



Eswatini Environment Fund: Funding climate change adaptation and biodiversity actions at the local level

Briefing Note

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Introduction

The Eswatini Environment Fund (EEF) aims “to promote environmental sustainability at the grassroots level” in Eswatini. The fund is managed by the Eswatini Environment Authority as part of its mandate to provide a clean, healthy, and safe environment for all by working with all stakeholders in the Kingdom of Eswatini (Eswatini Environment Authority, 2022a).

This briefing note provides a description of the EEF and emphasizes how small investments in projects at the local level through the fund have impacted communities and improved their adaptive capacity. It highlights the success in Eswatini in bridging adaptation and biodiversity planning and providing synergetic financing for both adaptation and biodiversity actions at the local level. The briefing note concludes with suggestions on how the fund can potentially support priority adaptation actions at the local level, as identified through Eswatini’s National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process (see Box 1).

This briefing note draws on information collected through community consultations and focus group discussions held in 2022 in the Hhohho and Shiselweni administrative regions.¹ Community members engaged in the consultations included *umsingisi wekutimilela* (senior citizens), representatives from traditional authorities (such as *Bandlancane*, community development committees), *tinyanga* (traditional healers), *lutsango* (women) representatives, and youth representatives. The local-level input was complemented by information collected through a desk review of relevant documents.

Box 1. Eswatini's NAP process

Eswatini started developing its first NAP in 2022, led by the Climate Change Unit, Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs (MTEA). The NAP process offers a way forward for implementing the adaptation priorities set out in Eswatini's 2021 nationally determined contribution (NDC), which focused on five priority sectors: water, ecosystems and biodiversity, health, infrastructure, and agriculture, and the cross-cutting area of disaster risk reduction. The NDC highlighted the importance of finalizing and implementing the NAP and developing a national climate change bill. Eswatini's 2021 Adaptation Communication identified the next steps for advancing national adaptation: strengthening institutional and human resource capacities; establishing legal and policy frameworks; monitoring and reporting on adaptation action; accessing climate finance; using Indigenous Knowledge to inform adaptation action; engaging traditional leaders; engaging the private sector; and establishing early warning systems.

Sources: Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2021a, 2021b.

The Eswatini Environment Fund

The EEF aims to promote sustainable livelihoods and environmental sustainability at the community level, including by supporting the implementation of adaptation actions that help these communities to cope with the impacts of climate change. The EEF is administered by the Eswatini Environment Authority in accordance with the policies and directions of the Board of Trustees, which is appointed by the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs. The board directly reviews and approves funding proposals with assistance from a fund officer. The fund started operating in 2007; it issued its first call for proposals in 2014 and its second in 2020. The fund is capitalized through government concessions, environmental fine collections, and grants from development partners, consistent with its mandate to aggregate funds from different sources (Eswatini Environment Authority, 2022a).

The fund seeks to ensure sustainable funding for programs, projects, and activities that encourage community participation in the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources. The recipients of the fund are communities or groups within communities, such as environmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

¹ The background technical report, *Climate Change Outreach Programme: Raising Public Awareness on Adaptation Action and Strengthening Traditional and Indigenous Knowledge Systems to Enhance Resilience in Eswatini*, provides details of the community consultations. A copy of this report can be obtained by contacting the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs.

In its operation of the fund, the Eswatini Environment Authority has a mandate to:

1. Aggregate funds from different sources to ensure sustainable funding for programs, projects, and activities that provide for and promote the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources.
2. Provide financial support for activities aimed at the enhancement, protection, and conservation of the environment; the sustainable management of natural resources; and community participation in these activities.
3. Enhance and restore Eswatini's environment (Eswatini Environmental Authority, 2022a).

The EEF and Climate Change Adaptation

The EEF has five priority thematic areas, including climate change adaptation. Adaptation actions, such as climate-smart agriculture and rainwater harvesting, can help communities address climate risks and the impacts of climate change (see Box 2). Three other thematic areas are relevant to Eswatini's adaptation priorities and can help to address climate risks and vulnerabilities: sustainable land management; water availability, use, and management; and ecosystem, habitat, biodiversity protection, and sustainable use² (Eswatini Environment Authority, 2022a).

Box 2. Climate impacts, vulnerabilities, and risks in Eswatini

The Kingdom of Eswatini is experiencing the impacts of climate change, including an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as storms, cyclones, and heavy rainfall, as well as increases in drought recurrence and frequency. The main climate risks faced by Eswatini citizens include increased flooding, landslides, and wildfires; declines in crop production (with negative impacts on household incomes and livelihoods); reductions in water quality and quantity; increased incidence of waterborne diseases; damaged and destroyed infrastructure; and invasive alien plant species. A large portion of the population is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which is largely driven by socio-economic conditions, including poverty; people who are particularly at risk include those living in rural areas that are reliant on subsistence agriculture. Women are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, partly because they comprise a majority of the population in rural areas.

Source: Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2021a.

