

Ecosystem-based adaptation: An approach for building resilience and reducing risk for local communities and ecosystems.

A submission to the AWG-LCA with respect to the Shared Vision and Enhanced Action on Adaptation by IUCN, The Nature Conservancy, WWF, Conservation International, BirdLife International, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee, Practical Action, WILD Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society, Fauna and Flora International and Wetlands International

The listed observer organizations welcome the opportunity to submit views, ideas and proposals on enhanced action on adaptation (paragraph 1(c) of the Bali Action Plan). We view adaptation as an essential component of the 'shared vision' which aims to create a climate resilient society. In this submission, we wish to highlight the important contributions that ecosystem-based adaptation can provide to effective adaptation strategies. We recommend that ecosystem-based adaptation becomes one of the elements of the future adaptation framework under the UNFCCC.

Ecosystem-based adaptation includes a range of local and landscape scale strategies for managing ecosystems to increase resilience and maintain essential ecosystem services and reduce the vulnerability of people, their livelihoods and nature in the face of climate change ¹.

Parties are invited to consider the following options for including ecosystem-based adaptation under the UNFCCC:

- Include ecosystem-based adaptation as a component of the Shared Vision of the AWG-LCA which aims to create a climate resilient society, and of the post-2012 adaptation framework;
- Increase incorporation of ecosystem-based adaptation into the implementation of the Nairobi Work Programme and the development of technical guidance and capacity;
- Incorporating ecosystem-based adaptation more fully into NAPAs and other national adaptation strategies and action plans;
- Aligning ecosystem-based adaptation strategies with ongoing efforts under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and other relevant international commitments.

¹ See overleaf for further explanation of ecosystem-based adaptation

Why “ecosystem-based” adaptation?

Global climate change is already adversely impacting the world’s ecosystems and the people that depend on them. Impacts are escalating as temperature and precipitation patterns change and extreme weather events and related conditions increase in frequency and intensity. Climate change directly threatens the services ecosystems provide including food, clean water, coastal protection, fuel-wood, soil stability, and pollination. People who depend directly on natural resources are affected most severely. The draft findings of the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Ad-Hoc Technical Expert Group on biodiversity and climate change are in full accord with these conclusions.

While global efforts to mitigate the causes of climate change are currently under way, adaptation is about “managing the unavoidable” – addressing the impacts that are already being experienced by people and ecosystems while mitigation measures take effect, and building resilience to future impacts. Ecosystem-based adaptation provides a cost-effective strategy that can be undertaken by Parties, and is especially effective at local levels with community involvement. Ecosystem-based adaptation may also contribute to climate change mitigation through the preservation or sequestration of carbon.

What is involved in ecosystem-based adaptation?

Ecosystem-based adaptation involves collective action among governments, communities, conservation and development organizations, and other stakeholders to plan and empower local action that will increase environmental and community resilience to the changing climate. Ecosystem-based adaptation and community-based adaptation are therefore mutually supportive. Examples of ecosystem-based adaptation that provide multiple benefits to local communities include:

- Maintaining and restoring “natural infrastructure” such as mangroves, coral reefs and watershed vegetation as a cost-effective means for reducing vulnerability to storm surge, rising sea levels and changing precipitation patterns;
- Protecting and restoring natural areas of cultural or religious significance, including areas critical for the cultural survival of indigenous groups;
- Enhancing the availability of natural resources as a source of food and other products important to livelihoods.
- Supporting indigenous peoples and local communities to adapt and enhance traditional knowledge systems and management practices to changing climatic conditions;
- Maintaining connectivity of ecosystems including protected areas and corridors in production landscapes involving a full range of stakeholders and governance arrangements that will ensure the continued supply of ecosystem services.

The development and implementation of ecosystem-based adaptation strategies championed by national governments will be supported in a variety of ways by the organisations listed above. This could include support for programmes designed to share knowledge and develop expertise at community and landscape scales. The development of the Ecosystems and Livelihoods Adaptation Network (ELAN) and other efforts will build capacity, share lessons learned, and link the science and practice of ecosystem-based adaptation to enhance the resilience of communities to climate change.