

Local adaptation plans in Nepal

Bimal Raj Regmi and Gyanendra Karki describe how climate change and development planning is being integrated into Local Adaptation Plans of Action in Nepal

Adapting to climate change will entail adjustments and changes at community, regional and national levels. To enable workable and effective adaptation measures, local and national government planners and policy makers, as well as stakeholders including non-government organizations, must consider integrating climate change into their planning, budgeting and decision making.

Integrating climate change into planning requires two types of information. First, information relating to climate change vulnerability is needed. This means knowledge relating to the factors that make people vulnerable to existing and potential climatic stresses, such as access to resources and services, political access and secure livelihoods. Such information is likely to be gleaned from vulnerable communities themselves. The second type of information required relates to

existing and potential climatic stresses. This includes predicted climatic trends, existing climatic hazards that are likely to be exacerbated, and which regions and sectors will suffer the impacts first and worst. Such information is available from experts and national level studies.

MAIN POINTS

- **The authors explain** how Local Adaptation Plans of Action in Nepal integrate top-down climate risk assessments with bottom-up community-led vulnerability assessments.
- **They describe** how adaptation planning in vulnerable

communities is supported through existing mechanisms such as Community Forestry User Groups.

- **It is concluded** that pilot activities have so far proved effective at mainstreaming climate change adaptation at the local level.

Both bottom-up information on vulnerability and top-down information on impacts is important for integrating climate change into planning at all levels. Much of the international discussion and debate to date, however, is based on an impacts-based approach to adaptation planning at the national level, through National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs). At the other end of the scale, some attention has been paid to community-based strategies that take a 'vulnerability first' approach to adaptation. These, however, have not been successfully scaled up to inform planning and policy-making across scales. This article proposes a way to integrate top-down and bottom-up approaches when mainstreaming adaptation into planning (from the local through to the national level) currently being piloted in Nepal: Local Adaptation Plans of Action (LAPAs).



Nepal, Barun Valley

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Adaptation planning in Nepal

Nepal is one of the last countries to develop its NAPA and as such has been able to learn lessons from NAPA processes in other countries. Recent evaluations of other NAPAs have shown that there is a need to take a more strategic approach to national adaptation planning with better links to both other climate change planning processes at the national level and also to mainstreaming adaptation across scales right down to the local level.

The NAPA in Nepal also follows a growing realization among academics, government and civil society that in order to achieve

mainstreaming, institutional mechanisms need to be developed to forge links between climate change activities initiated under the NAPA process and the risk management and development activities of national, sectoral and local planners.

Integrating climate change into development policy and planning whilst maintaining a participatory approach to understanding what vulnerability means in a development context requires inputs from a wide range of stakeholders. Lessons on mainstreaming adaptation into development from elsewhere have shown that it is important not to lose

sight of the contextual nature of vulnerability to climate change. This necessitates a range of inputs and approaches, from the knowledge of vulnerable local communities and non-government organizations regarding traditional and appropriate systems of adaptation in environmentally sensitive environments, through to the technical expertise of scientists and engineers.

In response to these lessons, the Government of Nepal has mobilized significant co-financing to undertake an 'expanded NAPA' process. This uses the NAPA as the basis for a sustainable framework on national climate change action, which can result in swift and well-coordinated follow-up to the NAPA priorities identified. The overall structure of the NAPA has three components: (1) preparation and dissemination of a NAPA document, (2) development and maintenance of a Climate Change Knowledge Management and Learning Platform for Nepal, and (3) development of a multi-stakeholder Framework of Action for Climate Change in Nepal.

Furthermore, the NAPA in Nepal has adopted an innovative approach to multi-stakeholder engagement and vulnerability analysis. This moves beyond the regional and national consultation meetings used by other NAPAs towards a framework that generates and incorporates meaningful inputs from a wide range of stakeholders including vulnerable communities themselves. Part of this approach involves the generation of LAPAs. These are being used to inform the

development of component (1) explained above - the NAPA document - and will be facilitated, taken forward and institutionalized under components (2) and (3).

What are LAPAs?

The vision for LAPAs is to develop a system of adaptation planning that does three things:

- enables communities to understand changing and uncertain future climatic conditions and engage effectively in the process of developing adaptation priorities;
- implements climate resilient plans that are flexible enough to respond to changing climatic and vulnerability conditions; and,

- informs sectoral programmes and catalyses integrated approaches between sectors.

Bottom-up processes are important in order to come to a common understanding with the community on what the most significant climate risks and hazards are, which among these are most urgent, and what could be done at the local level to respond to them based on local knowledge and perceptions. The LAPA planning process seeks to establish a vertical link between the national-scale, top-down assessments of current climate risks and future climate risks, with bottom-up assessments from community members themselves, informed by local knowledge and geographical specificity. This

