

Preparing to build climate resilience: Creating a strong foundation with a regional baseline

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Abstract

Building climate resilience requires a clear understanding of a region's unique natural, social, and governance contexts before solutions are designed and implemented. A well-developed baseline provides a shared starting point by synthesizing existing data, policies, initiatives, and stakeholder knowledge to identify climate risks, vulnerabilities, and opportunities. This article explores the role of a regional baseline as a foundational step in initiating transformative climate adaptation, with a specific focus on experiences from the NBRACER project regions. It describes the collaborative process used to develop regional baselines, including data collection, system analysis, and narrative development. Drawing on regional experiences, the article highlights key benefits—such as improved system understanding and stronger foundations for action—as well as challenges related to complexity, prioritization, stakeholder engagement, and scale. Overall, these regional experiences show that despite challenges, regional baselines are an essential tool for launching effective, context-specific pathways toward climate resilience.

Key words

Climate resilience; regional baseline; nature-based solutions (NBS); transformative change; stakeholder co-creation; socio-ecological systems.

Creating a strong foundation with a regional baseline

Have you ever wondered where to start tackling climate resilience in your region? Before diving into solutions, it's crucial to understand the unique and specific characteristics and qualities of the region: what's at risk, and what needs urgent attention and what climate initiatives are already happening. This is where a **baseline** comes in. A well-crafted baseline provides a clear picture of the region's natural and socio-economic conditions, setting the stage for designing nature-based solutions (NBS) that truly make a difference. The NBRACER regions made use of the baseline to kick off their Transformative Adaptation Journey. This article dives into why a baseline is useful, how it's developed, and the experiences of regions that have embarked on this journey.

Why is the baseline useful?

- A well-defined baseline is essential as it establishes a **clear starting point** that stakeholders define when starting their journey toward a more climate-resilient future. NBRACER fosters co-creation with stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, and the private sector. It helps stakeholders to jointly understand the current situation in each region - what is working well, what challenges exist, and where improvements are needed.
- **Joint understanding of the region:** the baseline provides a comprehensive snapshot of the region's natural and social system and how these systems are governed, including illustrating how climate change is impacting the region.
- **Bringing people together:** ensuring all partners have a joint knowledge base to foster collaboration and informed decision-making.
- **Guiding action:** it identifies which NBS approaches are already taking place and which new ones may be most effective and where they should be implemented.
- **Tracking progress:** as the project advances, changes and improvements can be measured against the initial baseline.

How is the baseline developed?

Creating a baseline is a collaborative effort that brings together data, expertise, and perspectives. Here's how NBRACER has developed the regional baselines:

1. **Collecting information:** regional partners and experts gather maps, reports, and key data about their area, drawing from existing knowledge and ongoing studies.
2. **Organizing the data:** the baseline is structured around three key areas—the natural system, the social system, and their interconnections.
3. **Drafting a regional narrative:** using the collected data, an initial narrative is created to make sense of all the information, offering an overview of the region's vulnerabilities and opportunities to build climate resilience.

4. **Refining together:** through workshops, stakeholders review and refine the baseline, ensuring accuracy and relevance.

By following these steps, regions create a well-grounded, actionable baseline that lays out the groundwork for meaningful NBS implementation.

What have NBRACER regions learned from developing their baseline?

The process of creating a baseline has been an eye-opening experience for many NBRACER regions, offering valuable insights and unexpected challenges. Here's what they've shared:

What worked well?

- **Comprehensive information gathering:** it centralizes data and information from different sources including policies and strategies at regional and local levels, in various sectors making them more accessible.
- **Summary of past and ongoing projects, policies and initiatives:** the process helps in mapping existing initiatives and identifying gaps.
- **Enhanced regional analysis:** it enables stakeholders to better understand interconnections between environmental and social systems.
- **Appreciation of the overview:** the baseline provides a broad yet structured understanding of the region's status combining knowledge of the natural system and the social system.
- **Strong starting point:** establishing a baseline offers a clear framework and directions for moving forward with NBS planning and implementation.
- **Opportunity to evaluate:** the process encourages regional actors to think broadly and in a structured way about their territory and potential NBS interventions.
- **Unified database across regions:** a shared approach ensures consistency and comparability among different regions.

Challenges and areas for improvement

- **Regional needs definition is challenging:** some regions struggled to define their specific needs and priorities.
- **Lengthy and complex process:** The process involves multiple stages, stakeholders making it time-consuming and difficult to navigate. As a result, a clear and condensed summary is often necessary to synthesize key insights, align stakeholders around a shared vision, support portfolio development, and enable well-informed decision-making.
- **It is difficult to involve regional partners** already in this exercise, as the discussion on the baseline was part of the first regional workshop. People were not yet fully engaged, and it appeared to be time-consuming

- **Lack of clear prioritization:** the baseline does not always directly lead to an actionable list of priorities.
- **Risk of being too general:** broad assessments sometimes lack the specificity needed for targeted interventions.
- **Finding the right scale and level of detail:** determining the right, up to date data and the level of detail to include remains a challenge.

Despite these challenges, the baseline process has proven to be a valuable step in laying the groundwork for effective NBS implementation. By continuously refining the approach and addressing these challenges, NBRACER aims to ensure that each region is well-equipped to build a resilient and sustainable future.

Ready to start your own baseline?

Building a regional baseline may seem like an overwhelming task, but it's an essential step to bring stakeholders together and start from a shared understanding of the broad relevant aspects for starting the transformative adaptation journey. This is key to develop a regional vision for strengthening regional resilience, and a portfolio of meaningful and effective NBS. By leveraging the lessons learned from other regions, you can develop a baseline that not only informs your strategy but also connects stakeholders in a shared vision for resilience. If your region is embarking on this journey, take the time to gather insights, engage your community, and build a strong foundation. The more you understand your starting point, the better equipped you'll be to navigate the path ahead!