Topic being contributed to: Lessons learned and good practices on adaptation planning processes addressing ecosystems and interrelated areas such as water resources

Title: Participatory planning as a tool for effective stakeholder engagement in addressing ecosystems challenges: Lessons from the Ecosystem Based Adaptation in Mountainous Ecosystems programme, Mt Elgon, Uganda.

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Introduction

The Ecosystem Based Adaptation in Mountain Ecosystems Programme is a Flagship Programme which was jointly implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). With funding from the Germany´s Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), the programme was in response to the 2010 UNFCCC Cancun Agreements towards enhanced action on adaptation. Its approach was to support countries´ local and national adaptation strategies by helping rural vulnerable communities adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change through the conservation, sustainable management and restoration of natural ecosystems. The programme was implemented in Uganda, Nepal and Peru.

In Uganda, it was implemented in Mount Elgon Landscape, in the districts of Kapchorwa, Kween, Bulambuli and Sironko. Mt Elgon is the seventh highest mountain in Africa, an important water tower and catchment that straddles the border with Kenya. The population relies on rain-fed subsistence agriculture (vegetables, fruit, paddy rice, yams and sugarcane). Predicted climate change impacts include temperature rise of 0.5-0.6°C for the next 20 to 50 years, while rainfall will increase by 18.7 mm over the next 20 years[1]. In terms of seasons, the present drier months of June, July and August are expected to receive even less rain. This is expected to lead to several climate-related hazards such as soil erosion, flooding, landslides and drought.

The activities which were implemented under the project included improved riverbank restoration interventions, soil and water conservation; gravity flow irrigation scheme as a green-grey solution to allow access to water during drought; and tree planting to stabilize soil to reduce erosion and landslides which are a common occurance within the area. These activities were identified through both scientific assessments and ground-truthing using the participatory processes described below.

[1] Vulnerability Impact Assessment (VIA) for the Mt Elgon Ecosystem, D. Hafashimana et al, 2013, NaFORRI.

Understanding the participatory process undertaken

The implementation approach of the project centred on enhancing awareness and creating a forum for relevant actors and groups to fully and equally participate in making decisions about the project activities and level of engagement. Selection of this approach was based on previous experiences where powerful groups would position themselves to access the relevant project information, skills and benefits, preventing the less powerful/privilledged from being involved. In addition, the participatory process was deliberately promoted to ensure inclusion of the less powerful sections of society, especially women, the very poor and youth, who are more at risk and less able to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change

As a first step, a stakeholder mapping and analysis was undertaken to identify and understand the relevant actors with a stake in the project, their interests, expectations, level of understanding, and influence. This enabled the project to make the right prioritisation, put in place the right communication channels and entry points. It also provided an opportunity to integrate local knowledge in climate change analyses. By doing this, local people were given an opportunity to articulate and enhance their own knowledge and understanding, and to plan actions for all-inclusive implementation of the project activities.

Beyond the communities, the relevant local government departments were engaged to ensure better coordination and harmonization of activities within districts. Because of this involvement right from the onset, the local governments took responsibility and ensured that the project was integrated in their government plans.

In addition, the coordination meetings between the districts called for better harmonization of the interventions within the Mt Elgon landscape to ensure concerted efforts, which would then lead to a more resilient ecosystem and livelihoods. This led to the birth of the Mt Elgon Stakeholders forum (MESF) with the overall aim of providing a platform for coordinating the scattered interventions within the ecosystem. The forum provides an opportunity for considering Mt Elgon at a landscape level where various stakeholders get a common understanding of the issues within their landscape, how they affect or are affected by the various interventions and hence the various inter-linkages within the landscapes which then guides strategic interventions. Through this forum, partners have been able to share information, understand the inter-linkages imbedded in partners' programmes on issues such as markets, governance, restoration, and ecological perspectives.

