

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND THE GLOBAL GOAL ON ADAPTATION

FEBA ISSUE BRIEF FOR UNFCCC COP27

This brief provides an overview of the discussions regarding the Global Goal on Adaptation at UNFCCC COP27 as related to the incorporation, implementation, monitoring and financing of Nature-based Solutions. This brief meets a request from FEBA members to both provide clarity and elevate a collective voice for the adaptation community around key aspects of the issue, and how and where Nature-based Solutions can inform negotiations.

Disclaimer

This paper is presented as a contribution to the ongoing negotiations on the Global Goal on Adaptation under the UNFCCC. The views presented herein do not necessarily represent the official position of any organisations listed. The content of this document does not preclude the debates to be held in and the outcomes of the meetings related to UNFCCC negotiations.

Introduction

The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) was established under the Paris Agreement to enhance climate change adaptation by increasing awareness of and funding towards countries' adaptation needs in the context of the 1.5/2°C goal of the Paris Agreement. The implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation focuses on tracking and assessing countries' progress on adaptation, to recognize achievements and identify gaps in addressing adaptation needs.

Unlike the clear 1.5°C target for global mitigation, adaptation is primarily a local activity and as such, a global target has been challenging to establish. Negotiations around the Global Goal on Adaptation currently focus on what metrics and indicators can be used at both global and local levels to effectively monitor collective progress, while incorporating and addressing outstanding concerns on bridging the gap between the local and contextual specificity of adaptation and the need to track it at a global scale.

The local context of adaptation outcomes is underpinned by building the resilience of ecosystem health and local communities. The [IPCC Working Group II report](#) on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, released in early 2022, drew attention to the interlinkages of climate resilience, ecosystem integrity, biodiversity, and human livelihoods and well-being – and noted that Nature-based Solutions (NbS)¹ offer feasible and effective options to reduce vulnerabilities and risks to people and nature and strengthen the resilience of social and natural systems against climate change. For example, healthy coastal wetlands can protect against coastal erosion and provide a buffer against sea level rise and storm surge, river systems and forest ecosystems can store water and reduce erosion, and urban greening can support local cooling. Collectively, NbS have the potential to reduce the intensity of climate hazards by 26 percent, representing protection against the economic cost of climate change by USD 104 billion by 2030 and USD 393 billion by 2050².

The scale, design and implementation of NbS - which follow key principles of [locally-led adaptation](#) - are a core means of context-driven adaptation which values and ensures equitable participation. Integration of the role and potential of NbS and ecosystem integrity as part of the Global Goal on Adaptation offers a critical pathway to define and implement an effective Global Goal on Adaptation and drive and enhance countries' adaptation actions.

The Global Goal on Adaptation in the UNFCCC

¹ Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are defined as “actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits.” UNEP Resolution EA.5/Res.5.

² IFRC and WWF, 2022. Working with Nature to Protect People.

At COP26, Parties established the 2022-2023 [Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh \(GlaSS\) Work Programme](#) on the Global Goal on Adaptation to define the key elements of the goal, including the methodologies, indicators, metrics, and data sources to support the assessment of overall adaptation progress, with the plan to conclude this work at COP28. In relation to this challenge, SB 56 requested the secretariat to produce a [synthesis report](#) on indicators, approaches, targets and metrics that could be used to evaluate progress toward the GGA. Groups of Parties and Parties further [submitted comments](#) on how to achieve the objectives of the work program. As part of these recommendations, it was suggested that “The GGA should be aligned with the principles of the Convention and the Paris Agreement, and provisions of Article 7.2 of the Paris Agreement should be underscored, namely recognizing that adaptation is a global challenge faced by all at various levels...and that it requires a long-term global response that protects people, livelihoods and ecosystems.”

The GGA will be assessed as a component of [the Global Stocktake \(GST\)](#), a periodic review mechanism for climate ambition that will be used to update Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Adaptation Communications (AdCom). Initial feedback from the GST Technical Dialogues in August 2022 in Bonn, Germany indicates that there is a significant gap in achieving adaptation implementation outcomes. Evaluation of progress on the GGA so far, including the [UNFCCC Synthesis Report](#) and the [IISD report](#) from the GST Technical Dialogues, emphasized that this gap comes in part from a funder and state-level emphasis on planning and policy over implementation, as well as a general lack of capacity in developing functional monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks for assessing adaptation progress.

