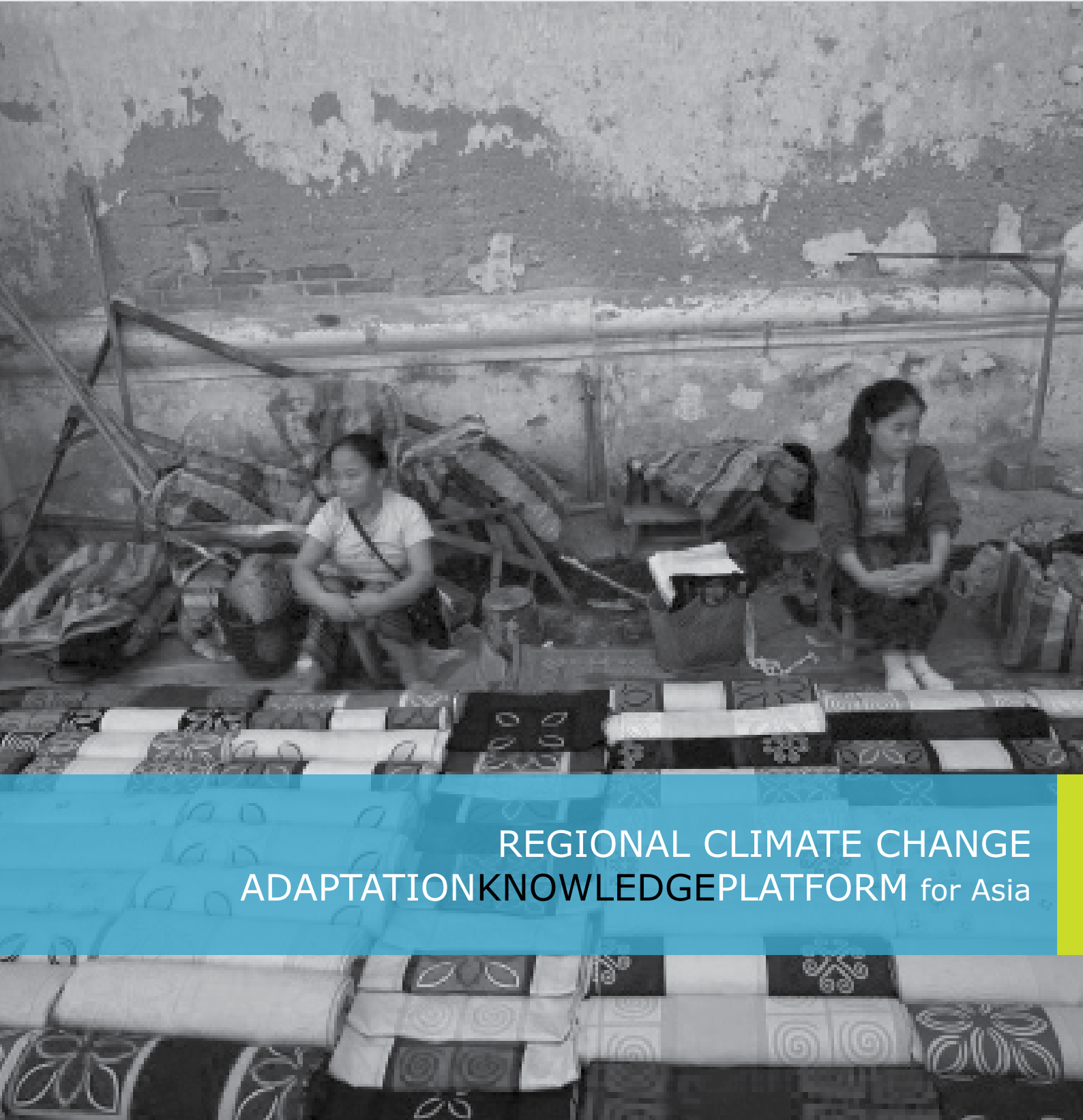


Policy Research Brief No 3
Governance of Adaptation

May 2012



**ADAPTATION
KNOWLEDGE
PLATFORM**



**REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE
ADAPTATION KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM for Asia**

This **Policy Research Brief** draws on work in progress related to the Adaptation Knowledge Platform to disseminate and exchange adaptation knowledge with a wider audience. We welcome your suggestions or comments.


