

ECOSYSTEM-BASED ADAPTATION BRIEF SERIES

**Acting locally for global impact:
Strengthening the nexus of people,
biodiversity and climate action**

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Introduction

Biodiversity and climate action are the twin pillars of resilient and sustainable development. On May 22nd, individuals, organizations, and initiatives worldwide unite to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB). Operating under the theme **“Acting locally for global impact,”** this year’s IDB is an urgent call to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, reminding us that protecting nature begins with actions in our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods and communities, and extends to cities, landscapes and transboundary contexts.

“Biodiversity is the foundation of all life on Earth. But around the world, it is being lost at an unprecedented rate” (CBD, 2026).

The relationship between climate and nature is a two-way street: climate change affects ecosystems and stands as a primary driver of biodiversity loss. On the other hand, conserved and sustainably managed biodiversity mitigates climate change by enhancing carbon capture, while simultaneously strengthening ecosystem resilience to help communities adapt (Pörtner, 2021). Because living systems are highly interconnected, policy action (or inaction) in one arena inevitably triggers feedback loops in the other. Given these linkages, we can no longer afford to treat climate change and biodiversity loss as separate issues (Förster, 2022).

Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) bridges this gap by using biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of a broader adaptation strategy to help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change (CBD, 2009). Through sustainable ecosystem management, conservation, and restoration, EbA simultaneously reduces human vulnerability and safeguards biodiversity.

For example, restoring wetlands enhances water storage, mitigates flood risks, and acts as a crucial carbon sink, while also reviving vital habitats for migratory birds and aquatic species and supporting local livelihoods through sustainable fisheries (GIZ, 2021). Similarly, integrating agrobiodiversity with beekeeping and sustainable water management enriches farm ecosystems while diversifying rural livelihoods and buffering farms against climate extremes such as intense rainfalls and droughts (Pinto et al., 2025).

The **Global EbA Fund** is a dedicated funding mechanism for catalytic, innovative, and inclusive projects. At the Fund, we are proud to champion these efforts. In this brief, we are sharing practical insights into how the nexus between people, nature, and climate operates in the real world—offering vital lessons for climate and biodiversity policymakers and practitioners alike. We will also be diving into four projects in **South Africa, Togo, Peru, and Brazil.**

Co-developing biodiversity stewardship in South Africa’s grassland landscapes

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Across the grassland landscapes of the KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga provinces, WWF South Africa **is demonstrating** how EbA can strengthen both biodiversity stewardship and community resilience in the face of drought, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. Working with the rural communities of Mgundeni and Donkerhoek, the project is co-developing a toolkit that helps national and provincial governments mainstream EbA into stewardship approaches.

A key strength of the project lies in its focus on practical, scalable implementation. The toolkit is being designed to complement existing stewardship frameworks, protected area

expansion strategies, and climate adaptation planning processes, ensuring it strengthens rather than duplicates existing governance systems. To support alignment across different governance levels, WWF South Africa is adopting an interactive and participatory approach in co-designing the EbA toolkit. This includes workshops, consultations, field visits, technical working groups, and pilot testing with stakeholders ranging from national entities such as the South African National Biodiversity Institute, to provincial conservation authorities, local biodiversity stewardship forums, community committees, and technical experts. This multi-level engagement helps ensure the toolkit is both scientifically robust and supported by the institutional partnerships needed for effective implementation.

Equally important is the project’s foundation in local relationships and community knowledge. WWF South Africa’s long-standing relationships in Mgundeni and Donkerhoek have fostered trust with community stakeholders. Through ongoing engagement with the local communities, including traditional governance structures, women, and youth, the project is creating inclusive spaces for shared learning and participatory decision-making. These partnerships help ensure the toolkit remains adaptable to local priorities, capacities, and ecological contexts, while strengthening its long-term sustainability.



**“Through this collaborative and integration-focused approach, the EbA toolkit will not only strengthen climate-resilient biodiversity stewardship practices but also enhance institutional coherence, practitioner ownership and long-term implementation viability across South Africa’s conservation landscape.”
(WWF South Africa team)**

Together, these efforts highlight how EbA approaches that are co-developed across governance levels and grounded in community priorities can strengthen resilience for both ecosystems and the people who depend on them.

Restoring forest landscapes in Togo through integrated, multi-goal planning

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In Togo’s Plateaux region, the United Nations University - Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) is collaborating with the University of Lomé and Jeunes Volontaires pour l’Environnement (JVE) to demonstrate how Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) can support interconnected biodiversity, climate, and land goals. Working in the districts of Anié and Est-Mono, the team is developing restoration strategies grounded in multidimensional technical

and traditional knowledge.

At the core of the initiative is a strategic, multi-goal approach to restoration planning. Through spatial mapping, the project is identifying areas where biodiversity loss, land degradation, and climate risks such as droughts overlap to target restoration efforts where they can have the greatest impact. Restoration models are then co-developed with stakeholders to determine which restoration practices and species are most appropriate for local ecosystems and livelihoods.

A key lesson emerging from the project is that successful restoration depends not only on ecological planning but also on understanding livelihoods and traditional knowledge. The project seeks to incorporate local perspectives on which species are considered resilient and valuable, while also considering traditional institutions and customary conservation practices relevant to restoration governance and long-term stewardship. These participatory approaches help create open dialogue around ecosystem change, climate risks, and restoration priorities.

