Strategic and Guidelines for Integrating Climate Change Adaptation Approaches in Trans-boundary Ecosystem Management in East Africa

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What sectors can do

All sectors need to adopt and recognize the value and significance of healthy intact ecosystems. Sectors such as forestry, wetlands, tourism, agriculture and energy, infrastructure development among others need to:

- Apply an ecosystem based approach to business planning and delivery, employing robust social and environmental safeguards in particular to ensure that trans-boundary ecosystem resilience is strengthened rather than weakened;
- Adapt an ecosystem based approach to adaptation when undertaking cost-benefit analyses and assessments of alternatives regarding projects and technologies;
- Work together and consult with other sectors in assessing risks posed by climate change and finding adaptation solutions;
- Pilot and demonstrate trans-boundary ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation, and their cost-effectiveness;
- Involve community-based organisations in choosing socially appropriate engineering and technological adaptation measures where necessary;
- Offer capacity building and training for ecosystem-based adaptation, targeted at policy makers and practitioners at different levels.

Specific recommendations for key sectors

Sector specific recommendations include:

- Financing: Leverage resources and appropriate funding mechanisms for ecosystem-based approaches especially those that are trans-boundary in nature;
- Agriculture: Focus on systems that promote health of soil, water and agricultural ecosystems;
- Water: Employ integrated water resource management approach and protect ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, store and release water;
- Transport: New transport networks should not affect the ability of local people to deal with climate change, for example by undermining ecosystem services;
- Energy: Mitigation strategies and energy supply should not undermine ecosystem services or habitat losses;
- Forestry: Promote forest landscape restoration which is a long term process of regaining ecological functionality and enhancing human well-being in acutely deforested and degraded landscapes;
- Ecotourism: Seek to popularize the diversity of life, meet interests of the tourist without undue stress to the ecosystems.

This brief is one of the policy influencing materials produced by the project – Implementing a resilience framework to support climate change adaptation in the Mt Elgon region of Lake Victoria Basin in Kenya and Uganda

The study analyzed regional and national policies and strategies in environment and natural resources management and identified opportunities, challenges and actions required to integrate climate change adaptation approaches into trans-boundary ecosystem management in East Africa.

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What are the opportunities

There are a number of opportunities for integrating climate change adaptation approaches in regional and national environment and natural resources management and development programs:

At national level:
- Member states have climate change policies and some have started processes for enacting climate change laws. Already National Environmental Management Acts that have established National Environmental Management Authorities (NEMAs) in Kenya and Uganda guide coordination and regulation of environmental activities including approval of environmental impact assessments;
- There are institutional frameworks that could be used as entry points for collaborative actions.

At regional level:
- Policy and strategic instruments - The EAC Treaty provides a favourable policy framework for integrating climate change approaches in environment and natural resources management including trans-boundary ecosystem management.
- Legal and Institutional Frameworks - The EAC has made significant milestones in legislation through the EAC Trans-boundary Ecosystem Management Bill (2011) that is awaiting enforcement.
- Programmes and Projects - Within the EAC region there are a number of trans-boundary ecosystems management programmes and projects. An example of these is the Mt Elgon Regional Ecosystem Conservation Programme (MERCOP) under the EAC framework that provides an opportunity for harmonized policy and practical approaches in the management of the Mt. Elgon Forest ecosystem including climate change adaptation and mitigation. Regional forest change projects such as the Programme on Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in COMESA-EAC-BAGO Region and the Planning for Resilience in East Africa through Policy, Adaptation, Research and Economic Development also provide good entry points for mainstreaming climate change in trans-boundary ecosystem management.

How it is working

The integration of climate change adaptation in Eastern Africa is already ongoing but with limited awareness. Stakeholders and actors are now giving it the required publicity to popularise the approach. There is already an appreciation and recognition that climate change is a fundamentally multi-sectoral issue, and that all sectors and categories of stakeholders must therefore be actively involved.

