

9th Ecosystem-based Adaptation Knowledge Day Brief

Discussion Track: Global Goal on Adaptation

21st September 2023

Session Leads:

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) & The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)

Brief overview:

This Brief is a consolidated documentation of knowledge shared during the Global Goal on Adaptation Discussion Track at the 9th EbA Knowledge Day (KD). It serves as a knowledge product for practitioners and policymakers engaged in this topic at the global, national, and local levels. The Brief summarises discussions and insights that emerged during the session - highlighting the views and ideas shared by participants representing various stakeholder groups (national governments, civil society, academia, etc.) - and offers several suggestions and recommendations for activities that would contribute to the advancement of this topic.

Disclaimer:

This brief is submitted as a contribution from the EbA Knowledge Day to the ongoing discourse and initiatives surrounding the Global Goal on Adaptation within the context of ecosystem-based adaptation. It is important to note that the perspectives expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the official stance of the organisations mentioned.

Introduction

We know from recent IPCC assessment that climate change has altered marine, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems all around the world (very high confidence). Without urgent and ambitious emissions reductions, sensitive and critical ecosystems will face conditions that approach or exceed the limits of their historical experience (very high confidence). Ecosystem protection and restoration can build resilience of ecosystems and generate opportunities to restore ecosystem services with substantial co-benefits (high confidence) and provision of ecosystem-based adaptation (IPCC 2022, 2023).

In 2015, the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established within the Paris Agreement (in Article 7.1) the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) with the aim to “enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change.” This was clearly an important decision, considering that countries have not yet found a way to mitigate climate change in time to avoid severe impacts on people and the environment, while the climate impacts are felt across the globe. However, a more specific global target to underpin this global goal on adaptation has been challenging to establish.

At COP26 in 2021, Parties established the 2022-2023 Glasgow-Sharm-el-Sheikh Work Programme on the GGA to define the key elements of a framework for the goal, including methodologies, indicators, metrics, and data sources to support the assessment of overall adaptation progress. At the COP 27, Parties agreed on developing a framework that includes themes, dimensions and cross-cutting areas that include ecosystems (e.g., terrestrial, freshwater, ocean, coastal), nature-based solutions, mountain regions and biodiversity. The framework will assess the progress in achieving the GGA, feeding its findings into future Global Stocktake processes.

The GGA discussion track during the EbA Knowledge Day aimed to highlight the relevance of EbA and NbS for the GGA framework, and how including these approaches can ensure coherence between the work under the SDGs, CBD, UNCCD and Sendai framework. The session discussed how the EbA/NbS approach could be articulated into GGA targets and indicators and what key steps are required to accelerate the transformative action on this issue before COP 28 and beyond.

The main envisaged learning outcomes were:

- Understanding the relevance of EbA/NbS for the GGA framework and how their inclusion can increase coherence and build synergies between the Rio Conventions, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the SDGs
- Highlighting some possible targets and metrics on ecosystem-based approaches that could be integrated in the GGA framework.
- Understanding the value of locally led approaches to inform and accelerate the implementation of GGA objectives.
- Understanding the challenges, opportunities, and enabling factors at the national level for the inclusion of ecosystem-based approaches in the GGA framework.

This Knowledge Brief provides a concise summary of the key findings, insights and outcomes that emerged during the session and provides recommendations on the next steps. The brief hopes to inform the policy discussions before and at COP28 negotiation.

Approach & Key Messages

Design of the Session

The session was moderated by Nathalie Doswald from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The session employed a hand-raised voting system to gauge participants' awareness and views on GGA-related topics. Approximately 50% of the audience were aware of the Global Goal on Adaptation, 20% were following GGA discussions under the UNFCCC, and 70% recognized the value of including EbA in global targets and indicators.

A panel discussion with introductory presentations was subsequently held. Sandeep Chamling Rai from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) gave a presentation on the GGA in the UNFCCC Landscape. Cordula Epple from the United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) reflected on how EbA/NbS can be reflected in the GGA targets/indicators. Finally, Harisoa Rakotondrazafy/Alice Estelle from WWF gave a reality check on the actual implementation of EbA/NbS by outlining some of the challenges and opportunities from the African experience and what this means for the GGA. Discussion with the audience followed.

Summary of Interventions & Key Findings

The following key messages came out of the presentations and discussions:

1. The Global Goal on Adaptation needs to be ambitious

The GGA was a welcome addition to the UNFCCC discussions because it places adaptation on par and in balance with mitigation, with an aim to advance adaptation ambition. However, the conceptualization of adaptation creates key challenges in terms of definitions (e.g. sometimes there are unclear boundaries between adaptation and development), in terms of methodological guidance (since adaptation encompasses many approaches) and in terms of formulating universal targets (as adaptation is locally specific), and finally the development of the framework that helps to measure the achievement of the GGA.

