

December 2021

Upscaling Ecosystem-based Adaptation.

Lessons from India and Guatemala

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Overview

The impacts of climate change are being felt in every region of the world, some of these are irreversible (IPCC, 2021). Even under the most optimistic emission reduction scenario, climate change will continue to adversely affect ecosystems and societies. Thus, investments and action in adaptation to climate change must be accelerated rapidly. The parties at the recent COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow agreed on paper to this course. Now is the time to take action.

Natural ecosystems play a crucial role in building climate resilience and securing sustainable livelihoods for billions of people. **Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA)** is a systemic approach that strengthens resilience to climate change by building capacities to tackle land degradation, biodiversity loss, and other challenges in an integrated way.

However, the implementation of EbA at a larger scale remains challenging (Reid et al, 2019). Many successful initiatives exist, but these have yet to be systematically documented or adopted at policy and

programme levels. Most countries have made sweeping commitments such as “enhanc[ing] adaptive capacity and resilience”; or “halt[ing] deforestation by 2020” as stipulated by SDG 15.2, yet such goals are abstract and have not yet been adequately translated into multi-level policy frameworks and local action (UNEP, 2021). The main obstacles to such translation are a lack of funding and insufficient cross-sectoral collaboration at local and national levels (Stiem-Bhatia et al. 2021).

This policy brief outlines some important lessons from the development of roadmaps to upscale EbA in multi-stakeholder settings. It draws on experiences gained by TMG Research while implementing the Climate-SDG Integration project in India and Guatemala in partnership with the Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR), WWF Mesoamerica, and the Guatemalan NGO ADIMI (Asociación de Desarrollo Integral Mitij Ixoq’).

“Climate change is around us. Despite several resolutions and policies in the past, we didn’t take this issue seriously. Now we should adopt a collaborative approach to make our ecosystems intact. This is not the time to push this issue for tomorrow. Sustenance and restoration of ecosystems is essential and should be married with people’s need to pursue sustainable livelihoods. ECOBARI [EbA network] is a great initiative in this regard.”

Vandana Chavan, Member of Parliament,
 Rajya Sabha, Government of India

What do we mean by upscaling?

Upscaling is not about replicating something at a larger scale; that is out-scaling. Upscaling EbA is about creating the conditions at policy and implementation level to enable EbA to be applied at a large scale, in different contexts and in different ways. This enabling environment provides implementing actors with the required financial, technical, and political support to sustain EbA over the long term.

Highlights

There was little mention of EbA in **Guatemala** three years ago. This changed with the **first National EbA Forum**, which was attended by practitioners and decision-makers from academia, civil society, international development cooperation, and the public and private sectors. It culminated in a declaration that “recognised the need to implement EbA on a larger scale in Guatemala and learn from local experiences”. Given the growing popularity of EbA, the National EbA Forum has become an annual event.

EbA advocacy work in Guatemala has already borne fruit: in the lead up to the recent COP26, EbA was included in Guatemala’s country position as well as in its **Third Communication** to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

There has also been increased momentum on EbA in **India**. Though cross-sectoral collaboration is a major challenge, working groups have brought together actors from different sectors to develop ideas on how EbA can help India adapt to climate change while ensuring farmers’ welfare. The roadmap for upscaling EbA in Maharashtra was born of these multi-stakeholder consultations and presented at a state-level consultation in February 2021. The various actors, including representatives from the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society, unanimously recognised EbA as a holistic approach that promotes resilient livelihoods and healthy ecosystems. They released a **joint statement** in support of upscaling EbA in Maharashtra.

What we did

The Climate-SDG Integration Project aimed to analyse and strengthen the enabling conditions under which EbA can thrive and be scaled up. To do so, we deployed a step-by-step approach, first documenting evidence of EbA, then engaging stakeholders, and finally jointly developing a roadmap for EbA upscaling at state and national levels (see Figure 1).

