

Chapter 10

Introduction to the Local Level

This chapter addresses why the local level matters for adaptation. It then discusses linking local adaptation to the national, sectoral and project levels. It closes with a discussion of the roles donors play at the local level.

Part II of this policy guidance has highlighted the main entry points for integrating climate change adaptation into development activities at key decision levels. While the sector- and project-level entry points are relevant at a number of geographic scales and contexts, their treatment was somewhat generic in order to render them as broadly applicable as possible.

Part III will contextualise the process of integrating adaptation into development decision making by highlighting some of the unique circumstances present at the local level, in both urban and rural settings. “Local” refers generally to the sub-national geographic scale, but can mean something as specific as a particular area or place. It is the scale of administration and analysis closest to people and their everyday activities. Local decision-making levels can range from individuals to municipal governments, while local administrative levels can range from communes and villages to municipalities and districts. Local administrative entities manage the resources and affairs of people living in a defined geographic unit or territory through their own local governments. Individuals, households and other collectivities residing in these areas are affected by local government decisions. This part of the policy guidance will highlight the roles of local governments, communities and civil society, as well as the private sector in integrating climate change adaptation into development activities.

10.1. Why the local level matters for adaptation

Development impacts are best observed and understood at the local level. Generally speaking, looking at the local level allows development practitioners to understand the actual impact of development decisions taken at other, higher levels – *i.e.* how are development policies, programmes and projects implemented on the ground and what do they deliver to people? Are individuals and households able to strengthen their livelihoods, improve the quality of their life and reduce their vulnerability to shocks and stresses? Answering these questions requires engaging with local actors and understanding local contexts.

In terms of climate change adaptation, the local level is important for three main reasons:

- First, climate change impacts are manifested locally. While climate change is broadly understood as an increase in global mean temperature leading to changes in regional climate patterns, it appears locally as, *inter alia*, hotter days, more intense storms, less rainfall, or changes in the onset and length of growing seasons. These climatic changes in turn affect local livelihood activities, economic enterprises, health risks, and so on. Thus global climate change is translated into localised phenomena in response to local geography and other environmental, economic and socio-political factors.
- Second, vulnerability and adaptive capacity are also realised locally. This is because vulnerability and adaptive capacity are context-specific; they result from the interactions between many socio-ecological factors and processes such as income level, settlement patterns, infrastructure, ecosystem and human health, gender, political participation and individual behaviour (Box 10.1). Independently or combined, these determinants shape the way in which people are able to reduce exposure to, cope with, and/or recover from negative impacts of climate change or, alternatively, take advantage of the opportunities afforded by climate change.

Regional or national vulnerability indices often mask the dramatic variations in vulnerability at local levels.

- Third, adaptation action is best observed at local levels. The anticipated or actual experience of climate change impacts shape adaptation decision making and action – the latter being the translation of knowledge and capacity into behaviours and activities. Individual and household decisions about livelihood strategies and investments (*e.g.* crop selection, equipment purchase, skills training, and contingency planning) can represent real-life demonstrations of adaptation. These demonstrations are important to development co-operation policy makers and practitioners since they allow for the monitoring and evaluation of how policies, programmes and projects are supporting adaptation, providing a basis for scaling up, revising, and learning.

Box 10.1. Climate change adaptation and gender issues at the local level

Within poor communities, women and children tend to be particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation and natural disasters. When developing and implementing adaptation strategies at the local level, either in rural or urban settings, it is critical to recognise and respect the greater vulnerability of women to the impacts of climate as well as the difference in the way they are affected in comparison to men. Institutions and policies are rarely gender-neutral, and it is therefore important to consider the gendered effects or impacts of policies implemented at the local level to avoid contributing to differences in the relative vulnerability to climate change of men and women.

