-based solutions and conservation through the Biodiversity Impact Partnership.

Professor Koh Lian Pin, NUS Associate Vice President and Chief Sustainability Scientist, and Director of CNCS, said: “NUS is delighted to launch the Biodiversity Impact Partnership in collaboration with XPRIZE. We urgently need to leverage technology and our collective efforts

to develop new solutions to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss facing our society.”

Minister Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment of Singapore, said: “The Biodiversity Impact Partnership between NUS and XPRIZE marks a commitment to harnessing technology for the good of global biodiversity, with a specific focus on Southeast Asia. I believe that this partnership will pave the way for more robust conservation research to enhance planetary health.”

Peter Houlihan, Executive Vice President of Biodiversity and Conservation at XPRIZE, said: “As we advance beyond the XPRIZE Rainforest Finals and into the latter half of the decade towards 2030, the solutions that have been field tested and verified through this global competition are ready to be implemented at scale for the monitoring and protection of biodiversity worldwide. The Semi-finals hosted in Singapore in 2023 were an instrumental step in validating these technologies that will now return to the region through this strategic Impact Partnership with NUS. We are grateful for the longstanding relationship with NUS and Singapore in advancing technological innovation and biodiversity conservation, and XPRIZE looks forward to the role of this regional hub in accelerating goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework.”

Biodiversity experts, together with winning teams of the XPRIZE Rainforest project, will conduct workshops and training sessions covering advancements in technologies like drone-based deployments, eDNA sequencing, and AI-based species identification, focusing on co-developing impact projects with regional and local stakeholders. These efforts will drive effective knowledge transfer and capacity building, crucial for scaling conservation solutions. There are plans to showcase initial findings of promising projects at COP30 in Brazil, to highlight the progress and potential of these technologies on a global stage.

Mr Desmond Lee, Minister for National Development, said: “It was our honour to have hosted the semi-finals of the XPRIZE Rainforest Competition in Singapore in 2023. With challenges such as climate change and urbanisation, the need for technology and innovation to help drive nature conservation efforts, is now more important than ever. I am glad that NUS will continue working with XPRIZE to advance biodiversity and conservation research and strengthen regional collaboration, reaffirming our commitment to protect our natural heritage.”

By strengthening regional capacities and supporting green economic growth, the Biodiversity Impact Partnership could pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future.

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About National University of Singapore (NUS)

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education, research and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise. We have 16 colleges, faculties and schools across three campuses in Singapore, with more than 40,000 students from 100 countries enriching our vibrant and diverse campus community. We have also established more than 20 NUS Overseas Colleges entrepreneurial hubs around the world.

Our multidisciplinary and real-world approach to education, research and entrepreneurship enables us to work closely with industry, governments and academia to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in our faculties, research centres of excellence, corporate labs and more than 30 university-level research institutes focus on themes that include energy; environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial systems; Asian studies; and Smart Nation capabilities such as artificial intelligence, data science, operations research and cybersecurity.

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