

# WHAT IS NEEDED IN SOUTHERN AFRICA TO ENSURE EQUITABLE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS?

Workshop summary 23 February 2022 · [Website](#)



## About the workshop

Together with policy makers, researchers and implementers from across Southern Africa, we explored and reflected on what is needed to ensure equitable nature-based solutions (NbS) in the region ([view recording](#)).



We presented initial research findings on equity and NbS for the region ([view recording](#), [NbS and equity framework](#) and details alongside).



We heard reflections from inspiring thought leaders from research, policy and practice across the region with a focus on insights from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and South Africa ([view recording](#), details on the [next page](#)).



We then held deeper discussions with all workshop participants in breakout groups ([details on page 3 of this workshop summary](#)).

## Key workshop messages



✓ Equity should be central in the process of working with nature to address societal challenges no matter what terminology is used to refer to the actions and interventions.



✓ We need more practical examples of what equity does and does not look like in existing or past NbS related projects/programmes.



✓ Knowledge product needs will be very different depending on where and by whom the product will be used.

## Key research findings

*As presented during the workshop*

Link to: [full presentation](#) · [NbS and equity framework](#)

### A framework to think about NbS and equity

- Definitions and framings of NbS lack a focus on the importance and integration of scales and differentiation.
- For example, NbS should address societal challenges, but for whom? NbS should improve well-being and biodiversity, but for whom and where?
- We fill this gap by developing a [NbS and equity framework](#) (also [page 4](#) of this workshop summary) which emphasises that solutions to global societal challenges can only be equitable by focusing on equity as a process in NbS at a local level.

### Negative impacts of NbS and inequitable distribution of NbS benefits in Southern Africa

- Many NbS in Southern Africa make efforts to or claim to incorporate equity dimensions, be participatory, collaborative or community-based, and target societal goals around local economic and social development and sustainable livelihoods.
- However, we found that negative and unequal distribution of benefits of NbS occur regionally, with the most vulnerable and those at a local level accruing the fewest benefits.
- Key constraints to achieving social equity in NbS are socio/cultural, economic and governance.

*These are initial findings from a systematic review of the Southern African literature which will be finalised later in 2022 and shared widely.*

### Insights on NbS and equity from policy makers, researchers and practitioners in Southern Africa

- Respondents to the [TES NbS online survey](#) are working across the region on a range of NbS types including Sustainable Management (e.g., Conservation Agriculture, Agroforestry, Sustainable Natural Resource Management); Protection (e.g., Public, Private, Community, Transboundary Protected Areas); Restoration (e.g., Ecosystem Restoration, Reforestation, Rehabilitation); and Creation (e.g., Afforestation).
- Almost all respondents indicated that equity was a focus or concern in their work.
- Greater than 70% of respondents felt there was a need for Southern African evidence-based knowledge products to support the inclusion of equity into NbS.

# Panelist Reflections



## DR IDA DJENONTIN

Researcher, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science

*"How do we balance biodiversity and climate change mitigation needs alongside protecting local natural resource based livelihoods, food security and socio-economic development. Focusing on these aspects is where the equity question lies."*

Drawing on her PhD research in Malawi, Ida highlighted four critical elements for supporting equity in NbS:

- 1) Enabling governance:** governance structures contribute to the creation or resolution of conflict and power imbalances. It is important to examine the context specific governmental structures for NbS.
- 2) Secure and gender-responsive rights and access:** we need to guarantee or safeguard secure rights over resources that are being conserved or restored and ensure gender-responsive access. Existing gender norms limit access for women's input into restoration discussions.
- 3) Integrate local context specific needs:** our biggest challenge is how to integrate local context specific community needs into NbS. One needs to embrace the idea of landscape dialogues to help alleviate conflicting values and explore consensus.
- 4) Avoid north-south inequities:** we need to break down north-south inequities through the power of discourses.



## SARAH SAVORY

Holistic Management Consultant and Educator

*"Social, economic and environmental issues are inseparable. By broadening our perspective at the point of our decisions, we make these decisions focus on the full complexity of the decision."*

Drawing on her experience teaching holistic decision making and ecological literacy to children and teachers, Sarah highlighted that it is **critical to teach holistic management to decision makers** in a simplified way.

The symptoms of environmental collapse often fall under three categories: social, economic and environmental. Our current management of the environment is failing as it considers these categories independently of each other. But our **physical and financial stability depends entirely on ecological health**.

Past decision-making approaches are the root cause of our current problems. We then attempt to use the same decision-making processes to try to solve these new problems, creating more problems.

Holistic management encourages a shift to **new ways of making decisions that consider money, people and nature** together, and include the complexity around these factors.