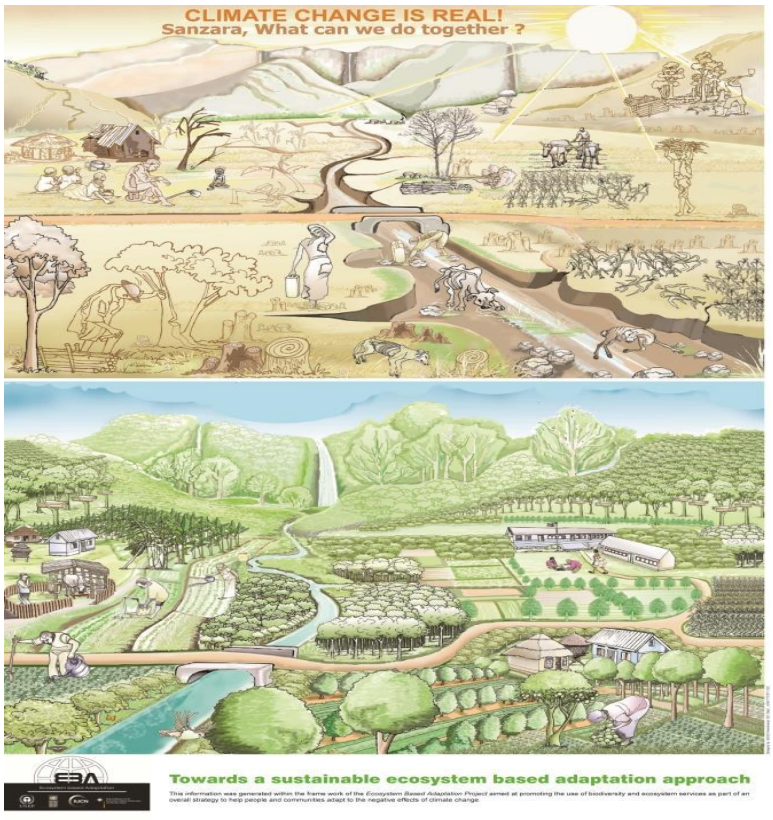
Tools and methods applied for participatory planning and implementation

- **The Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis framework:** IUCN chose to apply this framework because of the various tools and processes it provides to collect, organize and analyse vulnerability and adaptive capacity.
- **The Community-Based Risk Screening Tool: Adaptation and Livelihoods (CRiSTAL):** It provided a platform for all key actors to build a common understanding of the climate issues and a strong ownership of the solutions proposed, because it is based on local needs and priorities[1].
- **Forests – Poverty linkages toolkit:** This was applied to understand the contribution of the Mt Elgon forest products to peoples' livelihoods, and evaluate the different ways how the goods and services were being impacted on, in order to inform the project EbA interventions.
- **Joint planning meetings:** The outcome of these was a shared understanding of the project objectives and the expected contribution from each stakeholder.
- **Community visioning:** This was undertaken at the site level and helped communities develop their desired future as a target they should ensure to achieve through direct involvement in the project.

Key lessons learnt from participatory planning as a tool for effective ecosystem management.

The need for ecosystem management to build on the wealth of knowledge and skills within the communities: The rural communities are very knowledgeable about the critical issues affecting them, as well as solutions to address the challenges. However, they feel left out in decision making as most projects are designed and activities pre-determined without their prior engagement. It is very important to recognise the value of local knowledge and use it to make decisions. In Uganda, it actually emerged that the hot spots which had been proposed by the communities during the rapid vulnerability assessment were the same confirmed by the major Vulnerability Impact Assessment (VIA) which was undertaken. The VIA just helped the project to strengthen the ecosystem aspects of the proposed interventions, and the catchment approach. This confirmed the wealth of knowledge and skills within the community, and the need to take advantage. It is due to this that there has been sustained engagement with a high rate of adoption and scaling up in all the IUCN sites in Kapchorwa and Kween districts.

Collective planning promotes ownership and sustainability of ecosystem based interventions: EbA options provide a range of benefits to communities, but this needs to be clearly defined and understood for collective action and ownership. To most of the community members, these ecosystem goods and services are freely provided by nature and they are "here to stay". The process of helping them think through the trends, the changes and what needs to be done helps in changing that mind-set. Lack of this leads to laxity among community members due to the common notion that "*what belongs to everybody belongs to nobody*". When all community members are involved in the planning and design of activities, roles and responsibilities are clarified and the benefits to individuals and households are clarified, hence people being sure about their stake in the interventions.



Taking advantage of radio and ICT to achieve greater impact in ecosystem management: Radio is an important tool for creating awareness, enhancing participation and ownership of processes and interventions. This is because there are certain categories of people within

the communities who are interested in the programmes but never get the time to participate in the community meetings and trainings. Through radio, a number of people have been able to learn and take on the interventions, even beyond the project sites, as seen from the radio responses received.

Participatory assessments help to bring out the none-scientific information which is critical for planning: Sustained community involvement in and implementation of desired changes requires continuous and in-depth social assessment among and for implementing communities. This is needed in order to build trust and to better understand the key, underlying social dynamics and issues that have resulted in current behaviors and actions. Such assessment is often complicated by the very dynamic nature of peoples' attitudes. IUCN's work, with and through local partners, to informally unearth some of these issues has helped the project to adjust accordingly and ensure that it remains on track.