

# The important role of national ecosystems assessments for addressing climate change

Biodiversity makes key contributions to the livelihoods and wellbeing of people and underpins ecosystem-based approaches\* to tackle and adapt to climate change. However, biodiversity continues to decline at alarming rates, with global losses greater over the last 50 years than at any other time in human history, and few indications of a reduction in the rate of decline.<sup>i</sup>

Robust information on biodiversity and ecosystem services is increasingly identified as paramount to support decision-making around climate change, given the growing recognition of the role of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction. The latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) synthesis report revealed that most submitted NDCs include ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation action. Meanwhile, an analysis of the 19 National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) submitted between 2014 and 2019 found that all of them stressed the importance of incorporating detailed information about ecosystem vulnerabilities to climate change in risk assessments.<sup>ii</sup>

The National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative (NEA Initiative) at UNEP-WCMC supports countries conducting national ecosystem assessments. The NEA Initiative examined a selection of scoping and technical reports, and communication strategies developed by country partners undergoing this process to better understand the different ways in which such assessments can inform and advance policy and action for climate change. These are some of the key messages distilled from this process.

\* Frequently referred to as nature-based solutions

Supported by:



based on a decision of the German Bundestag

## Key messages

- National ecosystem assessments can help to shape climate change policies and plans, by providing up-to-date and credible information on biodiversity and ecosystem services and highlighting opportunities for synergies between climate change and biodiversity agendas.

A national ecosystem assessment is a nationally-driven process to develop an up-to-date, comprehensive and critical synthesis of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services (including in relation to climate mitigation and adaptation) and their interlinkages with people. They lay out the national status and trends on biodiversity and ecosystem services, their drivers of change (including climate-related threats), the present and future impacts of those drivers, the implications for those relying on nature, and the effectiveness of interventions and responses to counteract the loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem services.

- When it comes to reflecting climate change in a national ecosystem assessment, there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Climate change affects different countries, ecosystems and communities in different ways, and national and local circumstances affect the opportunities for ecosystem-based approaches for climate mitigation and adaptation. As such, climate change priorities will also differ between and within countries, and thus how climate change is framed and what aspects to include in an ecosystem assessment need to be determined nationally.

- Concerted effort is required to ensure appropriate consideration of climate change within a national ecosystem assessment to enhance its potential to contribute to decision-making.

Six key recommendations have emerged from the work of the NEA Initiative and its partner countries:

1	Contextualizing climate change concerns for the country	4	Engaging with climate change decision-makers, experts & other interested parties
2	Building the capacity of the assessment team, authors and stakeholders to address climate change issues	5	Approaching climate change impacts, policies and options comprehensively
3	Consistently using climate change concepts and terms	6	Taking advantage of climate change data, documents, and stories

- There are multiple entry points within a national ecosystem assessment where climate change can be considered, discussed, and analysed, depending on the national context and priorities.



**The National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative (NEA Initiative)** hosted by UNEP-WCMC contributes to a world where countries can assess the status and drivers of change to biodiversity and are empowered to transform policies to account for people and nature. The NEA Initiative builds capacity, provides support, and fosters knowledge exchange through a highly qualified, multicultural, and interdisciplinary team of practitioners and partners. Our approach is tailored to country needs, building a community of practice across five continents.

Since 2017, the NEA Initiative works with 14 countries to conduct or scope their national ecosystem assessments. Our support is delivered in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net). Through this work, the NEA Initiative contributes to the rolling work program up to 2030 of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the IPBES Capacity-building Rolling Plan.

Financial support for the NEA Initiative is provided by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of the Federal Republic of Germany.