A 2021 MTEA report explored public arrangements for climate finance, including a recommendation that the EEF could support adaptation projects, including adaptive research, ecosystem and sustainable land management, integrated water resource management, sustainable forestry management, promotion and protection of biodiversity, and water storage and conservation.

² The fifth thematic area, chemical and waste management, is not related to adaptation.

In 2022, the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs highlighted the importance of adapting to climate change and the role of the EEF in helping the country to address the issues of environmental protection and climate change (Eswatini Government Media, 2022). Six community projects were awarded grant funds totalling SZL 1.1 million through the EEF (approximately USD 65,000, provided through the United Nations Development Programme) for projects to take place during 2022/2023 (Eswatini Government Media, 2022). The projects focus on wetlands management, land rehabilitation (*donga* [erosion control] projects), and climate change education. They are delivered at the community level, and most engage youth and women (Eswatini Environmental Authority, 2022a).



Figure 1. Shewula mountain camp

The EEF has made significant strides in ensuring that projects create opportunities for the equal participation of women, youth, and representatives of less privileged groups. This is important for projects in rural communities where over 70% of the country’s population—60% of whom are women—rely on smallholder subsistence agriculture (World Food Programme, 2022). Despite women comprising a majority of the population, it has been a challenge for the EEF to find enough women to take on leadership roles in their projects. But good progress has been achieved: 40% of the members (27/66) of the committees overseeing the 11 community projects funded in 2019 were women (Eswatini Environment Authority, 2020).

The EEF has supported 56 projects to date, including those that potentially had adaptation benefits by assisting communities to conserve and rehabilitate degraded areas, ecosystems, and wetlands of national cultural importance. The Lawuba wetland protection project installed fences and raised awareness of the importance of wetlands (Phakathi, 2020). The community received an EEF grant of SZL 278,000 (about USD 16,350) that generated earnings of SZL 1.2

million (about USD 70,000) from selling crafts made from fibres harvested from the wetland (Pullanikkatil, 2019). In addition, the project enabled the community to establish livestock drinking troughs and vegetable gardens.

The community of Shewula benefited from an EEF grant of SZL 150,000 (about USD 8,825) for the Shewula wetland restoration project that assisted with the conservation of the Mangwenya wetland and the installation of a solar water pumping system (Eswatini Environment Authority, 2022b). The EEF project included the hiring of community security guards to prevent deforestation,



Figure 2. Shewula wetland, restored and protected through the EEF

the installation of solar pumps, and the establishment of a nursery. The EEF project was able to protect the wetland, which improved water availability in the community and, with the solar pump, increased the provision of water for household and agricultural purposes. The project helped to protect indigenous plant species found in the wetland, including medicinal species and fibre plants, such as *incoboza lukhwane* (*Cyperus spp.*), that play a role in preventing water pollution and are used to produce handicraft materials that are sold to generate income, such as baskets and mats (*emacansi*). In addition, youth were trained on the conservation of wetlands, and the program raised awareness of the importance of biodiversity and ecosystems.

The EEF project complemented other projects implemented under the Shewula Trust, such as the construction of the Shewula lodge and mountain camp, which highlights traditional ways of living in Eswatini. The lodge has helped to improve incomes in the community by hosting a craft centre that has enabled community members to sell mats, baskets, and other crafts to tourists. In addition, through a conservation agriculture project, community members were able to sell produce to the lodge and/or tourists.

These projects helped communities address climate risks, such as reductions in water quality and invasive alien plant species. The climate adaptation benefits of these projects included improved water quantity and quality, improved access to water in dry seasons, and restored flora and fauna. The improved water quantity enabled the community to water their livestock even during the dry winter months. The communities also benefited from being able to locally source raw materials for their handicrafts (alternative livelihoods) and improved household incomes, which helped them cope with the impacts of climate change. The projects also generated mitigation co-benefits through the protected and restored wetlands that increased carbon stocks and carbon sequestration (Eswatini Environment Authority, 2022b). The EEF funds have helped communities to improve their adaptive capacity, and the NDC reports that avoiding the adverse impacts of climate change costs less than disaster relief and response (Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2021b).



Figure 3. Solar system installed during Shewula wetland restoration project with support from the EEF

Addressing Adaptation and Biodiversity Priorities in a Synergistic Manner

There is a high degree of interdependence between climate adaptation and biodiversity. Climate change impacts biodiversity and ecosystems, and the sustainable use of biodiversity can increase ecosystem resilience, which improves the ability of people and local communities to adapt to climate change (Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation Expert Group & Least Developed Countries Expert Group, 2022). Eswatini's 2020 *State of the Environment Report* indicates that climate change will reduce biodiversity and its distribution. Various flora and fauna are under threat from climate change, from extinction due to climatic changes and increased temperatures that favour the growth of alien invasive plant species. Grasslands and forests in Eswatini are highly vulnerable to climate change. Low precipitation volumes combined with higher evaporative losses from open water bodies are expected to reduce water volume and availability and impact wetlands and catchment areas (Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2020).