There was a question as to what really is the added value of having a GGA? It is clear that to have value, the GGA framework needs to raise the bar for adaptation implementation and adaptation finance. Integrating EbA/NbS alongside other important concepts such as inclusivity and equity not only supports synergies with other key international agreements, such as the SDGs, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, but also shows an increased level of ambition, builds coherence, by requiring adaptation to become a part of the way we manage our ecosystems and the wellbeing of communities.

2. The GGA framework needs to ensure that it builds the resilience of the most vulnerable, through locally led adaptation

Several participants expressed concern over the degree to which local/vulnerable people's views are included (or not) in the development of the GGA.

In the [workshops](#) held under the [Glasgow-Sharm-el-Sheikh Work Programme](#) on the GGA, all the relevant stakeholders' engagement was welcomed and all stakeholders (government or non-government) were treated equally during the discussion. Examples and lessons learned, inputs from experts and stakeholders were also showcased during the GGA workshops that were supposed to help in the development of the framework that guides the achievement of the GGA objectives. Country-level data collection processes that feed into the GGA framework should reflect local perspectives;

knowledge and priorities, to direct action and finance towards effective locally led adaptation that contributes to national objectives.

The needs of the most vulnerable should also be given more attention at the international level. An IFRC analysis demonstrated that finance flows so far are not prioritizing the countries with the highest risk and lowest capacity, particularly when funding is assessed on a per-person basis. None of the 30 countries most vulnerable to climate- and weather-related disasters were among the 30 highest recipients of adaptation funding on a per capita basis.¹

A reflection was made during the discussion that the Loss and Damage discussions and the GGA probably intersect when it comes to the people and countries most vulnerable to climate change. Indeed, the high end of the vulnerability spectrum is where loss and damage will occur.

Capacity building and technology transfer were also discussed during the session. However, it was reflected that those are ongoing processes and in some cases, it shouldn't be just science-based, but in climate adaptation, we need to acknowledge the local and traditional knowledge as well as technology transfer from south to south, south to north, and north to south.

3. The GGA needs to be informed by bottom-up learning from national and local level measures and experiences

The importance of contextualizing global targets at the national level was stressed. A balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches to target-setting was recommended, utilizing experiences and best practices from the ground level. The global targets could inform and guide national priority setting and overall level of ambition. Examples of such an approach already exist in other international policy frameworks (e.g. CBD).

Questions were asked about how we can ensure coherence in bottom-up and top-down approaches to target setting, and how information from monitoring the targets can meaningfully be aggregated from the ground level up. Ensuring coherence can be a two-way process, with experience and best practices from the ground level informing adjustments at the global level, and the global overview yielding insights on where efforts need to be strengthened. Aggregating information from ground level up will always be challenging when targets and indicators have been made locally or nationally specific. However, it can be done as long as there is some guidance for the setting of targets and indicators and one accepts the unavoidable loss of granularity at each level of aggregation (e.g. aggregate figures can be produced as to the percentage of areas at risk from a certain hazard that is covered by interventions, the number of people effectively protected from a certain hazard, or the percentage of interventions that meet their (locally or nationally defined) targets), percentage of conserving or restoring natural habitats.

The discussion also went into the reporting instrument on the targets. While every country has the right to choose their own reporting instruments such as National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Adaptation Communication (Ad. Com) or National Communication (Nat. Com), there were general feelings that NAPs could serve as a main vehicle, but that they need to be periodically updated and reviewed as what many developing countries are in the process of doing.

4. EbA/NbS targets should be articulated in the GGA framework

¹ https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/20221102_COP27_PolicyBrief.pdf

Currently, there is no explicit reference to either EbA or NbS in the list of potential targets that have been proposed for the GGA framework. Ecosystems are referenced in some of the targets, but only as an asset to be preserved or as a sector in which to support adaptation. They are not recognized as the source of ecosystem services that can help to achieve adaptation within other sectors.

An explicit reference to NbS/EbA will ensure that these approaches are used to their full potential and not overlooked. Furthermore, doing so would support synergies with other international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity or the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

When thinking about ways to integrate EbA/NbS in the GGA framework, it is important to bear in mind some quality criteria that ensure a target is fit for purpose. A good target needs to be pertinent, measurable, and have a direct link to success. That is to say, reaching a target should mean that the problem is sufficiently addressed. This is sometimes not ensured with generic targets such as ‘increase adaptive capacity’, ‘reduce risks from climate change’ or ‘take action for XX% of people’. Where ethical considerations make it difficult to define an ‘acceptable’ endpoint for adaptation success (e.g. there cannot be an ‘acceptable’ number of deaths from extreme events), wordings linked to thresholds can be used, e.g. ‘reduce risks from flooding to the level of 2000-2010 or below’.

A few possible targets including EbA/NbS were presented (both process- and outcome-oriented targets):

- Vulnerability and risk assessments identify critical climate risks to ecosystems and ecosystem services, and the role of ecosystems in adaptation (by considering both current and future needs for ecosystem services)
- National Adaptation Plans make use of EbA/NbSA approaches
- Ecosystem services that are important for adaptation are enhanced (in a climate-resilient and nature-positive way)
- Degraded ecosystems and their services are restored and protected to enhance climate resiliency

(Note that the last two are examples of targets that would need to be further specified at the national/subnational level to become meaningful and measurable, e.g. by identifying priority ecosystem services for adaptation and quantifying expected outcomes.)

