NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Key results and lessons learned from IFAD Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Program (ASAP)

POLICY BRIEF

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July 2020

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The Nature-based Solutions (NbS) concept

The Nature-based Solution (NbS) concept emerged during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP 15) in 2009. It was developed from the Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) concept that integrates biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall adaptation strategy, but makes a paradigm shift from focusing solely on nature (EbA), to focus on people and nature (NbS)[1]. NbS put in perspective the fact that people can proactively protect, manage or restore natural ecosystems, as a significant contribution to addressing six major societal challenges: climate change, food security, water security, human health, disaster risk, social and economic development.

Several NbS definitions still exist. IUCN defines NbS as 'actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits'[2]. Some specific tools to operationalize the concept have been developed[3]. The NbS concept is increasingly being applied.

Main lessons learnt from ASAP case studies

This Policy Brief draws from a technical paper on NbS which presents the key results and lessons learned from IFAD ASAP portfolio. This paper analyses NbS according to five criteria (climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction; climate change mitigation potential; provision of non-carbon ecosystem services; food security and income generation; social benefits), each divided into sub-criteria. Seven case studies were developed as a sample illustrating the diversity of NbS implemented: 'Pasture rotation' in Tajikistan; 'Natural resources governance framework' in Sudan; 'Mangrove restoration' in Gambia; 'Shade trees in diversified croplands' in Nicaragua; 'Effective microorganisms' in Laos; 'Watershed management' in Ethiopia; and 'Land restoration' in Niger.

NbS can contribute to climate change adaptation while also supporting agro- and biodiversity, providing carbon sinks as well as a range of socio-economic benefits for smallholder farmers and communities. NbS are therefore particularly relevant to ASAP objectives and vice-versa ASAP is an interesting portfolio to experiment and promote NbS. NbS may contribute to wider environmental projects, such as the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI), on which IFAD is also currently engaged. NbS implemented in Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan all contribute to combat climate change effects and desertification as well as address food insecurity and poverty issues in targeted areas, as endorsed by the GGWSSI.

NbS may in some cases require time to be fully deployed as they include multiple and complex activities. NbS most often involve communities as well as local, regional and/or national authorities. Such involvement can be promoted through intensive mobilization and trainings. When implemented adequately, a participative approach has the following advantages: it responds to the site-specific natural and cultural context; it ensures proper ownership of the NbS and their sustainability; it builds stakeholder capacities and awareness.

For greater chance of success, NbS may be combined with other activities that more directly support livelihood assets at individual, household and/or community levels (e.g. in Gambia the mangrove restoration was combined with the provision of boats facilitating river transport). NbS activities that are labour intensive (e.g. digging trenches) often require significant external financial resources. This

[1] Mace, G., 2014. Who's Conservation? Science 345 (6204).

[2] Cohen-Shacham, E., Walters, G., Janzen, C., Maginnis, S., 2016. Nature-Based Solutions to Address Societal Challenges. Gland, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature.

[3] Among others by IUCN, the World Bank, the EU-funded ThinkNature, the University of Oxford (https://www.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org), IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), Griscom & al. (providing an exhaustive list of NbS in the Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use – AFOLU – sector).

involves specific approaches (e.g. cash for work schemes) as well as long-term financial planning to ensure NbS sustainability.

The plants used for NbS include a wide array of local species. They have various purposes (e.g. forest trees for timber and firewood; fruit trees for food and sources of incomes; medicinal herbs, etc.), while preserving soil and water resources. They also contribute to job creation (commonly targeting vulnerable women, landless and/or young people) through the development of nurseries.

To provide strong evidence of results and impacts, monitoring and assessments specifically related to NbS, are required.

Way ahead: towards a stronger operationalization of NbS

While these case studies provide useful lessons, more evidence is needed for decision makers and donors to ensure NbS move beyond pilot projects, and instead are deployed at scale to ensure the maximum benefits for society and nature. To generate a common understanding and consensus on what is a 'good' NbS, IUCN members have started working on a Global Standard for NbS and developing associated tools to provide NbS guidance to practitioners. Guidance will instruct how to use the Standard to: (i) design new NbS; (ii) upscale pilots by identifying gaps and; (iii) verify past projects and future proposals[4]. The objective is to facilitate the operationalization and ensure the quality and credibility of NbS.

One of the outcomes of the co-sponsored IPCC/IPBES workshop on biodiversity and climate change (planned to be held in May 2020 but postponed) will be a technical paper on potential synergies such as NbS and trade-offs between efforts that aim to conserve, restore and sustainably use biodiversity and efforts that support climate change adaptation and mitigation. A number of other initiatives, platforms and handbooks are also being developed to gather and share lessons on NbS implementation. They can be of good support to help practitioners build upon previous experiences.

Recommendations to IFAD

- Give wider emphasis to NbS at IFAD strategic and operational levels – NbS should be integrated within strategies at national, regional, institutional levels to expand their reach, which of course requires larger institutional discussions and dedicated resources and expertise. It should also be promoted on both theoretical and operational aspects among IFAD field staff, implementing partners and targeted communities. This technical note is a first step in this direction. The release of the IUCN Global Standard is however very necessary to design a NbS strategy and develop specific training sessions.
- Ensure sufficient expertise is available to design, implement and monitor NbS – External support is particularly relevant when IFAD's country presence or competences on a specific issue or solution is limited. It is important to have the proper technical expertise to ensure NbS are correctly settled and to avoid improper application.
- Implement NbS in different contexts and expand their geographical coverage – This will ensure NbS are experimented with different stakeholders and under various conditions, and then can more easily be scaled up.
- Ensure NbS are systematically set up in collaboration with communities and authorities – NbS should be implemented through a community-based and participative approach, and authorities (at local, regional, national levels) should be key partners of their implementation. This will contribute to stronger ownership and faster replication.
- Produce NbS-specific data – During the whole project course, production of data is essential in order to provide stronger evidence of NbS specific results and impacts, and notably how their implementation can strengthen resilience to climate change.

[4] Source: www.iucn.org/theme/ecosystem-management/our-work/a-global-standard-nature-based-solutions

July 2020

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