## MIKATEKO SITHOLE

Deputy Director, Climate Change Adaptation, Department of Environmental Affairs, South Africa

*"Nature-positive policies must talk to the needs of the people on ground..."*

*"To promote social equity in nature-positive policies and interventions, there needs to be overall inclusion of local authorities and utilisation of existing social structures."*

Drawing on her experience with multiple on-the-ground projects and working at the interface of science and policy, Mikateko explained that we should **forge forward with nature-positive policies** because they have the potential to support local communities, increase climate resilience and restore our ecosystems.

But these policies and interventions must relate to the needs of local people. We need to **push for a contextually-rich and bottom-up understanding of who are most vulnerable** and how they respond to their vulnerabilities. Implementers should not impose their understandings on a community.

There has been a strong focus on bridging the interface between science and policy to inform South Africa's approach to climate change adaptation. But **we still need more information**. We need research that increases the understanding of how to best implement NbS. This research should include a focus on what types of impacts we should expect on biodiversity, local communities and non-local communities when we take one approach over another.

We should also turn to the **power of enabling partnerships** to ensure equity in these interventions.



## DR RODGERS LUBILO

Community Outreach Director for Frankfurt Zoological Society Zambia Programme & Chairperson for the Community Leaders Network of Southern Africa

*"Working with government and communities, one can ensure equity within resource management."*

Drawing on his wide-ranging experience in Community-Based Nature Resource Management (CBNRM) across Southern Africa, Rodgers explained that **CBNRM is a common NbS approach** to address issues of conservation and socio-economic development in Southern Africa, and in particular in **Zambia**.

The type of **organisations and structures underlying CBNRM are critical to promote equity**. In Zambia there are key CBNRM examples where the organisational structures promote social enterprise while considering fairness and equity for various stakeholders.

Government policies in Zambia have been able to create programs that work at the local landscape level to manage and **protect natural assets while still ensuring benefits for the community**.

By assuring these structures are **practically organised** (given the available capacity), and **developing mechanisms for sharing financial and non-financial benefits** one can work towards social equity.



# Key Messages from Breakout Discussions

**Discussion topic:** Equity enablers\* and related knowledge products\*\* to support equity in NbS design, planning and implementation

- We need to know what principles and processes can ensure that contextual variability is captured in NbS
  - Context is often very different between regions but also between site level projects but it is critical when trying to target those most vulnerable in NbS and related equity processes.
  - How do we account for this?
- We need mechanisms to align donor funding requirements to on-the-ground values so that project goals speak to community goals
  - We need to be able to persuade funders to provide funds and time to earn trust and to ensure inclusive engagement on the ground.
- We need practical approaches to target the most vulnerable and bring in the most vulnerable groups using 'safe and trusting environments' at the early design stages of NbS.
- We need guidance on how to incorporate the most marginalised into participation processes across NbS design, planning and implementation.
- We need pragmatic tools to deal with differences and opinions across and between different social groups, especially when power dynamics are at play
  - How do we ensure inclusive engagement in NbS processes?
  - How do we know who are those most vulnerable?
- We need more practical examples of what equity does and does not look like in NbS.
- We need options to account for constraints to equity in NbS that do not stifle the NbS process
  - Not all constraints can be overcome at a project or programme level (e.g., structural, national governance), but how do we work within these constraints while ensuring equity at the local level?
- We need knowledge products to be developed for specific target groups working within the NbS space
  - Knowledge products should be based on the context and needs relating to different groups.
- We need knowledge products that promote equitable knowledge sharing.
- We need knowledge products to harness technological advancements in terms of formats and ease of use.
- We need awareness and capacity building related to using new digital platforms and other technological advancements to support equity in NbS.
- We need tools to understand and predict where and by whom impacts of NbS will be felt.
- We need more clarification of whether the focus should be on equity as a process in or equity as an outcome of NbS and how to practically achieve these.

**\*An equity enabler** is a “thing, process or condition” that makes social equity outcomes of NbS at a local level possible.

**\*\*Knowledge products** carry knowledge, enable action and include data, data syntheses, expert and/or traditional advice/insight. Examples include (among others) guidance material, tools, frameworks, case studies, best practice and dashboards. These can come in a variety of formats.

## More about TES NbS

The Towards Equitable & Sustainable Nature-based Solutions (TES NbS) research project aims to support decision making, planning and implementation processes to ensure that NbS are more equitable and sustainable through greater awareness of the opportunities, constraints and limits to NbS.

**We test the following ideas specific to the Southern African region:**

- NbS and related equity aspects are much more complex and contested than what is implied in dominant narratives
- Negative impacts on social equity can happen regardless of the type of NbS
- Outcomes are dependent on context and particularities of place
- Outcomes could be impacted by changes in the climate

## We need your help!

The vast majority of workshop participants and survey respondents work in NbS in South Africa. We really want to extend our reach beyond South Africa and into the policy space, and need your help to do that. If you have not already done so please:

- Complete and share our [online survey](#)
- Email Petra Holden (principal investigator): [petra.holden@uct.ac.za](mailto:petra.holden@uct.ac.za)
- [Subscribe](#) to receive research and knowledge products

# HOW CAN A FOCUS ON EQUITY IN NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS HELP TO ADDRESS SOCIETAL CHALLENGES FROM THE GROUND UP?

