

Ecosystems role in Climate Adaptation Reinforced at First United Nations Environment Assembly

Title

The role played by biodiversity and ecosystem services in helping people adapt to climate change was reinforced during the first United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) of the UNEP, held in Nairobi, Kenya, last week. The meeting that brought together over 1,300 delegates from 170 nations took place from 23-27th June and attended by over 100 Environment Ministers. It was officially opened and closed by Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta in the presence of UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon.

UNEA, is the governing body of UNEP and the top global environmental policy-making forum. It was preceded on 21-22 June by the 15th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, a forum that provides civil society groups an opportunity to contribute to the main agenda.

A decision on Ecosystem based Adaptation proposed by Uganda and Zimbabwe and supported by BirdLife International was passed by UNEA, calling upon countries, among other things to 'integrate ecosystem adaptation as a main approach into national climate, biodiversity and development plans and programmes?'

Dr Paul Matiku, the Executive Director for Nature Kenya (BirdLife in Kenya) said the landmark decision will encourage governments to prioritize ecosystems the same way they do health, security and peace. 'Ecosystems and biodiversity play a key role in helping the poorest adapt to climate change. They must underpin and inform development at national level. Fundamentally, the new Post 2015 development agenda must recognise biodiversity as a central pillar?'

Other important decisions and resolutions were arrived at during UNEA, including Illegal trade in Wildlife; chemicals and waste; science policy interface and marine plastics and debris. There were also high level discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals that are currently being developed to replace the Millennium Development Goals.

The resolution on illegal wildlife trade calls on countries to ?implement their commitments on fighting illegal trade in wildlife already taken in other forums?; promote cross agency collaboration; deal with supply and demand as well as ?cooperate for the timely and cost-efficient repatriation of live illegally traded wildlife, including eggs as called for by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered (CITES)?

?UNEA has been ground-breaking,? said Ken Mwathe, the BirdLife International Africa Policy and Advocacy Coordinator. ?However, these decisions must be translated into tangible action at national level. The commitment demonstrated by member states in passing these resolutions must translate into a benefit for the environment and people?.



During the week, Nature Kenya jointly hosted a side event on environmental justice with the European Environment Bureau. The event highlighted the need to map areas where environmental conflicts exist across the globe. Serah Munguti of Nature Kenya presented the Tana Delta case study which demonstrated how greed for natural resources including land can lead to conflicts, deprivation of land rights and environmental degradation. She explained how conflicts can be addressed through land use planning, Strategic Environmental Assessment, coupled with sustainable agricultural and land management practices.

Read more about [UNEA](#).

Story by: **Ken Mwathe, Olivia Adhiambo and Ibrahim Mitole**