



Ecosystem Approach

Managing Conservation and Sustainable Use in an Equitable Way

The ecosystem approach is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. Essentially, it is a way of looking at and managing everything together. It recognizes that humans, with their cultural diversity, are an integral component of ecosystems.

The term “ecosystem” can refer to any functioning unit at any scale and should be determined by the problem being addressed. It could, for example, be a grain of soil, a pond, a forest, a biome or the entire biosphere. According to the CBD definition: "Ecosystem' means a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit."

The ecosystem approach requires adaptive management to deal with the complex and dynamic nature of ecosystems and the absence of complete knowledge or understanding of their functioning. Ecosystem processes are often non-linear, and the outcome of such processes often shows time-lags. The resulting discontinuities lead to surprise and uncertainty. Management must be adaptive in order to respond to such uncertainties and contain elements of "learning-by-doing" or research feedback. There is no single way to implement the ecosystem approach, as it depends on local, provincial, national, regional or global conditions. The ecosystem approach is the primary framework for implementation of all activities under the Convention.

Why it is important:

- It provides means to assess the gains made in one area against losses which may accrue in other.
- It promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.
- The many components of biodiversity control the stores and flows of energy, water and nutrients within ecosystems and provide resistance to major disturbances.
- Benefits that flow from the array of functions given by biodiversity at the ecosystem level provide a basis of environmental security and sustainability.
- Ecosystem processes and functions are complex and variable, and their level of uncertainty is increased by the interaction with social constructs, which need to be better understood.
- It promotes the use of all available information and participatory decision-making, which seeks win-win outcomes for all stakeholders.

What the CBD is doing:

The ecosystem approach provides a framework for the elaboration and implementation of all the various thematic and cross-cutting programmes of work under the Convention. The 12 principles of the ecosystem approach were adopted at COP 5 (decision V/6), when the Executive Secretary was requested to collect, analyse, compare and disseminate relevant case-studies and lessons learned. An expert workshop was organized in 2003 in Montreal, Canada, to review the analysis of case-studies, develop proposals for the refinement of the principles and operational guidance of the ecosystem approach, and clarify the conceptual basis of the ecosystem approach in relation to the concept of sustainable forest



management. This further guidance was adopted at COP 7. Moreover, to help practitioners implement the ecosystem approach and share experiences, the Ecosystem Approach Sourcebook was created and is continuously updated <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/sourcebook/>. COP 9 will undertake an in-depth review of the application of the ecosystem approach to determine progress to date, what remains to be done and how best to achieve it.

For More information:

The Ecosystem Approach: <https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem>

CBD COP decisions: <https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/decisions.shtml>

Documents: <https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/documents.shtml>



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