UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Adapting with Nature: A global call to action on nature-based solutions for water resilience (Event ID: OS227)

March 22, 2023 2:00pm Nature Hub

Organized by:
Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA); CEO Water Mandate and the Pacific Institute; Erica Gies, Independent Journalist; Felicia Marcus, William C. Landreth Visiting Fellow, Stanford University; Forest Trends; Deutsch Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ); International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD); The Nature Conservancy; Water for People

Background on the event
The adoption and integration of nature-based solutions (NbS) for climate change adaptation has rapidly accelerated over the past ten years, spurred by an increasing recognition of the need for adaptation strategies that are both strong enough to withstand greater extremes and flexible enough to adapt as conditions or priorities change. However, this increased use of NbS has been largely limited to solutions focused on terrestrial or marine ecosystems. Freshwater ecosystems, the most degraded and undervalued of all of Earth's ecosystems, are largely left out of the conversation. This despite the fact that nearly all NbS - from upland forests to urban parks to coastal wetlands and tidal mangroves - are themselves freshwater dependent.

Adapting to climate change means dealing with more frequent and intense extremes related to the hydrological cycle: increased periods of aridity and drought, floods, storms, and sea level rise. By improving the ability of our natural systems to capture, store, channel, and release water, we can help our communities thrive despite these challenges.

Freshwater NbS such as wetland protection, aquifer recharge, floodplain restoration, or stormwater recharge zones are being tested and utilized in cities and rural areas from Australia to Zambia, but this work is being done largely in silos. As a global community of organizations, institutions, and individuals working in this space, we are using the occasion of the UN 2023 Water Conference to launch a global Call to Action on Nature-based Solutions for Water Resilience.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- The clearest impacts for climate change are around water systems and nature needs to be a critical part of the solution needed to adapt to these impacts

- Funding and policy around NbS to improve water security have implications for improving economic, health, and development drivers
- Language, knowledge, and understanding of NbS potential are a barrier for adoption/ integration within water infrastructure and adaptation planning
- We need to provide knowledge and frameworks that are helpful at the local level, that support local evidence and capacity and include the incorporation of local and indigenous knowledge
- We need to build capacity to plan for, design and deliver on NbS projects at scale in order to meet the demand for NbS created by new funding and policy changes
- Increase collaboration between the public and private sectors is necessary to ensure that all are able to benefit from NbS.

Water Action Agenda

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Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

Framed around the five pillars of the ground breaking Nature-based Solutions Roadmap launched by the U.S. Government at COP27, we commit to advancing the science, policy, and practice of inclusive, locally-led freshwater adaptation solutions through the following levers of change:

1. **Update local and national policies and regulatory frameworks**
    - Examples from our work: ProCuenca and Paisajes Resilientes in Bolivia (GIZ), the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy (California, USA), the Water Tracker for National Climate Planning tool (AGWA)
2. **Unlock climate finance for NbS**
    - Examples from our work: The Benefit Accounting of NBS for Watersheds Tool (CEO Water Mandate) and the Blantyre-Mulanje Water Fund (Water for People, TNC)
3. **Build capacity and understanding of locally-appropriate freshwater NbS**
    - Examples from our work: NBS mainstreaming in the Kafue River basin, Zambia (GIZ)
4. **Integrate NbS into existing and new infrastructure, planning, and design**
    - Examples from our work: Peru's Reconstrucción con Cambios (Forest Trends)
5. **Contribute to expanding research, knowledge, innovation, and learning**
    - Examples from our work: Water Fund Toolbox (TNC), Nature for Climate Adaptation Initiative (IISD), Water Always Wins: Thriving in an age of drought and deluge (Erica Gies)

As a first step, we will organize a series of events at global meetings around this work, aiming to raise awareness, expand opportunities for disseminating best practices and lessons learned from around the world and identify specific opportunities for collaboration around these five pillars. We will also be exploring additional ways to influence and advance NbS for resilience through joint research, publications, or projects. We invite all to join our global initiative. To learn more, please reach out to either Kari Vigerstol (kvigerstol@tnc.org) or Ingrid Timboe (itimboe@alliance4water.org).