Petra Holden, Tali Hoffman and Sheona Shackleton · February, 2022



Developing a nuanced understanding of social equity can be complex and slow. Yet, working from the ground up to achieve social equity can address local societal challenges while ultimately contributing to addressing broader societal challenges and achieving global Sustainable Development Goals.

## EQUITABLE SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL SOCIETAL CHALLENGES REQUIRE A FOCUS ON EQUITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

### WHAT ARE EQUITABLE NbS?

Equitable NbS are fair, respectful, socially responsive, and socially inclusive. They engender wellbeing for the groups and individuals situated at or near to the NbS site, providing more for those who need more.



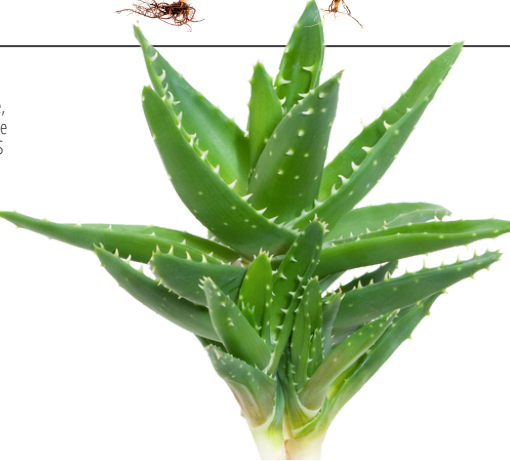
#### MITIGATE DISBENEFITS

particularly for the most vulnerable



#### PROMOTE EQUITABLE BENEFITS

particularly for those that need more



### SOCIAL EQUITY AS AN OUTCOME

### LANDSCAPES & ECOSYSTEMS



#### Natural/Semi-natural

Ecosystems (relatively self-sustaining or undisturbed) that are valued for biodiversity and the services they provide, such as savannas, grasslands, shrublands or rangelands



#### Farming/Cultural

Landscapes modified by humans for food and non-food production, recreation and other cultural uses, such as farmland (cropland and grazing lands) or recreational parks



#### Built/Semi-built

Human-built or engineered areas or spaces existing in transformed environments or representing transformed environments, such as green roofs and artificial wetlands

### NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are interventions and actions carried out within a variety of landscapes and ecosystems to address a range of societal challenges. NbS aim to improve biodiversity and human well-being relative to the pre-NbS state.



Other terms related to all or some of these categories include ecosystem-based adaptation and community-based natural resource management (among others).



#### Protection

Natural or semi-natural lands demarcated through effective or legal means where activities are governed by statutory or non-statutory processes, such as nature reserves, sacred forests or conservancies



#### Restoration

Degraded or farming/cultural lands returned to some prior natural or semi-natural state, through activities such as alien plant clearing, dambo restoration and species reintroduction



#### Sustainable management

Maintenance or return of specific ecosystem functions to sustain or enhance productivity and resilience, such as agroforestry, harvesting quotas or cover crops



#### Creation

Ecosystem-like characteristics created to harness specific ecosystem-like functions, such as planting vegetation on roofs, and constructing artificial wetlands or permeable pavements

### INCORPORATE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF EQUITY



#### Recognition

Recognition, respect and representation of local or traditional knowledge systems, different cultural identities, and statutory and customary rights in NbS



#### Procedural

Inclusive and effective participation in rule and decision-making for NbS, transparency and access to information in appropriate forms, access to justice, and access to a consultative process to negotiate conditions of NbS



#### Distributional

Fairness of distribution of benefits of NbS between different groups, including current and future generations, and the mitigation of burdens of the NbS

### SOCIAL EQUITY AS A PROCESS

focusing on the most vulnerable during the design, planning and implementation of NbS interventions and actions



#### Financial

Access to financial resources



#### Physical

Non-climate physical or biogeographical barriers



#### Information

Awareness or access to information or technology



#### Social/Cultural

Social norms, identity, place attachment, beliefs, worldviews, values, awareness, education, social justice, social support, history



#### Governance

Informal, customary or legal, and formalised: laws, regulations, procedural requirements, institutional arrangements, tenure systems



#### Human capacity

Individual, organisational, and societal capabilities including training, education, and skill development



#### Environmental

Disease, illness, temperature, precipitation, salinity, extreme events (droughts, floods, storms), including the effects of climate change on these aspects



#### Structural

Deeply entrenched, systemic and macro-level socio-political and economic biases that perpetuate poverty, inequality and inequity across scales

### KEY LITERATURE

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