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ADRA Germany – Nature Based Solutions (NbS) Position Paper

Introduction

ADRA Germany, an international humanitarian and development cooperation organization, works through an interdisciplinary approach across its departments (from implementation, project design, policy frameworks, in-house logistics etc.), thereby facilitating knowledge exchange and communication of expertise. We are focusing on solving societal developmental and relief challenges by addressing them on all levels - from delivery of life-saving items to addressing underlying causes such as inequality in wealth distribution, large dependence of population on agriculture, degradation of forest and agricultural land etc. In view of this holistic approach, ADRA adheres to the Nature Based Solutions method in its projects and programs. This method is based on three pillars: environmental, social and economic. Its 8 criteria aim to “protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits” .



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This method is necessary in solving underlying causes of human suffering and ecosystems decline, together with similar holistic methodologies focusing on solving environmental and societal challenges at once, such as One Health, Green & Circular Economy, Planetary Health etc.

This position paper aims to show how NbS approach as whole and its eight criteria in particular (further elaborated on below) align with ADRA`s implementation approach and how it informs our program methodology. Despite our 3 main sectors of operations being not exclusively related to NbSs (livelihoods, education & health), ADRA sees it as important to define our position towards this approach and its use in our

livelihoods and biodiversity programs.

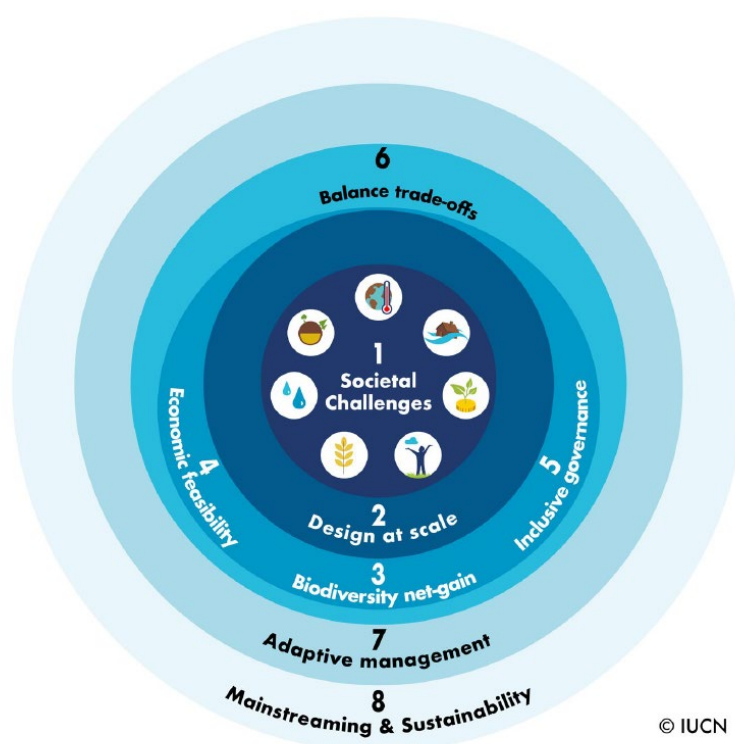
Background

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report shows once again that human-induced climate change is affecting health of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and lives of billions of people, especially those most vulnerable and less able to cope with disasters. With continuous Global warming, the world will face multiple climate hazards and increasing societal challenges. One of the solutions to the complexity of crossing planetary boundaries and underreaching society needs are NbS, which could contribute 37% of climate mitigation to meeting Paris climate goals.

The concept of Nature-based Solutions was elaborated during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations in 2009 and was further developed and became a cornerstone of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) programs. This method was developed as a response to multiple challenges related to crossing of main planetary borders: climate change, biodiversity loss etc. At the same time NbS put societal challenges and goals defined in SDGs (some examples are SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 11 Sustainable cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption & Production & etc) at the heart of its approach. The methodology is rooted in the idea of deep interconnection between planetary boundaries, ecosystem health including animal life and human well-being. This is reflected in the NbS goal, which aims to

“to support the achievement of society’s development goals and safeguard human well-being in ways that reflect cultural and societal values and enhance the resilience of ecosystems, their capacity for renewal and the provision of services; Nature-based Solutions are designed to address major societal challenges, such as food security, climate change, water security, human health, disaster risk, social and economic development”.

