

## Chapter 13

### Key Challenges and Priorities for Actions

*This chapter sets out the challenges with regard to integrating adaptation into development at the local level and then outlines priority actions for national governments in supporting local adaptation. These priority actions include: (i) collect and provide information for climate change adaptation; (ii) provide human, financial, technical resources and services to support local adaptation; (iii) provide social protection; and (iv) ensure a supportive policy and institutional framework. The chapter also identifies priority actions for donors. These include: (i) review sectoral priorities in light of climate change; (ii) explore different options for channelling funds and engage stakeholders in building local adaptive capacity; (iii) support decentralisation processes that transfer authority to elected local governments; (iv) enhance local government capacity to take up the responsibilities afforded by decentralisation.*

### 13.1. Challenges with integrating adaptation into development at the local level

Despite the establishment of enabling conditions and the identification of entry points, the process of integrating climate change adaptation into local development still faces several challenges. These include:

- *Awareness*: Awareness about climate risks is important to help communities deal with current climate variability and change. Lack of awareness on the part of government authorities, educators and trainers represents a significant impediment to integrating climate change considerations at local decision-making levels.
- *Information*: The role of different types of information for local-level adaptation decision making has already been discussed. Perhaps the most challenging of these is the availability of climate change projections at a scale that is relevant to rural communities. Efforts to downscale global and regional climate models proceed, but their utility at the community level is still limited. General trends (it is going to become hotter/wetter/drier over the next  $x$  years) can provide a starting point for considering changing risks, but may not be enough to encourage behavioural change.
- *Capacity*: Local governments and organisations are almost always under-resourced and over-committed. Budgets are typically stretched, whether local government revenue is raised locally or allocated by central government. Technical knowledge in the area of climate risk is correspondingly limited, as hydro meteorological knowledge is typically housed in a small department of a ministry, often removed from local communities. These inadequacies reflect local governments lacking the resources to meet their responsibilities – and often with very limited capacities to invest (as almost all local revenues go to recurrent expenditures or debt repayment).
- *Competing local (and national) priorities/needs*: Climate change is competing with other development priorities such as HIV/AIDS, conflict and access to primary education. In rural communities, because managing climate risk may be viewed as a “way of life” (as in the Sahel), local authorities may be reluctant to allocate too many resources to it. Instead, they may want to focus on more immediate threats to development such as infectious diseases, illiteracy, and food insecurity. The key to making sure climate risk management and climate change considerations do not remain ignored is to make the links between these development priorities and climate risk. For example, climate risk management may have an important role to play in reducing disease transmission and food insecurity.
- *Institutional structures that inhibit adaptation*: Complicated and unresolved institutional questions or conflicts may present a barrier to the integration of adaptation into community decision making. For example, poorly defined or insecure land tenure may impede a revision of local land-use plans and prevent people from adopting certain resilience-building strategies, since there may be no guaranteed returns on risk reduction investments on the land if land is suddenly taken away.

## 13.2. Priority actions for national governments in supporting local adaptation

To help overcome these challenges and promote adaptation at the local level, national governments can undertake a number of priority actions.

### *(i) Collect and provide information for climate change adaptation*

Decisions require information. For adaptation decision making, information about climate hazards, vulnerability, resilience and coping or adaptive capacities– is especially important for identifying options. This requires harnessing knowledge and experience at the local level, and having access to information sources housed at higher levels.

### *(ii) Provide human, financial, technical resources and services to support local adaptation*

Once community actors have identified and selected appropriate options to help them better manage climate risk, the role of governments and civil society is to assist with the implementation of these options. This can mean allocating financial resources to climate-sensitive infrastructure, offering education and skills training through extension programmes and projects, and assisting with the transfer and uptake of appropriate technologies, for example.

### *(iii) Provide social protection*

For the poorest and most vulnerable, governments (and to a lesser extent, civil society) play a crucial role in providing resources and services that protect them from the negative consequences of economic, social and natural hazards. Specifically, social protection programmes in the form of social insurance, social assistance, and/or labour market regulations can help people reduce their vulnerability to these hazards by ensuring basic levels of consumption, facilitating investment in productive livelihood assets and strengthening their capacity to manage risk (Barrientos and Hulme, 2008). Climate change will amplify the impact of existing hazards or introduce new ones, making it more challenging for people to move out of poverty. Adapting to these changes may require people to adopt new activities and shift resource allocations, potentially introducing more or new livelihood risks. In some instances, short-term risks must be taken to ensure longer-term welfare. If these risks are realised, where adaptation activities lead to diminished or varying returns, people may turn to coping strategies such as withdrawing children from school, selling off liquid assets, or engaging in low-productivity farming activities, that lead to increased rates of transient poverty and further entrenchment of chronic poverty. Social protection measures can therefore help people buffer themselves against a changing hazard profile and adopt sustainable adaptation strategies.

### *(iv) Ensure a supportive policy and institutional framework*

Finally, in addition to providing resources and services for local adaptation action, governments must create a supportive policy and institutional framework. This means devising policy incentives for risk management behaviour (e.g. secured land tenure, modest subsidies for climate-resilient crop species, improved access to social protection measures), reviewing or revising policies that increase climate-related vulnerabilities (changing zoning plans that permit settlement in flood plains, stronger enforcement of

building codes), and strengthening the institutions needed to manage the communication and decision-making processes. It can also mean introducing a greater measure of flexibility into the overall policy process, establishing provisions for increased bottom-up feedback and more regular reviews.

