

Sound ecosystem management key to adaptation

Title

On 20-21 August 2013 the first Africa Food Security and Adaptation Conference was held at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi. The theme of the conference was: harnessing ecosystem-based approaches for food security and adaptation to climate change in Africa.

The conference drew participants from various countries around Africa and from different sectors including government, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and private sector. Participating countries included: Togo, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Cameroon among others.

The conference comes at a time when the continent's focus has shifted to climate change adaptation as a priority in providing sustainable solutions to reduce vulnerability of a great majority of Africa's one billion citizens. Ecosystem based adaptation (EbA) has been identified as one of the key approaches to tackling the challenge of food security amidst climate change in Africa.

Scientists and practitioners have termed it as an approach which provides a flexible cost effective and broadly applicable alternative for building robust food systems on less inputs and reducing the impacts of climate change. Additional benefits that EbA provide include protection and improvement of ecosystem services that are vital for livelihood and human well-being, for example water regulation services.

The shift from the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) after 2015 also calls for such approaches as EbA that serve multiple purposes and provide cross-cutting benefits. The conference provided a platform for scientists, scholars, policy makers, and practitioners to discuss the state of EbA knowledge for food security in the continent as well as sharing the lessons and building regional co-operation. The key objectives of the conference were:

- Aggregate the lessons shared into common solutions for food security and climate change adaptation across country application, in building the capacity of the practitioners, supporting policy processes at all levels as well as empowering countries in undertaking bigger actions.
- Share information on targeted ecological actions that provide opportunities for addressing perennial food insecurity in Sub Saharan Africa.
- Identify key challenges and bottlenecks hindering the scaling up of ecosystem based adaptation practices and how they can be overcome.

BirdLife is currently implementing a project on ecosystem conservation for climate change adaptation within the East African region. The conference therefore provided an opportunity to not only share experiences but also to give recommendations on adaptation of EbA on a larger scale. The experiences shared during the conference were captured in case studies that illustrated how EbA is working.

The recommendations were incorporated into a conference declaration which will be presented at the next Africa Ministerial Conference on Environment meeting in October this year. For more information www.foodsec.aaknet.org