

PUTTING EQUITY AND INTEGRITY AT THE CENTRE OF CLIMATE ADAPTATION

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Understanding social vulnerability is key to addressing the problem of inequality in relation to climate adaptation. Recent research has highlighted the socio-political dimensions of climate change, linking climate change impacts with the social and political factors that drive vulnerability (Otto et al. 2017; Kelly and Adger, 2000). This is captured through the concept of social vulnerability (Fakin and Luers, 2006; Fussel, 2010) which assesses how climate change impacts countries and people differently depending on their wealth, social status, and other key factors that affect their ability and capacity to adapt. Social vulnerability also features prominently in the context of water access and water-related disasters, which are strongly influenced by climate change, revealing the need for water-related climate adaptation measures to be deliberately targeted towards addressing issues of inequality and social vulnerability.

While the need for more equal and just climate adaptation is widely acknowledged and recognized in various policy circles from the local to the international scale, the question remains as to how the key elements for achieving such equal and just climate adaptation can be incorporated into the current adaption frameworks and institutional arrangements.

To answer this question, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) conducted a review of institutional frameworks for climate adaptation in seven countries in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). The review also examined financial structures and mechanisms for climate adaptation, with a focus on the role of local communities and local authorities.

1. INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES FOR MAINSTREAMING CLIMATE ADAPTATION INTO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

While mainstreaming climate adaptation into national development programmes can be viewed as a first step in seriously tackling climate issues (Ayers et al. 2014), IWMI's review shows that mainstreaming specific adaptation measures into national development planning is hampered by the problem of institutional traps, including (Lebet et al. 2011):

- capture of agendas by technical elites;
- single level or centralized concentration of capacities;
- organizational fragmentation due to sectoral egoism; and
- overemphasis on reactive crisis management.

Because of these traps, mainstreaming climate adaptation does not automatically lead to more equitable adaptation plans and strategies.

In Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, India, and Pakistan, climate adaptation programmes form an integral part of development objectives to enhance food security and reduce poverty, involving the relevant sectors: water, agriculture, forest, health, transport. Climate adaptation programmes are also closely linked with risk prevention and disaster management in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan as well as with environmental issues (problems of desertification in particular) in Afghanistan.

Lack of capacity can also hamper the effectiveness of climate adaptation efforts. For example, in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, the absence of a strong climate adaptation programme is related to very low institutional capacity to implement climate adaptation programmes across scales, with the majority of government staff involved having little knowledge on climate adaptation issues.

In the long run, the actual significance, effectiveness, and equity of mainstreaming climate adaptation will be defined by whether or not national governments can improve their institutional capacity, while also allowing local government and other non-state actors and

local communities to convey their views as an integral part of climate adaptation programme formulation. Policy formulation must also better aim to protect the poorest (e.g. landless and marginal farmers) and other marginalized groups (e.g. by gender and ethnicity).

2. CENTRE-LOCAL DISCONNECT IN ADAPTATION PLANNING: A LACK OF PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

The way climate finance continues to be framed and implemented in a top-down manner, following the government hierarchical structure from national down to local level, leaves very little room for local communities to convey their adaptation needs and strategies. In this context, we argue that an equitable, and thus more transparent and deliberative, decision-making process in climate adaptation is a challenge.

The review shows that climate adaptation programme planning and implementation in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, which relies on external funding as its main financial source, are shaped following the centralized funds channelling, from international donor agencies, to national government agencies, to provincial, district and local level. Similarly, while adaptation financing in Bangladesh and India has been strongly driven by government spending, the majority of climate finance flows and attempts to improve adaptation planning has occurred at the national level, with little involvement from local authorities and local communities.

India's State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) for instance, were prepared without inputs from local governments or communities, and are therefore likely to be tied to achieving predetermined adaptation goals and targets without flexibility to adapt them to local circumstances (Sharma et al. 2015). Here, the central Indian government plays the role of a 'donor' in the manner in which it delivers funds to the States and local governments with goals and targets.