In 2020, the IUCN Global Standard for NbS and its implementation were published. They consist of eight criteria and 28 indicators. These aim to design and verify NbS in a systemic way. The standard is aimed to be a flexible tool, avoiding fixed thresholds and values, and aiming towards continuous learning and adaptation.



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Figure 1 The eight Criteria that make up the IUCN Global Standard for NbS

The four core factors composing NbSs are 1. Action driven and powered by nature; 2. NbS is designed as a response to societal challenge(s); 3. They provide multiple services/benefits, including biodiversity gain; 4. NbS are of high effectiveness and economic efficiency.

This approach was picked up by the international community and donors. The European Commission released its own definition of NbSs and provides a range of funding opportunities to facilitate NbSs implementation. Among other donors providing channels of funding for NbS approaches are the governments of Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, Sweden, as well as the Asian Development Bank, Green Climate Fund, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Two-thirds of the countries, who signed the Paris Agreement, also included NbS in their National Climate Plans. During G7 Ministerial Meetings in May 2021, NbS was recognized for its crucial role towards CCA & CCM as well as achievement of SDGs. The Federal Environment Ministry of Germany (BMU) is one of the contributors to Global Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) Fund aimed to support nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation. Studies and papers were published with support of the BMU and German Environment Agency (UBA) to better define the role of NbS in ecosystems protection and contribution to human well-being. KfW, German state-owned investment and

development bank, sees NbS as core of their environmental program. Diverse Universities from Oxford, Erasmus University Rotterdam to Technical University of Munich provide courses, studies and research projects on different aspects of NbS. NbS targets multi-level problems from biodiversity loss to lack of sustainable livelihoods and inadequate urban planning. Its effects are also multi-dimensional - from creating green jobs and business opportunities to reducing water and energy costs. At the same time, NbS design needs to be cost-efficient and limit potential trade-offs.

In the following part, this paper shows the development of ADRA Germany programs towards NbS and outlines already established methods and examples.

Below are some of NbS examples already reflected in ADRA projects and office set ups:



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- Using Effective Microorganisms during flood relief projects in Germany, allowing for cost-effective renovation as well as recovery of local ecosystems
- Reversing mangrove and coastal decline in Fiji through mangrove replanting, clean energy solutions, and green circular livelihoods incl. waste management system
- Soil regeneration programs connected with organic agriculture and green livelihoods in Laos and Mongolia
- Replacing fossil energy with clean renewable solar energy at the same time providing sustainable employment in solar technology installation to youth in Ethiopia

NbS and ADRA Germany

NbS are based on eight major criteria as named above. Below it is shown, how ADRA Germany`s focus in NbS aligns with some of these criteria:

Criterion 1: NbS effectively addresses societal challenges – In its programs ADRA Germany focuses on overlapping area between livelihoods and restoration of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. We recognize our responsibility in achieving SDGs/addressing societal challenges. In this case, specifically SDG 2, Zero Hunger. In our livelihood programs we are aiming to create sustainable income opportunities for vulnerable population, which are economically feasible and result in eco-systems regeneration (soil, mangroves, oceans etc.)

Criterion 3: NbS results in a net gain to biodiversity and ecosystem integrity – ADRA Germany is currently on the way to become climate-neutral organization. Part of it is creating our Carbon Reduction Plan, changing existing carbon-heavy unsustainable practices, and offsetting the remaining emissions through our projects. For such offsetting initiatives good initial analysis and constant monitoring of ecosystems (for example, in reforestation activities) is necessary. It is important to achieve recovery of ecosystem, which includes using indigenous plant varieties resilient to climate effects. It is also necessary to root this recovery in community ownership and connect it with income opportunities to create incentives in preserving the ecosystems.

