

UNEP and EbA

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has a strong history of supporting the development and implementation of ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA). Since the term EbA was adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2010, UNEP has worked with decision-makers and practitioners from around the world to understand how EbA can best contribute to national adaptation efforts and to support best-practice implementation of EbA measures on the ground.



Furthermore, under its 2018-2021 Medium Term Strategy (MTS), UNEP is not simply mandated to address climate change, but it is specifically committed to supporting vulnerable countries in transitioning from urgent and immediate adaptation responses to medium- and long-term national adaptation plans that integrate EbA. The MTS also commits UNEP to supporting the scaling up, expansion and collection of more evidence on EbA. Under UNEP's Programme of Work (PoW), which provides the details on how it will deliver and measure progress towards the MTS, EbA aligns closely with its priorities on: i) climate change; ii) resilience to disasters and conflicts; iii) healthy and productive ecosystems; iv) environmental governance; and v) environment under review.

This briefing note highlights UNEP's key strengths in relation to EbA and outlines some of UNEP's priorities for EbA work going forward while drawing on its extensive network and resources.

UNEP's EbA portfolio

UNEP's global reach and expansive team of experts is reflected in its growing portfolio of EbA projects. Since its first EbA project dating to 2010, UNEP has supported 41 EbA projects across 31 countries, funded primarily by the Least Developed Countries Fund (Global Environment Facility) with smaller levels of programming from the Special Climate Change Fund (GEF) and the Adaptation Fund (EbA being the primary focus of 23 projects, and a sub-component of wider adaptation projects in 18).

Of the 41 EbA projects, the majority have been implemented across the African continent, followed by the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe (Figure 1). UNEP has supported 19 countries with the implementation of one adaptation programme, while 11 countries have programmed two to three adaptation projects supported by UNEP, and four have been implemented in Nepal. Most projects have been executed by government ministries with implementation support provided by UNEP.

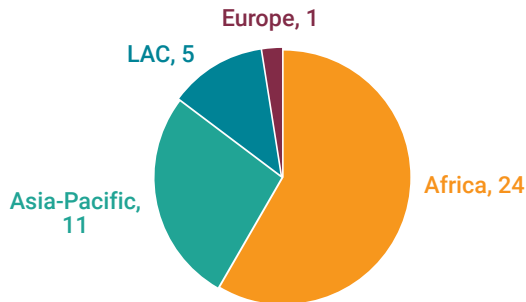


Figure 1. Geographic distribution of UNEP's EbA projects (projects per country).

EbA projects implemented by UNEP also cover a diverse range of ecosystems (Figure 2), with particular foci in agricultural systems, forests/woodlands and coastal areas. Many of the projects have also been implemented in mountain systems, grasslands, wetlands and urban landscapes while fewer projects have been supported in rangelands, savannas and drylands.

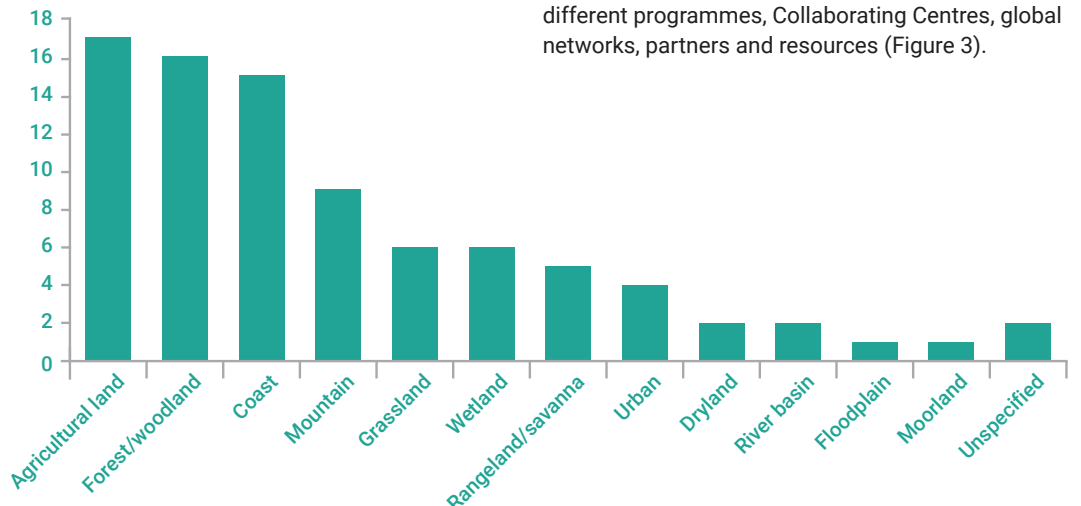


Figure 2. Frequency of projects working in specific ecosystem types.



