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## People-Nature Alliances.

### ENABLING ECOSYSTEM-BASED ADAPTATION IN GUATEMALA

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GTAbe members during the first national EbA Forum, 2019. © TMG Research gGmbH

This info brief makes a case for a multi-stakeholder approach to scaling Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) to climate change. It describes the emergence of a multi-stakeholder platform in Guatemala, the “EbA Technical Group”. Thanks to close collaboration across sectors, the platform is creating enabling governance conditions for effective climate adaptation.

### Guatemala: a megadiverse yet highly vulnerable country

The country takes its name from the Nahuatl word *Cuauhtēmallān*. It means “place of many trees” and alludes to Guatemala’s inherent biological abundance. However, today, Guatemala has one of the highest deforestation rates in Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

It is also one of the countries most affected by weather extremes<sup>2</sup> and most vulnerable to climate change.

Drought and storm-related harvest failures, habitat destruction, degradation of ecosystems and the services they provide (such as water, food, or wood) severely affect human livelihoods and cultural identities.

Increasing climate vulnerability and poverty drive a vicious cycle of social and economic inequality that hits the poorest segments of society hardest.

### Ecosystem-based Adaptation as a promising adaptation strategy

In order to respond to this delicate environmental and socio-economic situation, Guatemala’s government has made far-reaching national and international commitments. Environmental goals, such as recognising the economic value of natural resources and their importance in providing food security, are integrated into the National Development Plan (Plan K’atun 2032).

By adopting the Sustainable Development Goals and ratifying the Paris Agreement and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Guatemala is building the legislative and political foundations for Nature-based Solutions like Ecosystem-based Adaptation.

“Giving value to ecosystems is one of the ten national development priorities that were identified after the integration of the national development plan KATUN and the sustainable development goals”

Keyla Gramajo, National Planning Secretariat, SEGEPLAN 2019.

## EbA as a holistic approach to preserving human-nature systems

EbA relies on nature and biodiversity to (1) reduce climate vulnerability of human communities and (2) strengthen the integrity of ecosystems in a symbiotic way. It emphasizes processes that directly involve and include natural resource users in decision-making to manage and benefit from their surroundings.<sup>3</sup> EbA improves ecosystem functioning through measures such as reforestation and sustainable forest management that support water buffering and aquifer recharge to regulate the impacts of droughts and improve harvests. Another example is community-led restoration of mangroves to counter coastal erosion and floods.

EbA contributes to wider socio-economic development beyond mere adaptation policies, for example by enhancing the livelihoods and health of local communities.<sup>4</sup> It can address adaptation and mitigation needs at the same time and is often praised for its cost-effectiveness. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and others claim that each US dollar invested in ecosystem restoration (restoration, conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems forming the basis of EbA)<sup>5</sup> generates more than 9 USD in return, with substantial co-benefits in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation.<sup>6</sup>

**“Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) is the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall adaptation strategy to help people to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change”**

UN Convention on Biological Diversity, 2009



Community-run seed bank. Preserving and restoring locally adapted genetic diversity of corn. San Francisco, Huehuetenango. © TMG Research gGmbH

## The challenge of bringing successful adaptation projects to scale

Guatemala has the largest number of adaptation and climate change-related projects in Central America (around 70).<sup>7</sup> However, the quantity of initiatives does not seem to translate into a significant reduction in the climatic vulnerabilities of the country's ecosystems and human inhabitants.

On the one hand, structural barriers and short-term interventions can impede the success of local

“Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) is a social, intercultural, learning and capacity-building process that fosters sustainable development through climate change adaptation and the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in an appropriate governance framework, capable of scaling up from the geographical level of municipality or micro-basin”.

Ecosystem-based Adaptation Technical Group (GTABE), 2020.

adaptation projects. A lacking application of laws and regulations for natural resource management, societal inequalities, distorted land distribution patterns<sup>8</sup>, and extreme poverty can undermine the large-scale uptake and dispersion of effective adaptation measures. On the other hand, knowledge gaps between local realities and national decision-making impede the inclusion of local implementation experience into the design of national policies and programmes. Continued support for workable adaptation solutions falls short.

An *enabling environment* that fosters learning from community-led initiatives and addresses structural barriers is needed to promote sustainable development and effective adaptation strategies. In the context of EbA, we define an enabling environment as the institutional, political, technical, social, and financial requirements for broad, long-term, and effective adoption of EbA measures. To this end, a participatory roadmap process to ensure an enabling environment for EbA was set up in Guatemala.