This policy research brief was written by Louis Lebel (Unit for Social and Environmental Research, Chiang Mai University, *llebel@loxinfo.co.th*) on behalf of the Adaptation Knowledge Platform. It summarizes the key messages from two journal articles in preparation on the governance of adaptation.^{32,33}

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The legitimacy of adaptation projects, plans and institutions depends how acknowledged and affected stakeholders perceive the reasonableness and fairness of how decisions are made.

GOVERNANCE OF ADAPTATION

This policy brief argues that the quality of governance is an important determinant of successful adaptation. Governance is understood here as the system of formal and informal rules, rule-making systems, and actor-networks that steer societies.²⁰

There are four key messages.

- First, how decisions are made about adaptation is important for legitimacy, and ultimately, for who benefits from, and who is burdened by, interventions.
- Second, equitable and fair outcomes are more likely when participation is inclusive and deliberations open and well-informed.
- Third how well decisions are acted upon depends on knowledge, coordination, leadership, resources and monitoring.
- Fourth, significant uncertainties about impacts of climate change and the effects of policy interventions in specific places imply that adaptive forms of governance which foster learning will be crucial.

The brief derives from the experiences of the Adaptation Knowledge Platform. It draws on issues raised at the March 2012 Adaptation Forum held in Bangkok's United Nations Conference Centre and a series of sharing and learning seminars.¹⁶

HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

Decisions about what strategies and activities should be in a national plan, what programs to finance, and what a particular project should achieve can be made with differing emphasis on evidence, interests, needs and benefits or costs.

Decisions may be reached through or only after extended multi-stakeholder process of consultation, deliberation and negotiation; or they might be reached by an expert or politician sitting alone in a room.

The legitimacy of adaptation projects, plans and institutions depends how acknowledged and affected stakeholders perceive the reasonableness and fairness of how decisions are made. If the community does not accept the justifications or rejects the process then those decisions may not be supported and become harder to implement.

Experiences in the Asia-Pacific region at various levels of governance and dealing with different decision problems often conclude a need for more meaningful participation and higher quality deliberation.

PARTICIPATION AND DELIBERATION

Meaningful of engagement with key stakeholders and broader public participation is important to authorities getting support for projects and plans and for effective functioning of international institutions. Without it legitimacy may be low.

Being inclusive is critical because otherwise the interests and capabilities of marginalized and vulnerable groups are at risk of being ignored.

Being inclusive is critical because otherwise the interests and capabilities of marginalized and vulnerable groups are at risk of being ignored. Marginalized groups need social, economic, and political space in which to exercise their expertise and rights to adapt. Inclusiveness creates a sense of ownership.

Being deliberative is important because stakeholders have different understandings of issues, draw on different sources of knowledge, and need to be able to question claims. Deliberation may not produce consensus but it should help improve mutual understanding of points of agreement and difference. Deliberation encourages the integration of multiple perspectives.²⁵

National Plans

The history of national level adaptation planning highlights the importance of stakeholder involvement as well as making links to existing programs and organizations for legitimacy. National plans and policies on adaptation are typically led by an environment-related department. Gaining acceptance from other government stakeholders in other Ministries is a recurrent challenge and requires careful attention to coordination and consultation procedures. In many countries non-state actors carefully scrutinize national planning processes and reports for their openness, vested interests, and soundness of commitments.

Building legitimacy of national plans will often require multi-stakeholder processes that are inclusive. Once agreed to such plans can be a useful tool for negotiating external assistance and guiding sector and subnational activities as priorities have already been deliberated.³⁵

Assessments

Thorough and well organized assessments should inform development planning and help to identify and evaluate risks and adaptation options that are specific to the decision or policy problem. Assessments have evolved beyond their early linear hazards model to include a consideration of current climate, policies and other development factors.²⁷

Analysis of ADB's investments suggest that it costs 5-15% and sometimes as much as 20% more to climate-proof investments in infrastructure such as roads, pipelines or bridges. That infrastructure is projected to be adversely affected by climate change does not necessarily imply that it should be climate-proofed. The cost effectiveness of climate-proofing infrastructure depends on the benefits.

