

Ecosystem based adaptation

Most initiatives by local communities to adapt to climate change are both effective and sustainable. Their efforts and needs must be placed at the center of the response to climate change. This requires that local actors have the financial and institutional means to engage in relevant decision making processes and have access to climate finance.



THRIVING ECONOMIES



IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS



FOOD SECURITY



WATER SECURITY



HEALTHY BIODIVERSITY



CLIMATE RESILIENCE



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Empowering local climate adaptation action

Context and challenge

Around the world, communities are dependent on ecosystems whose natural resources are degraded due to increasing pressures from population growth, unsustainable land and water-use practices and extraction. Climate change impacts are posing additional stresses, leading to even greater cumulative loss of essential ecosystem services. When the natural resource base deteriorates, those who most heavily rely on it for their subsistence and livelihoods are the first to be affected. Deliberate action is thus needed to maintain, nurture and enhance ecosystem capacity in the face of extreme weather events and slow onset hazards that characterise climate change.

Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) to climate change is defined as “the sustainable management, conservation and restoration of ecosystems to provide services that help people adapt to both current climate variability, and climate change. [It] contributes to reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience to both climate and non-climate risks and provides multiple benefits to society and the environment.”¹ To succeed, this approach must be supported and mainstreamed at all levels of sectoral and development planning and implementation.



The Green Climate Fund (GCF) was formally established as an instrument of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2010. It is expected to be the primary finance channel to support developing countries in adopting climate resilient development pathways. However, there is a risk that much of the fund will be channeled through international financial institutions like the World Bank, as well as the private sector. These actors tend to focus on large-scale projects in which the poor often do not benefit or are negatively impacted. Another risk is that GCF-accredited institutions entitled to receive funds fail to take into account the needs and knowledge of local communities and the role of civil society. In this case, it is feared that the money may not end up where it is most needed and likely to be most effectively used: with the people directly impacted by the effects of climate change.

Taking an ecosystem approach through civil society engagement

The ecosystem approach promotes the integrated management of land, water and living resources in a way that achieves mutually compatible conservation and sustainable use, and delivers equitable benefits for people and nature.² As with most development initiatives, the success of EbA relies on local community involvement in planning and implementation, and clear acknowledgement of the overall political context and existing resource use conflicts. Local knowledge is also key to informing planning processes. Not only does it provide vital insights, it can facilitate community-based management of adaptation measures, which has been shown to improve their success in building the resilience of both human communities and ecosystems to climate variability and long-term change.³

With support from the Climate Development and Knowledge Network⁴, the Ecosystem Alliance has worked to ensure that critical funding is available for EbA measures and local participation, including:

- Active participation of Alliance partners in the GCF Board meetings with a view to ensuring that funds will be directly accessible to stakeholders – local authorities, civil society organisations and knowledge institutions – to design and implement EbA strategies.
- Working to build and amplify the voice of Southern civil society in GCF negotiations.
- Supporting civil society from Argentina, Benin, Ghana, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Togo to negotiate with the GCF at the national level and advocate for local access to funds for community-based EbA.
- Training 40 partner organisations from South East Asia and Africa on an integrated approach to EbA.
- Implementing and strengthening concrete EbA measures in the field. See the example in the text box and refer to the cases under further reading below.



WIMBERT HILF/GERMAN



Coastal livelihoods resilience

For years, fishers were getting poorer in Hinatuan Bay, Surigao del Sur in the Philippines. Catches were falling and climate-related storm surges were destroying the oceans' nurseries: the mangroves and coral reefs. So the communities took action. To protect and restore the mangroves that are central for food, income and coastal protection, the Center for Empowerment and Resource Development helped fishers form a Mangrove Nursery Committee. New sanctuaries set up by the fishers groups have improved catches from ~1 kilo to 5-8 kilos per day within a few years. Seaweed farming was introduced as an alternative (or additional) livelihood option and has become a major income source. Over 400 men and women are now seaweed farmers, earning at least as much as they did in capture fisheries. Even better – the farms act as de facto fish sanctuaries. Initial studies suggest that seaweeds may even be carbon sinks. The dual trend of declining livelihoods and biodiversity has been reversed and the track set for a more secure, sustainable future. *Contributing to livelihood resiliency in coastal communities: Making Seaweed production Climate Adaptive*, CERD Inc. Jovelyn T. Cleofe, 2013.



Impacts on communities, nature and policy

- The GCF Board has recently made some key decisions to help support EbA and local access, including:
 - Agreeing to pilot a programme of Enhanced Direct Access – i.e. the decentralisation of control of resource allocation from the Board to the national level – in 2015.
 - Acknowledging the importance of country ownership and gender mainstreaming in all GCF modalities and decisions.
 - The GCF Adaptation Results and Performance Management Framework now explicitly targets “Increased resilience and enhanced livelihoods of the most vulnerable people, communities, and regions”, as well as “Improved resilience of ecosystems and ecosystem services.”⁵
- Civil society is actively engaged with policy makers and processes to inform national priority setting and decision-making structures with local insights. In the Philippines and West-Africa, for example, Alliance partners are providing direct input to national Board Members. In Argentina Fundación M'Biguá has formally joined the working group for elaborating the National Climate Change Strategy.
- Following the training, Alliance partners have started integrating EbA in their field work, increasing the resilience of both the ecosystems and the people dependent on them.

Looking to the future

The GCF Direct Access modalities under negotiation must go beyond the national level to include sub-national and non-state actors in decision-making, and a sufficient part of the national budget should be dedicated to local level climate activities. This requires inclusive discussions in countries receiving GCF funding, as they are responsible for developing processes to ensure multi-stakeholder participation and country ownership.

Decision-makers at national and international levels must recognise the vital role of community livelihoods in developing and implementing adaptation measures.

Public investments in the communities' adaptive capacities and ecosystem resilience are necessary. Conversely, governments and businesses must avoid policies and investments – such as large-scale dam projects and mining – that further reduce the adaptive capacities of people or ecosystem resilience.

To build a strong, integrated approach to adaptation which effectively engages the local population and relevant stakeholders, civil society must be adequately funded and empowered to understand how climate-related hazards impact on their livelihoods and ecosystems and how healthy ecosystems can help increase the resilience of communities. They must be given the support they need to voice their knowledge and insight at the negotiation table. Only then can they play a crucial role in the design, implementation and monitoring of effective, context-specific and sustainable climate adaptation programs.

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Further reading

1. www.bothends.org/en/Themes/Projects/project/41/Ecosystem-Alliance
2. www.iucn.nl/en/themes/green_ic/ecosystem_alliance/
3. www.wetlands.org/OurWork/tabid/55/Default.aspx
4. *Reaching Local Actors in Climate Finance, Lessons on Direct Access for the Green Climate Fund*, March 2013
5. *Examining Advocacy Avenues for Ecosystem-based Adaptation in Communities of Southeast Asia*, June 2013

REFERENCES

1. IUCN (2009) Ecosystem-based adaptation: a natural solution to climate change, IUCN: Gland
2. www.cbd.int/ecosystem/
3. Richard Munang (UNEP), *Adapting to climate change – one ecosystem at a time*, Guardian, August 2013
4. www.cdkn.org
5. www.gcfund.org/fileadmin/00_customer/documents/MOB201410-8th/GCF_B.08_07_Further_Development_Initial_Results_ManagementFramework_fin_20141006.pdf

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