## Developing a roadmap to upscale EbA in Guatemala through a multi-stakeholder group

With the joint vision to make EbA work for Guatemala, a multi-stakeholder platform, called the EbA Technical Group (Grupo Técnico de Adaptación basada en Ecosistema, GTAbE), was formed as an initiative of the Climate-SDG Integration project. Since May 2019, the GTAbE has been working to develop a roadmap for scaling EbA across sectors and institutions. The group advises leading ministries about ongoing EbA initiatives, and fosters inter-institutional learning and collaboration. The GTAbE transcends institutional silos. It is now embedded in the National System for Climate Change Sciences (SGCCC), and provides a trust-based platform where members meet regularly in accordance with a jointly defined workplan to exchange experiences and explore ways to enhance the efficiency of climate adaptation efforts in Guatemala.

## Through the roadmap process, the GTAbE works to create an enabling environment for upscaling EbA in Guatemala:

... **By positioning EbA among key actors and strengthening institutional capacities.** One example of this is the first National EbA Forum that took place in November 2019. It was a joint endeavour involving more than 14 institutions, most of which are represented in the GTAbE ([blog on the EbA Forum](#), [Video on the Forum](#)). The forum provided space for an exchange of experiences related to EbA implementation and policy-making as well as mutual learning. Key state and non-state actors signed a policy declaration in which they recognize *“... the importance of Ecosystem-based Adaptation in support of sustainable development, poverty reduction, the promotion of ecosystem resilience, and climate change mitigation, as well as in meeting the country's commitments to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Therefore, we propose (to) work on the enabling conditions to promote the scaling up of EbA at the national level to address climate change.”*

... **By institutionalising the EbA Technical Group.** The GTAbE was incorporated in February 2020 within the Guatemalan System for Climate Change Science (SGCCC) and now forms part of the government's Working Group on Adaptation

The group promotes vertical and horizontal integration. Currently, the GTAbE represents more than 30 institutional members, with a wide range of stakeholders drawn from government agencies, civil society organizations, indigenous groups, the private sector, academia, NGOs, and international cooperation agencies. Thanks to this wide representation, the group is helping to bridge the gap between national policy and local implementation. The platform offers space to EbA practitioners to present their proven adaptation practices as well as the challenges they encountered. These practical lessons, in turn, inform relevant policies and programmes.



Panelists during first national EbA Forum, Antigua, Guatemala, 2019. © TMG Research gGmbH

and Vulnerability. The SGCCC's mandate to bring scientific information into political decision-making corresponds with the GTAbE's objective to create a policy framework for EbA scaling through knowledge dissemination and policy advice.

... **By mainstreaming EbA in existing policies and political instruments related to climate change.** EbA as a viable adaptation strategy and the GTAbE as a key inter-institutional platform will be included in Guatemala's third national communication to the UNFCCC. Further, the GTAbE aims to include EbA as a transversal topic in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement and the National Climate Change Action Plan (PANCC).

... **By developing monitoring and accounting strategies of EbA.** The GTAbE aims to develop a coherent set of indicators to measure and report on EbA benefits to national and international actors, thereby helping to ensure accountability for state investments and compliance with national and international commitments.

### ... By establishing a financing strategy for EbA.

Recognising that an EbA upscaling strategy requires a broad vision that goes beyond small projects, the GTAbE has set out to develop a viable financing mechanism that can attract international as well as national and regional funding. The inclusion of EbA in various policies and instruments is crucial in creating credible project portfolios to present to donors.

... By attracting the private sector. The GTAbE has attracted private-sector actors such as the Guatemalan Chamber of Food and Beverages (CGAB) and the Guatemalan Chamber of Industry (CIG). They and their members are exploring ways to commit to EbA in their day-to-day business, starting with a self-evaluation questionnaire on EbA activities.