Enhancing Adaptation through Nature-based Solutions

The conservation, restoration and sustainable management of ecosystems can enhance the resilience of societies to adapt to climate hazards such as flooding, sea level rise, and more frequent and intense droughts, floods, heatwaves, and wildfires. NbS actions for adaptation are highly context specific, and can include protection of coastal zones or sustainably managed forests, restoration of wetlands and rivers, agroforestry, and urban greening among other actions. These and other types of NbS, once well established, can protect against the impacts of climate change by reducing erosion, buffering storm surges, reducing or preventing wildfires, and maintaining farmland productivity under unfavorable climate conditions. Such NbS approaches can be implemented on their own or in combination with engineered approaches (such as the construction of water reservoirs or dykes), hybrid measures (such as artificial reefs) and approaches that strengthen the capacities of individuals and institutions to address climate risks (such as the introduction of early warning systems).

Because they work through the enhancement of ecosystems, NbS and hybrid adaptation approaches can offer scalability, flexibility, and less upfront investment -

together with offering significant biodiversity co-benefits and climate mitigation advantages such as securing terrestrial and soil carbon storage. NbS can further support food, water and livelihood security by maintaining or increasing the productivity of working landscapes and offer additional social advantages through opportunities for capacity building and collaborative governance.

For these reasons and others, the benefits of NbS for adaptation are recognized at the global policy level. The Convention on Biological Diversity supports ecosystem-based approaches for adaptation and disaster risk reduction and has adopted [voluntary guidelines](#) for implementation, with expected associated targets in the upcoming Global Biodiversity Framework. The [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#) promotes ecosystem-based approaches to building resilience against natural hazards both in prevention and recovery. Growing recognition of the importance of NbS is matched with a growing number of countries incorporating NbS into national commitments and strategies³; of the 122 new NDCs submitted in 2021 over 80% included the protection and restoration of ecosystems.

NbS for adaptation, guided by robust criteria and standards, offers a means for achieving climate adaptation that is both context-specific and globally recognized, while offering co-benefits for mitigation, biodiversity, and building overall livelihood security. To implement effective and sustainable NbS, work should follow the best existing standards for both [NbS broadly](#), and for [adaptation](#) specifically. NbS aligns with the theme emerging from COP26 in Glasgow which emphasized the need to increase a focus on adaptation while maintaining commitments to mitigation and prioritizing rapid decarbonization.

Enhancing Implementation and Support of NbS under the Global Goal on Adaptation

The Global Goal on Adaptation emerged from concern that adaptation was not being implemented at the needed scale and speed, especially in the face of accelerating climate change. The initial reports from the GST highlight the need for accelerated adaptation efforts and finance for implementation, in addition to policy and planning. As such, the GGA was combined with a commitment to double the collective share of adaptation finance within the \$100 billion annual target for 2021-2025 and beyond.

But simply increasing finance will not be enough: the structure of finance needs to shift with a higher emphasis on supporting projects beyond the planning stage, and focusing on effective implementation together with meeting the needs of monitoring, evaluation and learning. The GGA should not just become a catalog of adaptation actions, but rather push the global community in the direction of effective action and accelerated adaptation finance.

³ See UNEP 2021, Guidelines for Integrating Ecosystem-based Adaptation into National Adaptation Plans

Current knowledge from adaptation practitioners working on NbS can be leveraged in support of both setting and achieving the Global Goal on Adaptation:

Monitoring and Evaluation

The challenges of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in relation to adaptation are not only financial, but a successful framework also requires the right data, metrics and indicators for reviewing overall progress in achieving the GGA. A primary challenge is establishing and tracking metrics for success that do not create additional reporting burdens. This work can build from the range of efforts to develop M&E for NbS for adaptation. Examples include: [FEBA's M&E Guidebook for EbA](#), Conservation International's [Guidelines for Designing, Implementing & Monitoring NbS for Adaptation](#), IKI's [Guidelines on Project Planning and Monitoring](#), the [Guidebook for Monitoring and Evaluating Ecosystem-based Adaptation](#) by GIZ, and recent research on M&E for EbA. As part of the GGA, monitoring of NbS can be used to track collective progress through the GST as well as increase the evidence base on NbS. We strongly recommend targets and indicators under the GGA align with the SDGs and the Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity to create synergies and minimize reporting burden.

