



# Stuck in the clouds: Bringing the CBD's Ecosystem Approach for conservation management down to Earth in Canada and Germany

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## Summary

In order to successfully conduct integrated management of land, water and living resources the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has developed a strategy called the Ecosystem Approach (EA). This paper analyses the obstacles preventing the implementation of the EA in two case study countries, Canada and Germany. We briefly describe the EA, followed by the results of literature research of protected area management and the EA, as well as structured telephone interviews conducted with managers of large protected areas in Germany and expert interviews in the Canadian Provinces of Manitoba and Ontario, in addition to the German Federal State of Brandenburg all conducted in 2005–2006. Results reveal that the EA is faced with a wide range of barriers and its implementation seems to be stuck in the political arena, not reaching the practical level. Most notable were issues concerning general knowledge of the EA, top-down information sharing, both administrative and cross-sectoral cooperation and stakeholder involvement. Major outcomes are the need for more cooperation and knowledge sharing, as well as for a correct

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combination of both top-down and bottom-up approaches to ecosystem management. The results partially reflect eight general obstacles considered in a Strategic Plan of the CBD, with the exception of socio-economic factors and natural phenomena and environmental change. We rather see these as issues demonstrating the urgent need for implementing the EA. In particular, climate change increases the need of the implementation of the EA and actually could lead to a broader acceptance of its principles.

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## Introduction

As our population growth, consumption rates, waste production, and demand for resources continue to skyrocket, so do the multiple threats to biodiversity. To make matters worse, our alteration of the climate poses new, unforeseen threats to biodiversity and therefore to humankind (IPCC 2007). As the results of the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (2005) and the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (2007) show, integrated management of land, water and resources becomes increasingly urgent in order to bring an ecological and socio-economic balance to human society.

As early as 1995 the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) were already aware of the urgency for integrated management and so developed the Ecosystem Approach (CBD 1995). The Ecosystem Approach (EA), if implemented, has the potential to achieve such balance required for a healthier planet that would still include human society. Unfortunately, there is no widespread implementation of the EA today which is currently one of the critical issues occupying the conferences and working group meetings of the convention (*Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity* 2006).

The EA is designed to conserve entire ecosystems, especially in areas where there is much human activity, in order to reach a balance between ecological, social and economic needs (Smith & Maltby 2003). A set of 12 principles and five operational guidelines were constructed to help nations better understand and implement the EA. Known as the Malawi Principles, they were adopted in 2000 at the COP5 (CBD 2000) (see Box 1). The following five key aspects, a summarised version of those identified by Korn (2002), provide the general concept behind the Malawi Principles:

- Adaptive Management
- Balance between conservation and use of biodiversity
- Participative decision making
- Sustained functions within appropriate scales of time and space
- Use of all information and integration of science

The point of origin of the present study is the perception that the EA is neither being effectively integrated into conservation strategies, nor being widely implemented at the national and state or provincial levels, not even in developed countries, with a presumably higher availability of resources for biodiversity conservation (CBD 2007a; *Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity* 2006). The following are a summary of eight general obstacles (CBD 2001) to implementing the CBD, originally having been formulated in the CBD's Strategic Plan:

1. Political/societal obstacles
2. Collaboration/cooperation
3. Institutional, technical and capacity-related obstacles
4. Lack of accessible knowledge/information
5. Economic policy and financial resources
6. Legal/juridical impediments
7. Socio-economic factors
8. Natural phenomena and environmental change

Thus, the purpose of this study is to assess the barriers preventing the implementation of the EA, focusing exclusively on developed countries, represented specifically by case studies in Canada and Germany. Our objective is to bring together the results of literature research and three independent sets of interviews we conducted in Canada and Germany regarding implementation of the EA in and around large protected areas. We aim to answer the following questions: Are there common barriers to the implementation of the EA in both countries? Why are these barriers in place? How can these barriers be overcome?

## Methods

### Selection of study areas

The focus of our study was on large protected areas (LPAs) such as national parks or biosphere reserves, due to their potential for large-scale

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