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Across these different ecosystems, a variety of EbA measures have been implemented in order to address specific climate change impacts identified by the project (see Briefing Note 3 for examples). Further to the EbA measures, all projects have also implemented a combination of other adaptation approaches, including engineered, hybrid and enabling approaches (Briefing Note 4).

Reflecting one of UNEP's key mandates in the MTS and Programme of Work on strengthening national adaptation planning processes, all projects have recognised linkages to national adaptation strategies and have developed, or plan to develop, policy-relevant outputs and activities that aim to strengthen the science-policy interface.

To support its current and future EbA projects, UNEP can draw on its diverse group of staff from across different programmes, Collaborating Centres, global networks, partners and resources (Figure 3).

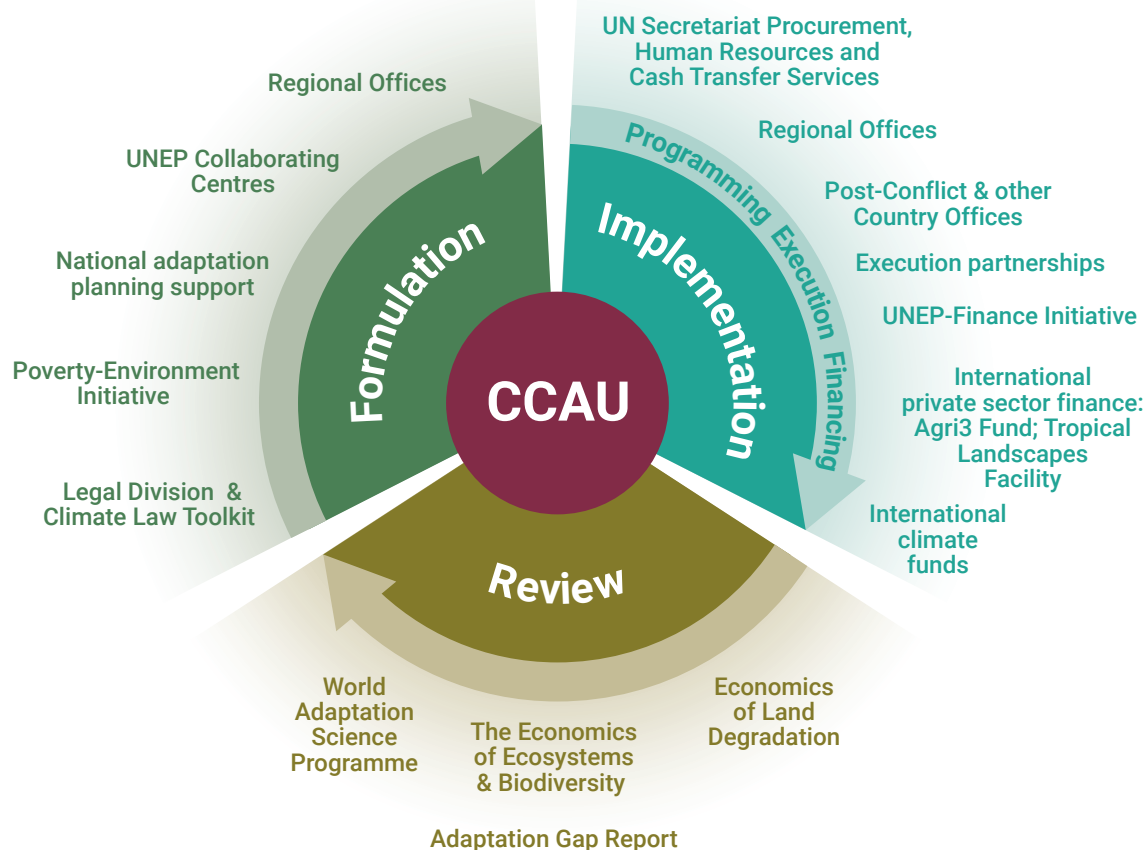


Figure 3. UNEP programmes and resources with potential to contribute to EbA.