Robust evidence of what EbA can deliver in different socio-cultural and ecological policy contexts is needed to convince policy-makers

Roadmap Development process

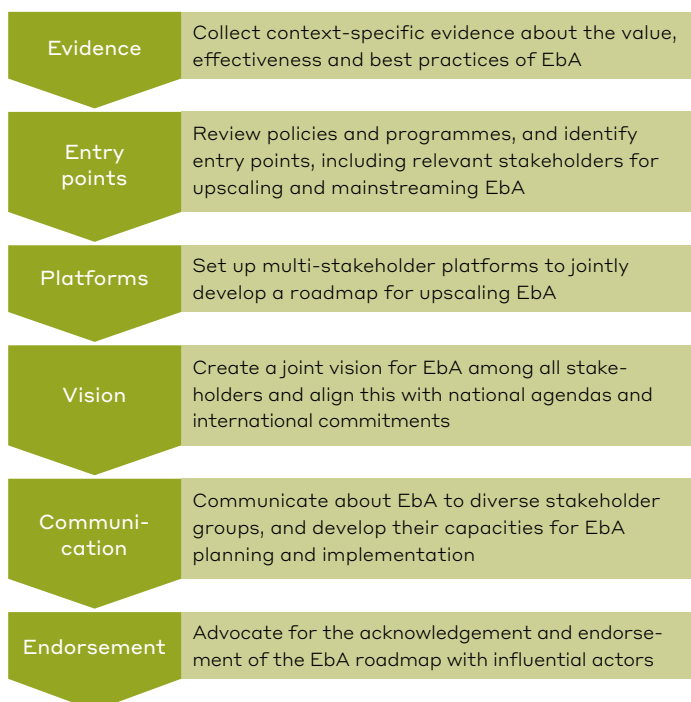


Figure 1: Simplified illustration of the process for developing roadmaps for upscaling EbA in Guatemala and India. Note, some processes occurred in parallel.

“We recognise the importance to continue promoting [EbA] in national strategies and programmes as well as to maintain the good coordination of the multisectoral technical [EbA] group and continue consolidating it as a formal and technical space for exchange of information, experiences, learning and capacity building, creating the opportunity for the identification of synergies, strengths and priorities of the EbA perspective for its scaling up in the country.”

Antonio Urrutia Lemus, Director,
Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Guatemala

and investors, but is scarce in some countries (Chausson et al. 2020). Thus, it has been vital to **research long-standing initiatives** that link climate adaptation to natural resource management in order to build the required evidence base. By **linking different knowledge systems**, we have developed a common understanding of what EbA is, why it is needed, and how it can help achieve the SDGs in different sectors. **This joint “EbA vision”** is a stepping stone for all other processes. Intensive communication and capacity development efforts brought together traditional knowledge and technical know-how to increase political and societal support for EbA. The multi-stakeholder platforms provide **inter-institutional spaces to share experiences** and knowledge about different adaptation approaches. These platforms go beyond dialogues: in **strategic alliances**, stakeholders worked jointly to develop a roadmap for upscaling EbA.

What we have learnt

The development of roadmaps for upscaling EbA over the past three years has given us many insights into the power of multi-stakeholder processes. In the following, we present six key insights:

▶ **Process, not just outcome, matters**

It was very important to understand the roadmap not merely as a document, but as a process. By emphasising the process we facilitated the gradual buy-in, engagement, and ownership of a diverse range of actors.

▶ **Tell positive EbA stories**

Given the lack of systematised evidence, collecting data on the added value and effectiveness of long-standing EbA initiatives helped to raise policy-makers' interest in EbA. Different knowledge systems (traditional, implementation, scientific) informed the areas of action that the roadmap addressed.

▶ **Build bridges between sectors**

EbA is a concept that cuts across sectors and constituencies. The roadmap development process brought together actors from different sectors (i.e., forestry, agriculture, water) and actors (i.e., government, academia, civil society, private sector). These alliances, bound by a common vision of EbA as a key instrument to build a climate resilient and prosperous future, broke down silos and fostered the creation of multi-stakeholder networks beyond the project lifetime (see text box below).