## Roadmap for upscaling EbA – 8 steps for enabling governance conditions

- 1 Measure the impacts and benefits of EbA in a coherent way.
- 2 Establish a financing mechanism for EbA
- 3 Strengthen capacities for EbA in organizations and institutions
- 4 Incorporate EbA into Guatemala's national communications to the UNFCCC
- 5 Include EbA as a transversal topic in the NDC review
- 6 Include EbA in country strategies and positions for multilateral agreements
- 7 Position EbA to encourage its adoption by key actors
- 8 Include EbA in political instruments related to climate change

## The way forward – a roadmap for upscaling EbA

The GTAbE has shown that strategic alliances and inter-institutional learning can leverage governance conditions to bring inclusive approaches such as EbA to scale. The development of a roadmap for upscaling EbA, under the leadership of the GTAbE, has paved the way for scaling EbA in Guatemala. The roadmap is the result of more than a year of interaction, joint reflection, and multi-sector commitments to harnessing the power of nature for the country's development and resilience to climate shocks.

The work of the GTAbE, including the development of a roadmap, marks the beginning of a long-term process to build an enabling environment for upscaling EbA in Guatemala. As a result, Guatemala can play a leading role in the global Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and EbA movements. To make EbA work for Guatemala and its people, continuous political and social support is required. The roadmap will be signed by the relevant ministries and stakeholders and needs to translate into effective action.

# Members of the GTAbE

## Government:

Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (MARN), Ministerio de Agricultura Ganadería y Alimentación (MAGA), Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Guatemala (MINEX), Secretaria de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia (SEGEPLAN), Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (CONAP), Instituto Nacional de Bosques (INAB), Instituto Nacional de Sismología, Vulcanología, Meteorología e Hidrología (INSIVUMEH)

## Civil Society:

Asociación de Cooperación para el Desarrollo Rural de Occidente (CDRO), Asociación de Organizaciones de los Cuchumatanes (ASOCUCH), Asociación Guatemalteca de Alcaldes y Autoridades Indígenas (AGAAI), Mesa Nacional Indígena de Cambio de Climático (MICC), Mancomunidad Copán Chortí (MCC)

## NGOs:

Mitij Ixoq' Association for Sustainable Development (ADIMI), Centro Gutemalteco de Producción más Limpia (CGP + L), Instituto Privado de Investigación sobre Cambio Climático (ICC),

Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza (FDN), Asociación Ak'Tenamit, Asociación Sotzil

## Academia:

Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG), Instituto de Agricultura, Recursos Naturales y Ambiente (IARNA/URL), Universidad Galileo (Galileo), Instituto de investigación y proyección sobre ciencia y tecnología (Poner INCYT/URL), Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE)

## Private sector:

Guatemalan Chamber of Food and Beverages (CGAB) and the Guatemalan Chamber of Industry (CIG)

## International institutions:

World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Rainforest Alliance (RA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Participants during first national EbA Forum, Antigua, Guatemala, 2019  
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## About the project

The GTAbE was initiated in May 2019 under the “[Climate-SDG Integration project](#)” (financed by the International Climate Initiative) and implemented by the think tank [TMG Research](#), [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\) Guatemala/Mesoamérica](#) and the [Association for Integral Development Mitij Ixoq' \(ADIMI\)](#). Aiming to develop synergies between the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, the project supports EbA as a way to both reduce vulnerabilities at community and landscape level and to support governments in meeting their global commitments. One of its main pillars is to develop a roadmap of strategic activities, commitments, and a common vision to upscale EbA in Guatemala.

For more information about our project, visit our website: [www.tmg-thinktank.com/iki](http://www.tmg-thinktank.com/iki)



1 Sales et al. (2017). On the way to restore Guatemala's degraded lands: Creating governance conditions. *World Development Perspectives*. DOI: 10.1016/j.wdp.2016.11.010 2 Guatemala was ranked 83th in the Germanwatch 2020 global Climate Risk Index. 3 CBD, *Draft EbA and Eco-DRR guidelines* p.1 CBD, (accessed 27th July 2018) 4 CBD, *Draft EbA and Eco-DRR guidelines* p. 5 (accessed 27th July 2018) 5 IUCN. Ecosystem-based Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation. Website (accessed 09 October 2020). 6 Climate Action (June 2020). Nature-based Recovery: A path to a global green recovery. Can a nature-based solutions approach become an integral part of the global economic recovery? *Webinar*. 7 IUCN (2018). Tendencias, enfoques y oportunidades de los proyectos sobre cambio climático y adaptación en Mesoamérica. *Serie 4 Número 2, Evidencia*. 8 In Guatemala, the largest 2.5% of farms occupy nearly two-thirds of agricultural land while 90% of the farms are on only one-sixth of the agricultural land. <https://www.land-links.org/country-profile/guatemala/>

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