Nevertheless, EbA is only one approach to adaptation, and adaptation options can reduce risks to ecosystems and services they provide. Mentions of EbA/NbS will therefore need to fit in with the overall structure chosen for GGA targets.

5. Existing indicators of ecosystems conditions could inform progress on EbA

The main challenge in adaptation monitoring relates to outcome metrics, and EbA is no exception. Existing metrics for EbA outcomes are context-specific and mostly used at the project level. Outcome indicators for EbA that could be used at a global or national level have been identified as a gap for a number of existing indicator frameworks (e.g. in work under the CBD or UN Statistics Division) and by national teams working on adaptation monitoring.

One possibility to close this gap, at least partly, would be to draw on existing global/national level indicators that reflect ecosystem integrity and condition, e.g. the Mountain Green Cover Index (an SDG indicator), Land Degradation Neutrality indicators (under UNCCD), indicators used in forest degradation/restoration monitoring (e.g. under REDD+, UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and

other initiatives), or the ecosystem services indicator that is due to be developed under the Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD).

Further work would be required to adapt these indicators for use in reducing climate vulnerability, support adaptation planning and improve resilience to climate shocks and hazards (e.g. making links to the location of human populations at risk who will benefit from improved ecosystem conditions, linking with data on adaptation interventions, analyzing at the level of watersheds), but this might be effort well spent as the results could feed into several processes/indicator sets! The output could be a set of indicators suitable for use at the global level, accompanied by guidance on how to customize them for use at the national level.

6. There is still a need for advocacy and capacity building at national/local level on EbA/NbS

Despite increasing progress at the international level on the acceptance of EbA and NbS as valid and effective approaches for climate adaptation, at the national/local level there is often still a lack of understanding of the concept due to knowledge gaps and barriers. There is a continued need to invest in business cases at the national/local level to provide proof of concept and build capacity for implementing it.

There is also a lack of clear instruments that can support the inclusion of EbA in national strategies, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Although there is increasing support for adaptation at the national level (but still very low compared to mitigation support), there is generally less support for EbA and NbS for climate adaptation. While the EbA and NbS for climate adaptation concept is slowly increasing in many developing countries in Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and other parts of the world, its potential hasn't been fully explored across different ecosystems. At the same time there is a lack of data and knowledge on climate related drivers of impacts to critical ecosystems and ecosystem services.

At the national level, there is still a need to support linking nature and climate agendas together. Many countries still see and treat these two agendas separately. This may be due to lack of coordinating institutional structures at the country level. There is a need for more capacity building on viewing the joint nature and climate agenda together, and more support needs to be provided for integrated implementation at the country and local level.

Recommendations & Follow-up Activities

Recommendations for different actors involved in GGA efforts:

- UNFCCC COP 28: To ensure that the GGA framework includes ambitious adaptation targets, metrics and indicators while leaving flexibility for contextualization at national and local levels. This framework should include science-based quantitative and qualitative targets, metrics and indicators that cover adaptation action, and aligned to the SDGs, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the Sendai Agreement Targets. It should also account the needs of the most vulnerable, include EbA/NbS and informed by bottom-up learning from NAP experiences and lessons.
- At National Level: To engage with your national delegates who follow adaptation and more specifically negotiate on the development of the framework for GGA to highlight the critical role and importance of EbA/NbS and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to be reflected

appropriately in its global targets and indicators, and so that there is scaled-up climate finance to implement NAPs. .

- EbA experts, practitioners, and funders to continue work on EbA target-setting and development of metrics, including through the development of a repository of national/local indicators to measure the climate change adaptation outcomes of ecosystem-based adaptation across different climate projections. These indicators should be guided by the best available science (i.e., science-based indicators), as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems. Such work can continue under the auspicious of the UNFCCC following GGA targets agreed at COP 28 in form of technical working groups with practitioners, relevant national and local stakeholders.

Additional Literature Resources

- UNFCCC Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation - detailed information on [Overview, Workshops and Background](#).
- IISD (2023) [next steps for defining a monitoring, evaluation, and learning system for the global goal on adaptation by COP 28](#).
- FEBA (2022) Issue Brief on [nature-based solutions and the global goal on adaptation for UNFCCC COP 27](#)
- WWF (2021) Briefing Paper on [operationalizing the global goal on adaptation \(GGA\) of the Paris Agreement](#)
- [Action Aid, Care & WWF \(2016\) Global Goal on Adaptation: from policy to practice](#).

Upcoming Events & Participation Opportunities

- Asia Pacific Climate Week (13- 17th November) in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.
- COP 28 GGA Negotiation process at Dubai.
- Various GGA related side events during COP 28.