▶ **Forge a joint vision**

A joint vision of what it takes to upscale EbA in different country contexts laid the foundation for developing the roadmap. Each stakeholder had the opportunity to add their perspectives and discuss risks and synergies. This stage was instrumental in building political support.

▶ **Embed EbA into existing processes**

Considering the enormity of development and adaptation challenges facing climate-vulnerable countries like India or Guatemala, upscaling is impossible without strong state involvement. EbA must be embedded in existing public policies and programmes if it is to reach the scale needed for significant impact. EbA that is built into existing processes can also use resources more efficiently and achieve acceptance within the framework of the country's National Development Priorities more readily.

▶ **EbA upscaling requires collaboration**

The roadmap process is a practical illustration of the “counter-current principle”; cooperation between the local and national levels should run in both directions. EbA solutions, based on effective local initiatives, inform national level policies and programmes, with the aim of strengthening an enabling environment for EbA to be scaled up at local level.

Building alliances for change

In **Guatemala**, the so called **Technical EbA Group** was formed to develop a roadmap for upscaling EbA. As a consortium with members from government, civil society, academia, development agencies, and the private sector, the group fosters knowledge exchange and mutual learning, and advises the government on implementing the EbA roadmap. Since March 2021, the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources has its own secretariat for EbA, which provides a new home for the group that was originally born of the Climate-SDG Integration project.

The impetus created in **India** resulted in the creation of the first-ever India-wide EbA network, called **ECOBARI**. This is an alliance of researchers, practitioners, financial institutes, corporate actors, and citizens working together to implement the EbA roadmap. ECOBARI was officially launched on 19th November, 2021. Its mission is to scale-up Ecosystem-based Adaptation through multi-stakeholder partnerships, policy enablement and resource provisioning, in order to help India reach its SDGs, the Land Degradation Neutrality targets, and climate change commitments.

Recommendations For policy

- ▶ **LEARN:** Raise awareness among politicians about the multifaceted value of EbA, analyse current environmental and agricultural policies through an adaptation lens, and identify opportunities to integrate EbA into existing policies and programmes.
- ▶ **CONNECT:** Work with scientists and practitioners, including women, youth, indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups, with local insights to design policies that manage trade-offs, are coherent with other sectoral policies, and integrate the best available safeguards.
- ▶ **ENABLE:** Foster locally grounded collaboration and alliances between policy, civil society, business, and research to achieve national targets. Create an enabling policy environment for sustained EbA action.

For practice

- ▶ **LEARN:** Gather evidence on best practices, and the benefits and challenges of EbA, to drive policy and programme design from the bottom up.
- ▶ **CONNECT:** Explore, build consensus and partner with like-minded CSOs, donors and other actors, bilaterally or through networks, to support locally led EbA action. Agree on a common language and indicators for measuring progress on EbA implementation, while acknowledging different agro-ecological contexts.
- ▶ **ENABLE:** Train farmers and other land users, and enable them to practice what they already know, to protect ecosystems as a common good.

For donors

- ▶ **LEARN:** Collect evidence of high-impact initiatives that develop capacity for locally led and ecosystem-based climate adaptation.
- ▶ **CONNECT:** Listen to project implementers, and local and indigenous communities, about what works and which priorities need to be set in EbA funding, and develop regulatory models for public-private partnerships.
- ▶ **ENABLE:** Create opportunities for responsible private investments, make funding for EbA accessible to local implementing actors, and invest in their capacities to manage larger scale initiatives.

About the Climate-SDG Integration Project

This policy brief builds on the outcome of a 4-year project (2018–2021) entitled, “Climate-SDGs Integration Project: Supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda through Ecosystem-based Adaptation”, which was funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety in the context of Germany’s International Climate Initiative (IKI). For more information about the project, visit: www.tmg-research.com/eba

This policy brief
has been endorsed by:

Member of the Technical EbA Group (Guatemala)



Members of ECOBARI (India)