Capacity Building and Technology Transfer

To meet its vision, the Global Goal on Adaptation should be tracking and assessing countries' progress on adaptation to drive and accelerate meeting adaptation needs. As such, it is critical that the development of the GGA set its sights on filling gaps and enhancing effective implementation of adaptation actions. The design of the GGA should be country-driven, inclusive, participatory and transparent, and include a pathway for supporting means of implementation. This can include knowledge sharing, capacity building, and supporting technology transfer through best practices for scalable and replicable adaptation actions – including nature-based solutions – at the local, regional and national levels.

Increasing Finance

The overall shortfalls in adaptation finance are more pronounced for NbS finance specifically. Despite the cost-effectiveness of NbS as a strategy for building resilience, so far only [7% of global climate finance flows are spent on adaptation](#), and only [1.4% of this on nature-based solutions for adaptation](#). A number of recent studies and guidelines have been developed to address this issue. In particular, the [WWF](#) and [UNEP](#) have recently identified recommendations for scaling up NbS finance. As part of the directive of the Global Goal on Adaptation negotiations, improving access to financing for NbS should be a component of efforts to increase adaptation finance overall.

Building on the Critiques of Nature-based Solutions

The recent groundswell of attention on NbS has included both enthusiasm and critique over the promises of such projects. Indigenous Peoples and other civil society

groups have pushed back on the silver-bullet framing that often accompanies efforts to promote NbS. Critics point to several issues, including the limited advantages of standard practices of inclusion and engagement, and the need to prioritize project ownership and territorial and revenue rights for Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, NbS (in the context of climate mitigation) has been challenged in how it might distract from the priority of decarbonization, especially for the most destructive and polluting industries, by greenwashing business as usual. There is also a concern that NbS may perpetuate or worsen existing inequalities, for instance repeating historic patterns of displacement of Indigenous Peoples for conservation, or clearance of informal settlements to make way for urban greening in cities.

Principles of equity and social justice therefore need to be a central consideration in planning and implementation of all NbS. NbS for adaptation should be guided by robust criteria, safeguards and standards including through inclusive and transparent design, governance and implementation. Implementation of NbS should follow the best existing standards for both [NbS broadly](#), and for [adaptation](#) specifically. However, even when following guidelines, NbS practitioners and policy supporters should recognize that NbS work has certain limits for addressing the historical drivers of vulnerability that go beyond local environmental conditions and include structural inequalities which continually marginalize groups across the globe.

Finally, in many contexts it is important to recognize the ecological limitations of NbS, especially under a rapidly changing climate. For example, the timescale of mangrove restoration does not consistently meet the needs of providing immediate security from more intense coastal storms, and coral restoration may be undermined above certain temperature limits. In these instances, NbS can (and often should) be [combined with gray infrastructure](#) in order to effectively reduce vulnerability and build on the best of both nature and engineering to secure the strongest adaptation outcomes.

Investment in Nature-based Solutions provides one of the most cost-effective means to build climate resilience for vulnerable communities and the ecosystems they depend on. Due to the limited time and resources available to address the impacts of climate change, there should be an emphasis on adaptation actions - such as NbS - that address climate hazards and build resilience while providing co-benefits for biodiversity, carbon storage, livelihood security and sustainable development.

In the negotiations on the Global Goal on Adaptation at UNFCCC COP27 and beyond, we encourage actions that (1) recognize and integrate the role of ecosystems for building climate resilience; (2) strengthen and create the enabling conditions for adaptation action, including increasing overall investment on adaptation finance and specifically finance for NbS; and (3) build on the existing portfolio of work on monitoring & evaluation of NbS for adaptation, with targets and indicators that align with the SDGs and the Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity in order to create synergies and minimize reporting burden.

Notes and Comments

ABOUT FEBA

Friends of Ecosystem-based Adaptation (FEBA) is a global collaborative network of more than 100 agencies and organisations working on EbA working jointly to share experiences and knowledge, to improve the implementation of EbA related activities on the ground, and to raise awareness and understanding of nature-based solutions in adaptation planning processes and multilateral policy frameworks. The CBD COP recognizes FEBA as a key partner “to support Parties in their efforts to promote ecosystem based approaches to climate change adaptation” (Decision 14/5).”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The coordination of the Friends of EbA network is made possible with the financial support of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV).

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