Priorities moving forward

Given this extensive and diverse portfolio of EbA projects, UNEP is well positioned to help build and solidify the evidence base needed to make a strong case for EbA upscaling and integration. With improved processes for monitoring and evaluating projects, UNEP will collect and consolidate information from its EbA portfolio on effectiveness, good practices and lessons learned. It can use its global reach, extensive networks and partnerships with governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector to share this knowledge and build capacity to improve practice and shape policies and plans. Doing so will reinforce UNEP's role as a thought leader on EbA and strengthen its advocacy positioning at the science policy interface.

Some key future priority areas in EbA for UNEP are:

Building the evidence base

Going forward, UNEP will continue to support countries in developing more precision about the role and relevance of EbA in both practice and policy. This will involve investing in building the evidence base through improving monitoring and evaluation processes based on well-developed theories of change and suitable indicators. It will also work to help meet the need for an improved scientific knowledge base on climate change projections and anticipated impacts of climate change on social-ecological systems at a level sufficiently down-scaled to support sub-national and local level planning and implementation. UNEP aims to bring relevant colleagues together from throughout the organisation, such as the Science Division, and external partners in order to develop such information, including scenarios, tailored to the context of the needs of EbA decision-makers and practitioners working in different countries and ecosystems. The generation of such tools and knowledge will allow for improved long-term planning and implementation, as well as the design of appropriate indicators.



Working with new sectors and partners

Integrating EbA into national adaptation policies and plans has been an important focus of UNEP's EbA work. To build on these successes, UNEP aims also to focus on integrating EbA into the plans and policies of other sectors. This will involve working increasingly with ministries beyond those with direct responsibilities for the environment and climate change, such as ministries of finance, planning, infrastructure, agriculture, development and health. Understanding the projected climate change impacts on the various sectors and communicating these in language appropriate to the sector will be key to effective engagement.

UNEP also intends to increase its engagement on EbA with the private sector. As EbA has great potential to help businesses and industries address their climate risks, UNEP aims to identify and implement effective strategies for engaging with private sector actors and incentivising them to invest in EbA. Experience and ongoing work with the private sector throughout UNEP should be used as a foundation for building successful public-private alliances for EbA.

Exploring new thematic areas of work

While UNEP has to date implemented a small number of EbA projects in urban environments, urban EbA is an area ripe for exploration in greater depth, with great potential for expanding UNEP's work. In the context of urban adaptation, engineered approaches tend to be the norm. This provides an opening for UNEP to investigate the spectrum of possible urban EbA measures and to develop a case for suitable EbA solutions in urban environments. Such work should build on the ongoing 'cities' work within UNEP and integrate lessons learned from current urban EbA projects.

UNEP also intends to explore the potential role of



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EbA in post-conflict and conflict zones. Climate change adaptation in such settings is usually implemented by development- and peacekeeping agencies. Given the central role the scarcity of natural resources often plays in conflicts – which is increasing under climate change – there is potential for UNEP to enter into conversations with other agencies operating in these regions to identify possibilities for collaboration.

Ensuring a successful path ahead

To maximise the impact of current and future EbA projects and programmes, it is important that UNEP staff, project teams and consultants integrate best-practice knowledge, as highlighted throughout this briefing note series, into the design and implementation of EbA.

UNEP undertakes to:

- Strengthen the evidence base on the effectiveness of EbA in the wider context of the adaptation challenge and strengthen science-policy linkages through its normative and programming work.
- Support governments to test different EbA approaches and technologies to address climate change risks.
- Help governments track progress of adaptation through the development of indicator frameworks and monitoring capacity.
- Support the strengthening of capacities of partner governments to plan, programme and execute EbA projects in partnership with a range of actors and institutions.

With its global reach and extensive network, UNEP is uniquely positioned to equip to decision-makers and planners with such knowledge that can help drive a much needed paradigm shift: moving the world from cycles of degradation driven by unsustainable development to making best use of ecosystem services to support resilient societies and economies.



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