The strategies are not necessarily new, but are being strengthened and defined to respond to the future climate projections, and the link to ecosystem resilience. Strengthening ongoing efforts to make them deliver the outcomes that are coherent and harmonized at sectoral level is what is required.

We need to engage the communities that are custodians of the resources at stake and therefore local governments are critical in advancing this forward. In the region, local governments with trans-boundary resources are already collaborating but this requires financing, which is the biggest bottleneck at the moment.

Policy, legal and institutional frameworks

The EAC has policy and strategy documents related to environment, water resources, wetlands, land and all the conditions provisions for addressing climate change issues.

Kenya and Uganda are countries with an enabling policy, strategic and legal framework for addressing climate change issues. The National Constitutions of the two countries are very clear on the role of governments in protecting the natural resources in the face of the problem.

Sectoral policies, strategies and laws in the two countries such as those related to environment, water resources, wetlands, land etc all contain provisions that provide a good basis for climate change adaptation and these are harmonised under the East African Community.

Kenya and Uganda, have climate change policies, strategies and action plans and this is an enabling environment for mainstreaming climate change in trans-boundary ecosystem management.

Sectoral institutional frameworks in the two countries such as those related to environment, water resources, wetlands, land etc all contain provisions that provide a good basis for climate change adaptation and these are harmonised under the East African Community.

Thus an enabling institutional framework for coordinating and mainstreaming climate change in trans-boundary ecosystem management exists in both Kenya and Uganda and hence in the EAC region.

The challenges

Addressing climate change in the region faces social, economic, environmental and political challenges. It is even more complicated when such climate change concerns stride over a resource that is trans-boundary in nature. Within the region the following have been identified as major challenges requiring a concerted effort to collaborate in order to find short term and long term responses. These include:

- High population growth rate and over reliance on natural resources;
- Governance mechanism that have limited provisions for enforcement;
- Inadequate institutional and human capacities to formulate and implement programs;
- Limited financial resources;
- Lack of joint and coordinated management plans;
- Conflicts in environmental and socio-economic development interests of the countries and stakeholders;
- Emerging environmental and natural resources management threats such as over exploitation of natural resources; and
- Lack of awareness and ownership at community level and limited information about transboundary ecosystem management.

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What the East African Community can do

As a region, the East African Community needs to strengthen implementation and compliance to regional and national policy for environment and natural resources management. In addition, there is need to develop structures for multi-stakeholder involvement and cross-sectoral coordination to mainstream climate change adaptation in sectoral strategies and programs. Specifically, the EAC should:

- Identify competent regional institutions to assist in the institutionalization of EAC protocol on environment and natural resources management by regional governments as agreed at regional level;
- Develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for tracking the level of implementation of regional policies and strategies to ensure that they are effective and also provide information for informed decision making on the necessary corrective actions;
- Build regional institutional and human capacity for mainstreaming environmental and climate change measures in regional programs and for integrated transboundary ecosystem management;
- Develop approaches and guidelines for mainstreaming climate change adaptation at regional level in the management of transboundary ecosystems;
- Support countries to undertake risk assessment across various sectors to help develop strategies to reduce and prevent climate change related disasters;
- Promote and fund projects as a access cutting at the highest political level in the EAC;
- Mainstream climate change vulnerability assessment and climate change adaptation strategies into Strategic Environmental Assessment guidelines;
- Develop multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral coordination structures and approaches for transboundary ecosystem management at regional level that provide mechanism for the active participation and collaboration of various stakeholders and actors;
- Put in place operationalisation programs and project for building climate change policy legal frameworks including private sector, civil society organisations to enable them provide meaningful and well informed input in ongoing transboundary ecosystems management and climate change adaptation activities;
- Enhance regional capacities to sustainably promote investment in development projects based on shared natural resources and promotion of regional integration.

Most importantly, the East African Community should prioritize management of shared ecosystems through increased funding at regional level. Specifically, there should be earmarked financial resources for trans-boundary resources such as Lake Victoria, Mt. Elgon, Kagera River among others.