

ISSUE BRIEF

THE BENEFITS OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR ADAPTATION IN USAID PROGRAMMING

USAID Climate Adaptation Support Activity

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are actions to protect, manage, and restore ecosystems (including managed systems such as agricultural lands) that effectively and adaptively address societal challenges. NbS approaches informed by climate information are key for climate adaptation. NbS are one of the five foundational principles of USAID’s Climate Strategy, which presents NbS as “essential to limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius and adapting to climate change.” The Climate Strategy calls for USAID to promote the use of NbS to “simultaneously reduce emissions and store carbon, adapt to the impacts of climate change, and conserve and restore ecosystems.”

The [USAID Climate Adaptation Support Activity \(CASA\)](#) recently worked with USAID to develop preliminary recommendations to enhance NbS integration in Agency adaptation programming and reporting. This effort involved interviews with USAID Mission and implementing partner staff across over 25 completed, active, and planned activities that use NbS. These activities spanned various program areas, including WASH, biodiversity conservation (forests, marine, and freshwater), adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR), sustainable landscapes, agriculture and food security, and resilience. The interviews found that USAID and its implementing partners generally recognize the benefits of NbS and actively incorporate these approaches into their activities, though only some of them have emphasized the benefits for adaptation.

The assessment process found strong support for NbS-related program interventions, with many Missions reporting that they already use NbS to achieve a range of development, humanitarian, and adaptation objectives. Considerations for furthering the use of NbS for adaptation include:

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP. USAID Missions and implementing partners have found that NbS approaches are generally accessible and manageable for communities because they build on familiar land and resource management practices. In many cases, NbS have also strengthened community governance processes for land resource planning, boosting local support. For example, [USAID’s Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience \(APIK\)](#) activity in Indonesia used climate vulnerability analyses to guide interventions across three provinces. Notably, communities led the decision-making process to select which NbS options to implement. Engaging with local governance processes facilitated the adoption of NbS and helped ensure sustainability after the project’s conclusion.

This document was prepared by the [USAID Climate Adaptation Support Activity \(CASA\)](#), which provides strategic support to USAID Missions, Bureaus, and Operating Units to advance effective adaptation mainstreaming and programming and to scale meaningful change. The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the view of USAID or the United States Government.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS. USAID Missions and implementing partners have often found NbS to be a cost-effective approach compared with alternatives. For example, [USAID's Safe Water](#) activity in the Philippines enhances water security through improved access to resilient WASH services, climate-resilient water resource management, and strengthened sector governance. The activity incorporates NbS, such as constructing bamboo dikes and planting bamboo on riverbanks, to combat erosion and reduce flooding at a lower cost. This approach has also garnered support from the local government, which is exploring ways to expand its flood control budget by incorporating NbS and green infrastructure.

BRIDGING DIFFERENT INTERESTS. USAID Missions and implementing partners observed that NbS can bring together diverse stakeholders, including communities, the private sector, and government, to achieve diverse objectives. For example, [USAID's TSIRO Alliance \(Thriving and Sustainable Investments for Land Restoration and Economic Opportunity\) in Madagascar](#) () collaborates with local organizations and private sector entities to boost cacao production in Madagascar. The Alliance aims to scale up climate-resilient spice and cacao production models, alleviating pressure on protected forests and enhancing farmer productivity and incomes while also supporting private-sector production and marketing goals.

THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS. USAID Missions and implementing partners reported integrating NbS interventions into both development and humanitarian portfolios. For example, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funds initiatives addressing the root causes of food insecurity, such as degraded agricultural and natural landscapes, climate variability, changing weather patterns, and natural hazards. Interviews with these activities highlight that NbS-related humanitarian interventions foster community ownership and connect various stakeholders, enhancing the overall effectiveness of humanitarian responses.

The enthusiasm among USAID and its stakeholders for NbS underscores the potential to leverage these interventions to advance both climate adaptation and broader development goals. To further this impact, USAID and its implementing partners can:

- ▶ Actively involve communities in the planning, implementation, and management of NbS;
- ▶ Foster stakeholder arrangements that enhance benefits and participation; and
- ▶ Consider the scale of activities to ensure impact of and engagement on NbS.



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