### 13.3. Priority actions for donors

Donors and international agencies can support the development of adaptive capacity within rural and urban settings in a number of ways. Depending on their policy priorities, mandates and capacities, different agencies may focus on one or several of the options below.

#### *(i) Review sectoral priorities in light of climate change*

In urban areas, this may mean drawing attention of partner governments to the urgent need to increase funding for infrastructure. Most bilateral aid agencies have given a relatively limited support to “economic infrastructure” (for such things as transport, communications and energy) and to water supply and sanitation. The deficit in urban infrastructure provision is a serious constraint to adaptive capacity in developing countries. It can therefore be argued that there needs to be a correspondingly large increase in international funding for these types of investments. However, a climate lens should be applied to make infrastructure resilient to anticipated climate change-related impacts. This may well imply some changes in standards for cities in high-risk sites, and may also imply some more fundamental changes in the design of the infrastructure, as well as other changes.

In rural areas, this may mean a continued increase in support for agriculture and rural development. Given that the large majority of the world’s poor reside in rural settings, generating livelihoods in these areas is central to reducing poverty and hunger, and to helping developing countries adapt to climate change. After decades of decline in the share and value of aid to the agricultural sector, flows seem to be increasing again. But the increase still falls short of what is needed to improve agricultural performance, particularly in the face of climate change. In addition to applying a climate lens in agricultural and rural development investments, donors should continue supporting agricultural research and development to help rural populations better manage their climate-sensitive livelihoods, as well as funding discrete projects that pilot or test new approaches and target neglected sub-sectors, such as smallholder agriculture.

#### *(ii) Explore different options for channelling funds and engage stakeholders in building local adaptive capacity*

In many nations, a substantial municipal infrastructure fund to which local governments and civil society groups can apply may be the most appropriate way through which international donors can channel much-needed funding for infrastructure. Such a fund should also be proactive in helping identify cities or smaller urban centres most at risk and develop appropriate local responses. It should also encourage and support civil society’s engagement with adaptation. This may also mean working more collaboratively with lower-income and other high-risk groups, especially those living in homes and locations most at risk from the direct and indirect impacts of climate change, or those most directly dependent on climate-sensitive livelihoods. There are good experiences in

“slum and squatter upgrading”, for example, in which local governments have worked with the inhabitants of informal settlements to provide infrastructure and services and improve the quality of housing. These kinds of grassroots initiatives require donor support.

***(iii) Support decentralisation processes that transfer authority to elected local governments***

General Budget Support tends to stay in central government coffers and resistance to devolution can be strong at this level. Yet decentralised governance structures show the most promise for helping local stakeholders understand and successfully manage risks associated with climate change. Encouraging a more effective and politically palatable transition to decentralised governance should therefore be considered.

***(iv) Enhance local government capacity to take up the responsibilities afforded by decentralisation***

Support for more meaningful and effective decentralisation must be coupled with efforts to help local governments fulfil their corresponding roles and responsibilities. This may present many more difficulties for official development assistance agencies than the actual funding. Developing more competent and accountable city and municipal governments is a complex and usually highly contested process. It is very difficult for any external organisation, however well informed, to know how best to support this. Table 13.1 illustrates this by highlighting the different local government contexts.

**Table 13.1. Different local contexts through which national governments and international agencies can pursue “good governance” for adaptation**

| Resources available to local government  | The quality of local government/governance  |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | From democratic and accountable local government structures...  | ...to undemocratic, unaccountable and often clientelist local government   |
| From relatively well-resourced local government institutions with the needed technical competence...         | Local government can be well served by external funding, including funding to support adaptation by households and private enterprises, and funding for needed infrastructure and support services (whether provided by community organisations, non-governmental organisations, private enterprises or government agencies). | Long-term support needed for governance reforms at all levels of government; also support needed for local private and community provision both to improve conditions and to build local pressure on government for better governance. |
| ...to poorly resourced local governments lacking funding, a strong local revenue base and technical capacity | Need for a strong focus on capacity building for local government and support for its partnerships with civil society and local private-sector infrastructure and service providers (including informal providers).   | As above but with strong support for local private providers and community provision within a long-term goal of supporting more competent, accountable and transparent local government.   |

***(v) Increase support to civil society organisations***

Because civil society organisations interface most directly with communities, they represent a key constituent in local-level adaptation. Supporting civil society actors at the local level usually means supporting projects as the primary aid instrument. Despite limitations associated with project funding, civil society projects – and the actors that plan, implement and monitor them – are often the most direct line to local-level realities and priorities. They can be the most effective and efficient way of targeting low-income

and other high-risk groups that are underserved by the public sector. Ideally, projects should be undertaken with as much local and national government ownership as possible to ensure transfer of lessons and experience, and therefore the longer-term sustainability of results.



**From:**  
**Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into  
Development Co-operation: Policy Guidance**

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264054950-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2009), "Key Challenges and Priorities for Actions", in *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into Development Co-operation: Policy Guidance*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264054950-17-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to [rights@oecd.org](mailto:rights@oecd.org). Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com) or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at [contact@cfcopies.com](mailto:contact@cfcopies.com).