



What is the ELSAA Map?

Map of Essential Life Support Action Areas

The map of Essential Life Support Action Areas (ELSAA) shows where actions can be taken to achieve national policy targets related to biodiversity, climate change and human well-being. It is based on an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme to help countries prioritise where to take action to protect, restore, avoid loss and reduce pressures on nature and adapt to climate change. South Africa was one of 12 pilot countries that tested the ELSAA method, which is now being applied more widely. It involves identifying the top ten national policy commitments, gathering spatial data to map them and then running a prioritisation process. The main purpose of the ELSAA Map in South Africa is to mobilise resources for nature-positive action to achieve the country's top policy commitments.

How is an ELSAA Map developed? ———

The key aspect of ELSAAs is that they are based on a country's most important policy commitments, using specific quantifiable targets, such as the requirement to create additional jobs in the wildlife economy. In South Africa, the top ten targets came from national government strategies and frameworks related to water, biodiversity, land degradation, climate change, disaster risk reduction and job creation. Specific quantitative targets from these strategies and frameworks were selected, such as the requirement to create additional jobs in the wildlife economy or to secure Strategic Water Source Areas.

Spatial data are then sourced to map priority areas and features relevant to these targets. South Africa gathered 44 spatial datasets relating to water security, food security,

climate change adaptation, protected area expansion, disaster risk reduction, and jobs and livelihoods. All the datasets were converted into a similar format with the same size spatial unit. The data were then fed into an online webtool that uses the software PrioritiseR to optimise where different actions should be taken to meet the policy commitments and targets. Optimisation means that the software identifies areas where it is possible to achieve more than one target at the same time. Stakeholders and experts were consulted throughout the process to ensure that the data, parameters and outputs are accurate and functional.

The ELSAA Map can be revised as national policy commitments and targets change. The online webtool can also be used to help understand trade-offs between different policy commitments, by experimenting with how the map would change if policy targets were adjusted upwards or downwards.



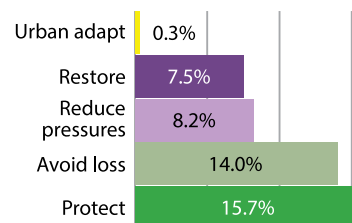
What do the map categories mean?

The ELSAA Map shows where to take nature-based actions to achieve national policy commitments related to biodiversity, climate resilience and human well-being. Since it is intended for action, the map categories correspond to specific types of activities that need to be implemented.

ELSAA Map category	Definition
Protect	An area that should be prioritised for expanding protected areas and improving their management effectiveness.
Avoid loss	An area where further loss of biodiversity and ecological infrastructure should be avoided through appropriate land-use planning and decision-making.
Reduce pressures	An area where pressures on biodiversity and ecological infrastructure should be reduced through sustainable production practices.
Restore	An area that should be prioritised for the restoration of biodiversity or ecological infrastructure that has been degraded.
Urban adapt	An area where green technology and natural open spaces will help urban populations to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

What are some key statistics?

The targets that were used for the South African ELSAA Map are tied to the top ten national policies that were selected. Based on the targets in these policies, the percentage of the country in each ELSAA Map category is decided. If a different set of policies was selected, or if different targets were used, the proportion of the country in each map category would change.



How should an ELSAA Map be used?

The ELSAA Map has a relatively coarse spatial resolution of 1km² units. Since developments or projects can happen on areas smaller than this, it is not suited for making project or site-level decisions. South Africa has existing fine-scale maps, such as CBA Maps, that are more appropriate for these uses. The ELSAA Map is best used for strategic planning and to prioritise what is needed to meet policy commitments at a national level. It supports the implementation of existing policies, and is not intended as a basis for new policy. Because the ELSAA Map optimises across different policy commitments, it can help to ensure that resources are used efficiently.



Mobilising resources: The ELSAA Map may be particularly relevant for mobilising resources, for example by helping to allocate budgets for government programmes related to restoration. It could also be used to guide investment in biodiversity, for example by identifying where activities such as sustainable wildlife ranching are best located.



National planning: The ELSAA Map could also be used for **national-level planning**, such as the identification of future biodiversity economy nodes, or for actions linked to the National Spatial Development Framework or the National Protected Area Expansion Strategy.

Where can I get more information?

- South Africa's ELSAA Map is available on its own workspace on the **UN Biodiversity Lab**: <https://unbiodiversitylab.org/unbl-workspaces/>
- Explore the optimisation process using the South African webtool: https://csl.gis.unbc.ca/SouthAfrica_ELSA/

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