Women can be supported in the implementation of livelihood activities that are more tolerant and/or less vulnerable to an increasingly extreme and variable climate. In Bangladesh, for example, women have been supported in their efforts to move away from raising chickens to raising ducks for household consumption and income generation purposes in light of the growing risk of floods (CARE Canada, 2008). The specific needs of women should be considered when developing or designing local-level adaptation strategies, programmes and activities. For example, the needs of women have to be taken into consideration when seeking to improve access to agricultural extension services, developing disaster risk reduction strategies and identifying and distributing tools for adaptation. At the same time, recognition needs to be given to women’s knowledge and experience with respect to, for example, seed selection, medicinal plants, local hydrology, community organisation, and coping strategies that can promote adaptation to climate change. Adaptation plans, programmes and strategies need to include not only men’s but also women’s knowledge and experiences.

Source: CARE Canada (2008), “Bangladeshi Women are Knowledge Keepers in Mitigating Climate Change”, <http://care.ca/main/?en&BangladeshiWomen>; IUCN (2007), “Gender Aspects of Climate Change”, http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/climate_change_gender.pdf.

A range of activities oriented towards reducing poverty, improving nutrition and education, promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities, and improving climate change information would enhance local adaptive capacity to respond to climate change impacts. However, while adaptation at the local level is important for sustainable development, it is not easy to generalise the process through which this occurs or should be facilitated. The more localised the scale of analysis and action, the more difficult it is to develop broadly applicable guidance on how to promote successful adaptation. Different

administrative levels will have different roles in development policy planning and implementation, often depending on prevailing governance structures and approaches in a country (including the type and extent of decentralisation). Other times, local decision-making processes are influenced by informal, unpredictable or idiosyncratic factors such as individual personalities (*e.g.* opinion leaders), cultural preferences (*e.g.* traditional decision-making bodies), or events (*e.g.* election, conflict, earthquake). Thus, this policy guidance should be viewed as providing general information that will need to be interpreted and applied in practice in light of local circumstances, opportunities, limitations and needs.

10.2. Linking local adaptation to the national, sectoral and project levels

To understand adaptation decision making, one must differentiate between decision making at and for local levels as both cases involve different scales and actors. In rural and urban settings, decisions *at* the local level can be taken by individuals, households, and other collectives such as co-operatives, community-based organisations, businesses, and local governments. Decision making for or affecting local actors can take place at higher levels, such as at the provincial or central government levels, as well as in multilateral and bilateral development agencies. Local actors are ideally, but not always, consulted during these externally driven decision-making processes.

Thus, adaptation at the local level is strongly related to the other levels of decision making previously described in this policy guidance. The efforts to integrate adaptation into development processes at the regional, national, sectoral and project levels should ideally create a set of conditions, plans and incentives that allow sub-national actors to understand the changing risks they face and take actions to reduce their vulnerability to these risks (top-down). At the same time, however, many of these conditions, plans and incentives should be devised with participation and inputs from sub-national actors themselves, in order to ensure their uptake, sustainability, inclusiveness and overall success (bottom-up). Local actors should therefore both benefit from and shape adaptation decision making at other levels in order to ensure successful adaptation action. Lessons and experiences with adaptation at the local level must feed into higher levels of decision making to make sure that local strategies remain relevant and appropriate, and provide a basis for transferring knowledge to other sectors and communities. Effective communication channels, institutions that support innovation and experimentation, and meaningful participation from community-level actors are central to achieving this objective.

10.3. Roles donors play at the local level

Development co-operation agencies interact with local actors both directly (with local governments and locally based non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) and indirectly (through financial support at the sector or national level) to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate development programmes and projects. Indirect interactions are more common, as donors will typically prefer to work through locally based organisations.

Some of the critical policy initiatives of development assistance agencies have clear implications for adaptation at the local level. For example, donor support for decentralisation in partner countries may have important implications for climate change adaptation. Whether focused on political, fiscal, and/or administrative decentralisation,

the overarching aim of the process is usually to increase participation, government accountability, and to make public services delivery more efficient, accessible, and responsive to local needs. As the process of decentralisation continues, local-level adaptation to climate change may provide a window through which donors can better understand the relationship between decentralisation and local vulnerability reduction.