Criterion 5: NbS are based on inclusive, transparent and empowering governance processes – ADRA Germany supports development of a community-based NbS, which is developed in cooperation with government (local, regional & national levels) and relevant stakeholders. Where possible, we pursue Multi Actor Partnerships and cooperation with the local civil societies and groups to establish cooperation (versus just consultation) approach and joined decision-making processes. This approach allows us to support organic law developments, circular economy coupled with sustainable waste management and community based coastal protection initiatives. By principle, we work through and with local Civil Society Organizations regardless of gender, age or social status.

Criterion 7: NbS are managed adaptively, based on evidence – As a learning and dynamic organization ADRA is moving towards adaptive management approach: monitoring & evaluation framework created in a joined exercise with project stakeholders and followed up continuously over the course of implementation. If observed that suggested NbS does not show required effectiveness or proves unable to be implemented due to external or internal circumstances, the project design is adjusted in a participative exercise with all project stakeholders.

Outlook

Faced with the global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, lack of productive employment and food insecurity, we need to apply more holistic solutions. One of these solutions is NbS. However, while using this approach one needs to be careful not to misunderstand and misuse the NbS term in activities which damage ecosystems (reforestation with mono tree species, using non-native vegetation not resilient to the local climate and invasive to its flora; project with ecosystems using too much of natural resources leading to further degradation, restoring ecosystems using too much water, to name a few); or establishing NbS which result in major trade-offs or losses from the indigenous/local population (loss of livelihoods). How to avoid these negative effects? It is important, that during the development of NbS full attention is given to all of its eight standards as opposed to fulfilling just a few of them. This, of course, makes this process more complex, but at the same time more holistic and sustainable.

Further work, that needs to be accomplished on the way to achieving sustainable NbS:

1. **More practical examples and documented good practices** according to the eight NbS criteria need to be shared within Global community to inform decision-makers and implementing bodies on what NbS is and what not.
2. **More donor-awareness and NbS funding opportunities need to be established.** If NbS is initially piloted on a more local level and proven successful, then approaches could be scaled up and translated into national and regional programs. These opportunities need to be made transparent. This would align with criteria 2 of NbS “Design informed by scale” and criteria 4 “NbS are economically viable”. It is also important to make sure this NbS funding does not come at the cost of reduction of other humanitarian and fragile-context financing. Since One Health and NbSs are used and prioritized by donors differently and sometime even interchangeably, it is also important to understand the differences and commonalities between these approaches and at the same time use joined funding to address above-mentioned societal challenges in a comprehensive way (see figure 1).
3. **More elaborated indicators, standardized approaches and assessment tools** needs to be developed and tested. ADRA acknowledges that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach in NbS and that the NbS standard is developed to be flexible and adaptable. However, with more projects incorporating NbS there is a bigger need for implementation tools and standardized indicators. This could help in informing design of the new projects as well as to comparing impact between NbS projects.
4. **Multi Actors Partnerships need to be created for better and more sustainable NbSs.** Just 100 companies are responsible for 71% of the world`s emissions . It is well documented and long proven that unsustainable business leads to habitat and species loss, soil and water contamination, soil degradation, to name just a few. It is essential to involve the global economy and companies in the NbS process by identifying their interest, minimizing possible trade-offs, and creating joined sustainable programs. This joined development process should be informed by the society and biodiversity first approach, and regulated by the relevant national and local policies.
5. **More research-based evidence on NbS impact is essential.** Further mapping and scientific evidence reporting on the NbS impact around the globe should be done in order to show the evidence of success as well as approach limitations. This evidence should be presented in an accessible way, so that a diverse audience (from communities to academy and national governments) can benefit from it.

Related ADRA Resources

- ADRA Carbon Reduction Guide
- ADRA Resilience Policy & Guidance
- ADRA Environmental and Climate Change Policy
- ADRA One Health Position Paper



Contact

Anna Neumann
ADRA Deutschland e.V.
Robert-Bosch-Straße 10 • 64331 Weiterstadt • Germany
Referentin
Tel: +49 (0) 6151 8115-46
E-Mail: anna.neumann@adra.de