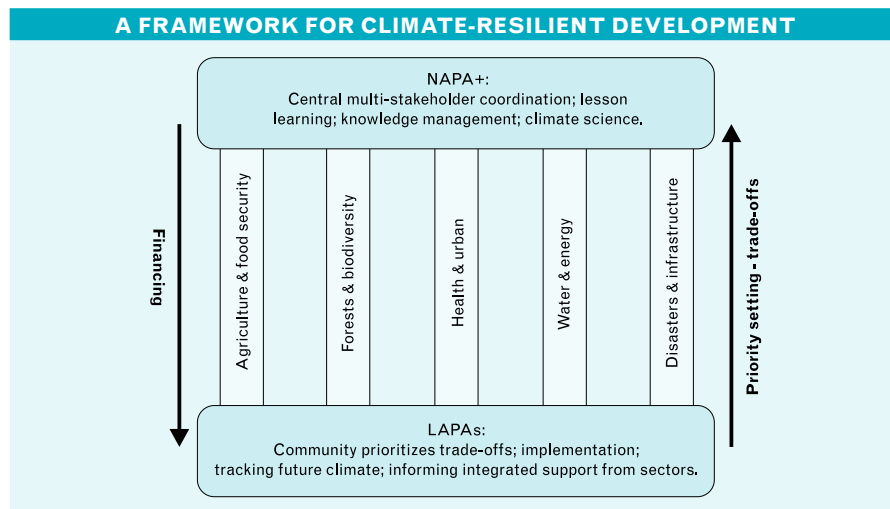
is particularly critical because if communities are unable to distinguish climate change risks from the other risks that they face, then efforts to develop adaptive capacity might become unfocused or ineffective. As other research has noted, involving communities in identifying adaptation priorities and options is more likely to lead to a successful adaptation intervention.

The LAPA is a plan prepared at the local level by a multi-stakeholder team including the vulnerable communities. It involves decentralized and bottom-up planning processes. It aims to identify local adaptation needs that focus on reducing local climate risks and vulnerabilities and increasing resilience. It should also strengthen local and mid-level institutional mechanisms for ensuring consolidated and coordinated adaptation responses at local levels through existing planning process.

In turn, LAPAs could be used as a vehicle to inform sectoral programmes and catalyse cross-sectoral coordination to build climate resilience. Mainstreaming climate change adaptation into existing local development planning in this way - particularly at district and village levels - is important to ensure bottom-up perspectives are integrated into climate resilient development planning.

Case study: piloting LAPAs in Nepal

The Ministry of Environment in Nepal has taken up the concept of LAPAs and is currently designing plans for a pilot programme





Farming in Nepal

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under the NAPA. This pilot programme will design and implement LAPAs in ten districts across the country. The aim of the LAPAs is to showcase how to enable adaptation planning and delivery at a local scale, and how to identify appropriate multi-scale institutional linkages for mainstreaming adaptation throughout Nepal.

One of the existing models that LAPA design in Nepal will draw on is that of the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP). This

has been piloting a LAPA-type approach to forest management in over 300 districts since 2009. The community forestry programme is one of the most successful community-based natural resource management programmes in Nepal. It has helped enhance rural livelihoods - hence providing climate change adaptation benefits - by conducting wider livelihoods-based and community development activities at the community level. Community forestry has provided livelihood

opportunities for the poor by using pro-poor inclusive approaches that target poor and disadvantaged people using wealth ranking. Key to the success of the LFP programme are effective formalized local institutions known as Community Forestry User Groups. The LFP supports the Community Forestry User Groups by providing technical and financial backstopping to help them understand, plan and implement forestry and climate change related activities. Community Forestry User Groups spend more than 70 per cent of their income on wider community development or livelihood activities.

Supported by the United Kingdom government Department for International Development, the LFP has recently started developing the adaptive capacity of local communities by systematically developing Community Adaptation Planning through community forestry. This is done using existing mechanisms such as Community Forestry User Groups and Public and Institutional Land Management groups. The Community Adaptation Planning programme covers 512 village development committees and 2292 community groups (about 50 per cent of the total number of LFP Community Forestry User Groups) in 15 districts.

Rather than creating new mechanisms, the LFP has used existing mechanisms to develop community adaptation planning in support of the most vulnerable communities and people. The process started with sensitization of local communities on climate change

issues, developing guidelines for field facilitators/practitioners, enhancing the capacity of more than 500 local facilitators/community practitioners on vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning, and supporting the preparation of adaptation plans at grass-root levels targeting poor and vulnerable households.

The Community Forestry User Groups and their network provide very strong sustainable grassroot-level institutions that can take the lead on natural resources conservation and management. The piloting of local-level adaptation planning and community-based adaptation is done by mobilizing these 300 User Groups and the Village Development Committee-level forestry coordination committees. The programme has also established grassroot-level community-based adaptation funding to help innovative users and vulnerable households access resources and obtain support for their adaptation plans.

The LFP initiatives piloting community-based adaptation planning will provide good lessons for LAPAs. The NAPA will build on learning from the LFP, particularly from the pilot projects, on institutional design, institutional linkages and natural resource management interventions.

Key learning for LAPAs

It is too early to assess key learning for LAPAs, but this innovative adaptation mechanism is already helping test whether mitigation and adaptation options in particularly vul-

nerable districts of Nepal can converge. The process has identified social transfer and financial support programmes that are well-targeted, well-timed and can help enable adaptation in the forestry sector by encouraging people to become less risk averse and try out different adaptive options. High levels of awareness and sensitization have encouraged users to pilot and scale up mechanisms for mainstreaming climate change into their development activities.

The way forward

The LAPA concept is being debated and incorporated into development thinking in Nepal. The Ministry of Environment, which is the lead ministry on climate change and the focal ministry for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is very keen to pilot and draw lessons from LAPAs and is looking for opportunities to mainstream climate change into development planning processes. Preparation of the NAPA document is a live process, which plans to link to local-level community-based adaptation planning and initiatives. Although the pilot activities are in an early phase, there are already encouraging results: existing mechanisms are so far proving effective at mainstreaming climate change adaptation at the local level. ■

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DISCLAIMER

● Bimal Raj Regmi is currently Climate Change and Natural Resources Adviser at the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) in Nepal. The views presented in this paper do not, however, represent DFID's views or position.