Governments urged to recognise the role of ecosystems and biodiversity in climate change adaptation and mitigation

Title

Climate change during the coming decades is projected to dramatically alter current patterns of temperature and precipitation across Africa, with huge implications for both humans and biodiversity. Ecosystem and biodiversity will play a critical role in supporting adaptation from the worst impacts of climate change, a meeting organized by BirdLife International was told at the sidelines of UNFCCC COP 17 taking place 28th November to 9th December in Durban, South Africa. Dr. Julius Arinaitwe, the BirdLife Regional Director for Africa informed the delegates: ?Very often, the roles and benefits from ecosystems are underplayed or even ignored when searching for climate change adaptation and mitigation solutions. Governments must recognise the role of the natural environment in reducing vulnerability to climate change ? something central to the COP17 negotiations here in Durban.? He added: ?Forests, wetlands, grasslands and other ecosystems and the services they provide are the first line of defense for the poorest of the poor who depend on them for their day to day survival, the majority of whom are found in the African continent? The BirdLife Side Event, attended by over 40 participants from government and civil society, was held at the Durban Natural Science Museum and was graciously funded by the MacArthur Foundation, with additional support from the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID). BirdLife?s climate change work in Africa and Asia combines underpinning science with policy interventions and conservation action on the ground. The participants at the meeting were informed of the outcomes of BirdLife projects in Africa and Asia funded by the MacArthur Foundation. An Adaptation Framework has been developed aimed at enhancing resilience to climate change at site level. Presenters were drawn from Burundi, Nepal, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. Mr. Paul Mafabi, the Commissioner for Wetlands in the Ministry of Water and Environment chaired the meeting. In his remarks, he said: ?Africa must find its home grown solutions to climate change and these must include protection of the ecosystems and biodiversity that the continent is abundantly endowed with, and largely depends on. It cannot be business as usual as was the case with the National Adaptation Programmes of Action

(NAPAs). NAPAs were meant to address short term needs but there has been little in terms of implementation and progress. We must begin to see tangible action on the ground? The meeting was informed that ecosystem- based approaches to adaptation may have some costs but the benefits are immense, and often provide a cost-effective and accessible approach for rural and poor communities. Melanie Heath, the Head of Policy at BirdLife International said: ?Ecosystems underpin life on earth and many sectors such as water, forestry, agriculture and health. An integrated approach of socially- and environmentally-sound adaptation that is cross-sectoral and recognises the role of natural systems in adaptation and resilience, should be integral to any adaptation strategy or plan.? These are the key messages from the BirdLife side event to the delegates at UNFCCC COP 17:

- Climate change is happening now; solutions must address both immediate and future needs
- NAPAs must be implemented and linked to the development of National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) in an integrated way.
- Ecosystems- based approaches to adaptation should be recognised in national adaptation plans and strageies for their role in reducing human vulnerability to climate change
- Finance needs to urgently flow to the most vulnerable countries to support adaptation actions

It is hoped that among other pressing issues such as the second commitment period of the Kyoto protocol, parties will consider these issues in both adaptation and mitigation negotiations and put necessary and sufficient measures for the benefit of current and future generations, especially the poor communities. For further information on what BirdLife International wants done in Durban, see COP17