Eswatini's National Climate Change Policy emphasizes the restoration and maintenance of ecological infrastructure and supports ecosystem-based adaptation to increase climate resilience, protect biodiversity, and support the sustainable management of forests (MTEA, 2016). The updated NDC and Adaptation Communication recognize biodiversity and ecosystems as a priority sector for adaptation action (Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2021a, 2021b). Through Eswatini's NAP process, the MTEA is leading the finalization of the country's NAP document in 2023. The NAP will identify priority adaptation actions and is expected to highlight biodiversity and ecosystems, including ecosystem-based adaptation.

Box 3. Ecosystem-based adaptation: A definition

The Convention on Biological Diversity indicates that ecosystem-based adaptation “uses biodiversity and ecosystem services in an overall adaptation strategy. It includes the sustainable management, conservation and restoration of ecosystems to provide services that help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.”

Source: Convention on Biological Diversity, 2009, p. 6.

Eswatini's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan II highlights the reliance of Swazi traditions on the country's rich biodiversity base, which is under threat from climate change and a range of anthropogenic activities. One of the targets of the second biodiversity strategy is to restore at least 15% of degraded ecosystems, which will increase resilience to climate change and maintain carbon stocks. The biodiversity strategy calls for climate-smart forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, and agricultural production systems as critical actions for the sustainable management and conservation of the country's biodiversity (Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2016).

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation Expert Group under the Nairobi Work Programme on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change, in collaboration with

the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (2022), highlights Eswatini as a case study of how climate adaptation and biodiversity are linked at the assessment and planning stages. The case study notes the MTEA's strong coordination role, awareness of the interlinkages between adaptation and biodiversity, the promotion of ecosystem-based adaptation to promote synergies, and the critical role that community-level engagement plays in conservation (Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation Expert Group & Least Developed Countries Expert Group, 2022).

Many of the EEF-supported community-level projects promote an integrated approach to adaptation and biodiversity, and there is an opportunity to further these synergies by addressing the interrelated causes and impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. For example, the EEF has supported many projects focused on sustaining and restoring wetlands, which have the important adaptation function of recharging groundwater aquifers and releasing water flows slowly during drought periods (Pullanikkatil, 2019). In addition, the restoration of wetlands has strong benefits for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The EEF has proven successful in funding small projects at the community level that protect wetlands and rehabilitate land/degraded areas. Community mobilization and cooperation are key for successful project implementation, and engagement with and buy-in of local authorities has been critical for mobilizing the community for project activities. Community engagement enhances project ownership and helps members to understand the need to support and maintain the project.

Other factors for success include targeting communities where leadership opportunities for women are supported and encouraged. This is important in Eswatini's rural communities, where women comprise the majority of the population. Many projects have led to improved and alternative livelihoods for women and youth, which have helped to alleviate poverty.

The EEF process could be improved by considering farming calendars in the timing of the start-up and implementation of projects. Projects that align with the plowing season are not effectively implemented because most community members are busy with fieldwork and crop production.

The administration of the EEF could be strengthened by improving its financial management systems and developing new systems that are tailored to attracting and managing climate and development finance. The Eswatini Environmental Authority has committed to improving the monitoring and evaluation of EEF projects, and the process could include making reports publicly available, ensuring that information is collected on women's and youth engagement, and assessing the outcomes of project implementation (including adaptation outcomes where appropriate).

Opportunities to increase alignment with Eswatini's NAP process and to improve the adaptation impacts of projects funded by EEF include:

- Identifying opportunities for the EEF to finance initiatives that have both adaptation and biodiversity outcomes, with an emphasis on ecosystem-based adaptation, which

is a priority for Eswatini. The adaptation–biodiversity synergies can be promoted by considering the interconnections at the planning stage.

- Continuing to build leadership and maintaining high-level support to deliver an integrated adaptation–biodiversity approach, including through statements in policy and planning documents and by building buy-in with decision-makers and practitioners.
- For non-adaptation projects, identifying climate risks to the project and recommending adaptation measures at the planning stage (recognizing that this would be a light touch given the small size of the projects funded by the EEF).
- Raising awareness on climate change to help communities better identify and address adaptation in their EEF-funded projects. Stakeholder consultation on the NAP process could be combined with outreach on the EEF, as knowledge of this fund is low, especially among the rural population (Dlamini et al., 2019).
- Encouraging strong community engagement in the identification of local-level adaptation actions that could be funded by the EEF. The Eswatini Environmental Authority and MTEA could encourage adaptation action by providing information on the priority adaptation areas in the updated NDC and the NAP that will be approved in 2023; these could be funded through the EEF. These areas could include rainwater harvesting, control of alien invasive plant species, restoration and protection of wetlands, and erosion control.
- Communicating the adaptation and biodiversity benefits of synergistic actions funded through the EEF. For example, the protection and restoration of wetlands is a cost-effective strategy for climate adaptation, with strong benefits for poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation (Pullanikkatil, 2019). A focused effort to improve integration could help Eswatini make the best use of limited finances to achieve both adaptation and biodiversity results. The EEF could adopt an approach of joint financing, which could help to attract greater support for the EEF from development partners and climate funds.

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