Assessments of risks, vulnerability and adaptation options increasingly incorporate and even emphasize the concerns and issues of stakeholders. Doing so can lead to rather different framing of adaptation in development problems than the conventional approach from starting with potential climate impacts.

Regardless of the process and technical content of assessment there are still challenges in taking the knowledge they synthesize and perspectives they bring to a problem into decision-making. Existing national and sub-national development planning systems, often limit wider engagement and deliberation. Improving transparency and accountability in adaptation planning is an issue that has not been sufficiently addressed in discussions concerning mainstreaming.³⁵

Financing

Asian countries need as much as US\$40 billion per year for the next four decades to adapt to climate change.⁷ International support is going to be critical to successful adaptation in developing countries. A long-term commitment to adaptation is needed and underway and now must be pursued in parallel with mitigation efforts.¹⁸

Several international funds exist to help with financing of adaptation actions in developing countries. The Least Developed Country Fund, for instance, has supported mostly preparation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action and a few priority follow-up projects. It is financed through voluntary contributions from donor countries and managed by the Global Environment Facility. The Adaptation Fund aims to support project in 'particularly vulnerable' developing countries and is financed, in part, by proceeds from the Clean Development Mechanism. It has its own Board. There are several other funds in operation or proposed.

The governance of international financing for adaptation is complex and contested.

The governance of international financing for adaptation is complex and contested. Donor and recipient countries often have different perspectives on representation in governance structures, contributions to funds, how decisions should be made and the criteria and procedures projects should follow.

Multiple sources of finance will continue to be necessary to match large and growing needs of developing countries. At the same time consolidation and improved coordination among international funds is needed. Fragmented system makes it hard for countries to prioritize and synergize projects.³⁷

Climate financing need to take into consideration that projects which build resilience to climate change and have other development co-benefits will often be preferable to stand-alone projects addressing a specific impact. This will make addressing accountability and transparency concerns of donors a bit more difficult but is consistent with the mainstreaming approach.

Another key issue is how to prioritize allocation of funds among countries. Gaining agreement is itself a governance challenge and major point of negotiations as can be witnessed in arguments over the details of the design of the Green Climate Fund.³⁰

⁴¹ Past experiences with international aid, global health funding and climate-related financing should be critically reflected upon in designing new adaptation-related funds.

How financing instruments are governed matters – who sits on boards, rules and criteria for grants, and transparency of procedures – for their perceived legitimacy and thus ultimately supporting successful adaptation. It is important that efforts to improve the governance of financing do not become too cumbersome that they delay adaptation actions.²³ Likewise poor governance in recipient countries should also not become an excuse to hold back funds, but rather an opportunity to improve the quality of governance.

HOW DECISIONS ARE ACTED UPON

How decisions are acted upon, in part, is a reflection of the kinds of decisions made. Adaptation projects focused on responding to a specific climate impact can be distinguished from those which aim to build resilience or capacities to adapt to a range of plausible future climates. The latter type of projects and plans bring adaptation into the sphere of 'normal' development.

Coordination

Vertical and horizontal coordination are important to national policies and strategies on adaptation.² Capacities to coordinate, consult with, and engage multiple stakeholders may be as important as technical expertise on climate change for resilience planning.³⁹ There are many challenges of ensuring the top-down and bottom-up approaches meet.¹²

From the perspective of the local level enabling them to work with national and international experts may be an effective way to build capacity.

Adaptation programs that take a multi-level approach, even if they primarily focus on one level, must manage the challenge of working with different key individuals and organizations at each level. From the perspective of the local level enabling them to work with national and international experts may be an effective way to build capacity.³⁹ Many questions remain, institutionally, about what are the most effective ways to

coordinate adaptation activities across scales.^{1,28}

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming adaptation into development planning has been widely promoted.³⁵ The expected benefits include: avoiding policy conflicts; reduced risks and vulnerability; greater efficiency compared to managing adaptation separately; and, potentially access to larger financial flows. A key step is to screen for climate risks and assess whether or not more should be done.²⁹

Mainstreaming principles, in practice, are often hard to implement. Reasons include insufficient guidance from central to local and line agencies as well as conventional problems of sectoral fragmentation and lack of long-term objectives.⁶ Integration into sectors which are rarely identified as climate related is particularly challenging.¹⁵ High-level support and leadership are often crucial to success of mainstreaming efforts.