“FLR is more sustainable when it acknowledges existing ecological conditions, local livelihood systems, and traditional knowledge and customs” (UNU-EHS team)

The project also places strong emphasis on adaptive and participatory monitoring in which communities help identify locally relevant indicators.

Beyond measuring trees planted or hectares restored, the project is also assessing broader ecological, socio-economic, and cultural indicators such as ecosystem connectivity, species diversity, preservation of rituals, and participation of vulnerable groups in restoration activities. This approach strengthens data relevance and enhances local ownership of the monitoring process.

While the project is focused on FLR in two districts, its impacts extend beyond the local level. The initiative supports Togo's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), while contributing to regional and international initiatives such as AFR100 and the Bonn Challenge. In doing so, the project demonstrates how locally grounded restoration initiatives can help advance broader national and global biodiversity and climate adaptation goals.



Strengthening wetland resilience in Peru through Indigenous knowledge and gender inclusion

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In Peru's Andes, Conservación Amazónica - ACCA worked closely with Indigenous and local communities to **embed** EbA into regional policy and territorial planning while supporting high-altitude wetland ecosystems (bofedales) that store carbon, regulate water, and sustain unique mountain biodiversity.

A major achievement of the initiative was strengthening regional climate governance through participatory planning processes that build on existing multi-stakeholder platforms, including the Cusco 'Regional Climate Change' and the 'Regional Environmental' Commissions. With support from the project, the Cusco Regional Strategy on Climate Change (ERFCC) was successfully updated through 2050. The project also supported the development of a Wetlands Restoration Plan, leading to the restoration of 27 hectares of wetlands.

Central to these achievements was the active involvement of local communities. Yachaq – community knowledge holders with a deep understanding of their territory and the surrounding natural environment – played a key role in

identifying ecosystem changes, restoration priorities, and locally appropriate adaptation practices. Intercultural dialogue processes connected ancestral knowledge with scientific information on climate change, while translation into Quechua improved accessibility and participation among local communities.

The project also placed a strong emphasis on advancing gender inclusion within climate and biodiversity governance. For the first time in the region, a Regional Ordinance was approved to promote the empowerment of rural women engaged in family agriculture. This led to the establishment of “Women, Climate Change, and Family Farming – MURCCA” as a platform through which rural women can voice their experiences, concerns, and challenges related to climate change, ensuring that their perspectives are heard and recognized. In parallel, the ERFCC introduced measures to improve women’s representation and leadership in climate and conservation decision-making processes, including mechanisms to support gender quotas.

“Collectively, these [processes] have helped position rural women not only as beneficiaries of climate and conservation policies, but also as key actors in negotiations and in defining priorities related to climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable land management.” (ACCA team)



The project demonstrated that building on existing regional governance platforms, integrating traditional and scientific knowledge, and strengthening participation of women can help create more inclusive and sustainable approaches to climate adaptation and conservation governance.



Advancing urban biodiversity in Brazil through evidence-based planning

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In the Brazilian city of Belém (host to UNFCCC COP 30), ICLEI South America worked with municipal authorities to **strengthen** the integration of conservation and climate adaptation into urban development and planning processes. Belém, located in the Amazon Rainforest, faces high exposure to flooding, coastal erosion, and the heat island effect. Through the [Nature-Based Cities: Biodiversity and Climate Resilience on Urban Development](#) project, ICLEI supported the city to address these climate risks by building the capacity of municipal managers and technical staff to advance nature-based solutions.

The project highlighted how evidence-based planning can help cities better align conservation and climate action priorities. Through the [development](#) of an [Ecosystem Services Diagnosis](#) and a [Climate Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment](#), the initiative combined participatory mapping processes, technical workshops, and peer-review activities with municipal staff and local stakeholders to ensure both technical

evidence and local perceptions were reflected. These studies were used to inform [Belém’s Local Climate Action Plan](#).

Another important dimension of the project was providing mentorship for the Polígono dos Parques initiative, which aims to enhance urban resilience through interconnected green spaces. ICLEI successfully included the initiative in its Transformative Actions Program pipeline, representing an important step toward improving its readiness and positioning for future investment and implementation.

“[One of the key success factors] of the initiative include the creation of participatory governance mechanisms capable of connecting biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation agendas within municipal decision-making processes” (ICLEI South America team)

ICLEI’s experience in Belém highlights how urban climate planning can be strengthened through participatory governance, capacity building, and the co-production of knowledge products. The project illustrates that successfully scaling EbA approaches in urban settings depends not only on long-term institutional commitment and multi-stakeholder collaboration, but also on intersectoral coordination, active participation from civil society and academia, sustained technical capacity, and access to financing opportunities.

Translating local action into broader global impact

Together these four projects demonstrate how locally grounded EbA initiatives can generate impacts that extend far beyond the communities where they are implemented. Collectively, they underscore that effective climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation depend on several key enabling factors that help translate local action into broader global impact. These include participatory and proactive collaboration models across multiple levels of governance – from local authorities to municipal, regional, and national institutions – as well as the inclusion and empowerment of local communities and vulnerable populations through a gender-responsive approach, valuing and articulating Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems, supporting evidence-based planning and monitoring with practical and innovative tools, and linking local priorities with broader national and global goals.

Key enabling factors:

- Multi-level collaboration
- Community inclusion and empowerment
- Gender responsive approaches
- Indigenous and traditional knowledge
- Evidence-based planning, monitoring, and innovative tools
- Linking local with national and global priorities



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