



Room to Roam

Building climate-resilient landscapes across Africa

Room to Roam is an ambitious transnational initiative to tackle the climate crisis by implementing nature-based solutions across East and southern Africa. Anchored in IFAW's science-based approach to conservation, Room to Roam leverages the power of climate-smart conservation, landscape restoration, and ecosystem-based adaptation to expand carbon sinks, support community adaptation, and address loss and damage. Through Room to Roam, we are building climate-resilient landscapes in which human communities and wild animals can thrive together, now and into an uncertain future.

Biodiverse landscapes at risk in Africa

Across East and southern Africa, climate change puts some of the world's most iconic landscapes at great risk. From Kenya to Zimbabwe, the savannah woodlands and grasslands that are home to keystone species like elephants, lions, rhinos, leopards, buffalo, and giraffes are already suffering the consequences of a changing climate. Rising temperatures and increasingly variable rainfall result in longer, more frequent, and more intense droughts. The rains that follow often cause severe flooding and drive disease. Tropical storms are becoming more frequent and intense, with severe impacts on natural ecosystems, especially in countries like Mozambique and Malawi.

These climatic changes exact a heavy toll on wild animals and the ecosystems on which they depend. High temperatures and unreliable rainfall are reducing fodder and water availability, especially in times of drought, resulting in large-scale die-offs. These conditions impact breeding patterns and the reproductive rate of species like elephants, whose numbers have already declined severely due to poaching and other human pressures. As global warming increases, these impacts will only worsen, threatening the survival of critical wildlife unless urgent action is taken to help populations stabilise and achieve resilience.

The same climatic changes also present severe challenges for the millions of people who live alongside wild animals in these landscapes. Chronic poverty, dependence on rainfed agriculture and natural resources, and a lack of local economic alternatives mean many households are highly vulnerable to climate change, and they are experiencing deepening poverty and food insecurity, malnutrition, and disease as a result.

In their effort to cope, impacted households often turn to natural resource exploitation, which can harm wild animals and their habitats. Poaching, bushmeat consumption, illegal wildlife trade, logging, charcoal production, encroachment into conservation areas, and converting wildlife habitat to agriculture all increase when people living in biodiverse landscapes struggle with poverty and disasters.

IFAW's response: Room to Roam

Working in partnership with national governments, local communities, and the private sector, IFAW is joining hands with nature to tackle the climate crisis across East and southern Africa through an ambitious nature-based initiative called Room to Roam.

Based on more than 20 years of science-based conservation experience in the region and the growing body of evidence that shows wildlife and biodiversity conservation are vital tools in the fight against climate change, Room to Roam is building climate-resilient landscapes in which people and animals can thrive.

Climate-resilient landscapes

Climate-resilient landscapes are landscapes that can continue thriving under changing climatic conditions, maintaining biodiversity and the delivery of ecosystem services for animals and people while enabling human communities to adapt sustainably and achieve low-carbon socio-economic development in the long term.

Our approach leverages the power of climate-smart conservation, integrated landscape management, and ecosystem-based adaptation to deliver multiple co-benefits for nature, climate, and people.

Climate-smart conservation

By factoring climate change risks into conservation management, we support conservation managers to adapt, putting in place the infrastructure that animals and ecosystems need to remain resilient despite climate change. For example, by protecting, linking, and effectively managing elephant habitats, we improve ecosystem health and maintain biodiversity, thereby supporting the resilience of elephant populations and other wildlife. This includes creating ecosystem connectivity networks that will be viable over time, delivering a strategic adaptation response to climate change in critical elephant landscapes by: (1) considering projected habitat change for species-specific targets, (2) broadening the spatial extent of each ecosystem connectivity network, and (3) identifying 'climate corridors' that connect areas which, over time, will share similar climatic characteristics.

Landscape restoration

IFAW supports stakeholders to develop and implement integrated landscape management plans that support biodiversity protection, local climate adaptation, and low-carbon, climate-resilient economic development. Based on the environmental condition of the landscape, the vulnerabilities, capabilities, and aspirations of the local population, and a robust analysis of long-range climate risks, these multisectoral plans catalyse local initiatives to create climate-resilient landscapes. These often include integrated watershed management; water harvesting and conservation; tree planting and sustainable forestry; improved rangeland management; land zoning and use of environmental by-laws; and legal restrictions on construction, mining, and industrial development. Over time, implementation results in improved ecosystem health and provision of ecosystem services, increased resilience of human and wildlife populations, and climate-resilient local economic development.

Protecting and expanding carbon sinks

By establishing conservation areas, restoring degraded ecosystems, and conserving species that play critical roles in maintaining and enhancing the ability of their ecosystems to store carbon, we are protecting and expanding carbon sinks in ways that mitigate climate change for the benefit of the planet and humanity as a whole. By linking conservation actors with carbon and biodiversity markets, we also help generate carbon and biodiversity finance that will benefit communities and governments in achieving their adaptation and development goals.

Nature-based adaptation

IFAW works with partners to support households and communities at risk from climate change to access knowledge, resources, and skills to adapt and build prosperous, environmentally friendly livelihoods that are resilient to the changing climate. Based on community-developed local adaptation plans, households may adopt climate-smart farming methods and gain new skills to find jobs in local businesses or establish their climate-resilient, nature-positive enterprises. By gaining access to financial services, households can begin to save and access credit and insurance, helping them cope during difficult periods and plan for the future. Linking community adaptation plans to government systems supports landscape-level adaptation and the flow of finance into local community schemes.

Addressing loss and damage

IFAW's wildlife conservation approach means we believe every animal matters, including those impacted by climate-related disasters. We train and support community members and conservation agencies to rescue animals affected by fires, floods, storms, and diseases and enable their recovery. We also work with communities to ensure they have the skills to prepare for, cope with, and recover from climate shocks, and we support landscape managers to restore ecosystems following disasters. Through this work, we actively support local actors to address ecological and socio-economic forms of climate-related loss and damage.



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