The centre-local disconnect is most evident in Nepal, in which only 12 climate adaptation projects have been implemented, although 124 are being planned at the local level (Karanjit et al. 2014). One of the reasons for poor implementation is that only 11.4% of the total climate budget was allocated to local governments as of the financial year 2013/2014. This is despite the 80% target set by both national government and development partners for local-level climate financing.

The role of local communities and informal institutional arrangements in developing sustainable adaptive capacity has been raised in recent discussions on climate adaptation (Agrawal, 2008; Berman et al. 2012). In practice however, across the seven countries studied,

local communities generally continue to be positioned as recipients of (nationally-defined) adaptation programmes, rather than as actors capable of shaping their own adaptation measures. There are many examples of innovative strategies by local communities to cope with climate issues (Rotberg, 2012; Birkenholtz, 2013; Esham and Garforth, 2013). Specific examples include how local communities shape bottom-up climate adaptation approaches in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta (Tran et al. 2019a; 2019b). Because of the limiting institutional framework, these are lost to overall adaptive planning.

This centre-local disconnect highlights the need to bring both local government as well as other representatives of local communities into central planning processes, as key priority action.

3. DISJOINTED FUNDING MECHANISMS

Despite the strong inclination towards a centralized approach in climate adaptation, the institutional architecture to incorporate climate finance into climate adaptation planning is almost non-existent in the majority of the countries studied, with the exception of Bangladesh and Nepal. Generally, adaptation measures are driven through indirect funding where climate change responses are windfalls of broader sectoral and multi-sectoral development investments. This situation is partially due to a highly fragmented but crowded landscape of international climate finance, which makes it difficult, in all countries, to develop an efficient, targeted climate financing plan. This makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness and actual significance of climate adaptation measures, as the latter might be incorporated and/or linked with other development activities driven by other needs.

In Afghanistan for instance, climate finance is difficult to track, not only because most of Afghanistan finances come in the form of foreign aid, but also because the majority of projects are categorized under development project grants and do not include climate adaptation in their budgeting codes. Similarly, Pakistan also focuses primarily on development projects that are not directly related to climate adaptation. In India, despite the country's smaller reliance on foreign external funding mechanisms, securing and allocating adaptation funds is still a disjointed and fragmentary exercise (Sharma et al. 2015), allowing for neither efficiency nor accountability. In Sri Lanka and Bhutan, large amounts of funding from both national and international sources are channelled towards water resources management for the agriculture sector and for disaster mitigation. Even in Bangladesh, for large investments like the one, since 2000, to build about 165,000 deep tube wells

(Winston et al. 2013) to increase food security and meet growing demand for supplementary irrigation attributed to climate change, some funds are multi-sectoral, others are sector-specific.

Disaggregating these large bundles of spending is crucial for a country's climate spending to be linked with major climate risks and adaptation needs. There are still too few efforts to make the necessary institutional adjustments to better link financing and planning. In Bhutan, the Mainstreaming Reference Group aims to more systematically incorporate climate change considerations into national and local-level planning. Overall however, the majority of funds generating adaptation capacity in each country cannot be clearly identified, making any assessment of spending on climate finance, including in the water sector, only approximate.

4. TOWARDS INCLUSIVE, ACCOUNTABLE, AND EQUITABLE CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Our findings show how the current institutional frameworks have contributed to a centralized approach for climate adaptation across the seven countries in South Asia and what this means in terms of equity and participation. We have also shown that most countries lack the institutional architecture to better link climate finance with development planning and how this is problematic for accountability. As a consequence, current climate adaptation efforts remain largely uncoordinated and lack actual representation from local community and the wider society.

To be effective, current institutional frameworks need to be oriented towards adaptive institution building, enabling existing institutions across scales and affiliations to react and respond more rapidly and flexibly to emerging climate trends and development demands. While the inclusion of the respective ministries in charge of local government in central decision-making bodies is noted, what is lacking is an explicit mechanism to reflect adaptation needs from the ground upwards, including those from the poorest and most marginalized groups.

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