The local level

Many crucial adaptation actions take place at relatively local levels. Local governments make decisions, coordinate and implement projects. Local communities choose to participate, cooperatively manage resources, and provide knowledge or labor. Individual, local, projects need to demonstrate accountability both upwards to national government and donors and downwards to local communities and constituencies.

In some cases community-based adaptation may be relatively self-organized and independent, but in others actions significantly benefit from, or are hindered by, the actions of local government. Local governments, in practice, have often been responsible for adapting to climate even if they have not fully recognized this role. They build the dykes, secure water sources, set housing standards and zone land-use. Now they need to consider adapting to a changing climate.⁹

Building climate resilient cities requires careful attention to local government planning both within and beyond municipal boundaries, especially in critical peri-urban areas.¹⁰ Multiple strategies, hard and soft, are needed at the intersection between climate change and urbanization.⁵ City planning cannot expect complete control over how space is used but instead should enable self-organization and enhance autonomous adaptation.¹⁴

Decentralization reforms further enable local governments to act on adaptation strategies.³ Despite the many challenges, some countries, like Bhutan and Nepal, have been able to allocate most of their adaptation budget to the local level.¹³

Capacity and resources

A key issue at sub-national, but also at national level in many sectors, is the capacity of authorities to integrate climate change concerns into their operations. Often non-government organizations and corporate sector have skills or expertise needed by public agencies. Partnerships may be important for effective implementation but can make accountability relationships ambiguous. Regulations and standards may be necessary.

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Adequate resources – human and financial – are essential to going from plans to actions. Budgeting processes and planning cycles can both enable and hinder implementation of adaptation actions. Scientific knowledge as well as both experience and understanding of local context is important to taking actions.^{4,31}

Successfully combining these different forms of knowledge and learning from their application raises institutional challenges related to effective knowledge management; when there are contested claims there are also important governance issues to consider, for example, related to the credibility and legitimacy of scientific assessments..

HOW ACTIONS ARE LEARNT FROM

Adaptation projects, plans and policies – if evaluated at all – are typically judged against stated objectives and expected results. To properly judge performance or success, however, they should also be evaluated for their social, economic and environmental impacts.²⁴ A key element of quality in governance is being reflexive, in other words, evaluating the system itself and changing it if needed.

Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation of adaptation strategies is important because of the large uncertainties associated with both climate change and the impacts of newly formulated policies and projects.^{34, 36} Monitoring is needed to evaluate whether projects meet their climate adaptation objectives as well as other benefits or adverse impacts they may have on the environment and development. Although the need to monitor and review is stressed in most guides and frameworks, how to achieve this is often left unspecified and often appears to be lacking.³⁸

Most governments are not tracking climate-related expenditures.¹⁷ Experiences working with Pacific Island countries suggest a need to think in terms of decadal programs of tracking funds, measuring impacts and building capacities.⁸ Long-term building and integrating capacity and producers into decision-making processes, however, is contrary to the conventional project-based logic of development agencies with a focus on short-term demonstrable results.

Overall, monitoring and evaluation of adaptation projects needs to be strengthened. Tracking should measure both how well climate risks are being managed and vulnerabilities reduced so development trajectories are maintained.²² Regular as well as triggered reviews of policies, plans and projects should be designed into implementation from the start.^{36,40}

Accountability

Effective monitoring can help improve accountability if information is also disclosed and available to affected stakeholders and they have a way of sanctioning authorities for poor performance – for example, through the electoral box. In the case of private or internationally financed adaptation projects such conventional accountability mechanisms are typically not available.^{19,21}

Most attention has been given to improving accountability of project activities to donors, or through intermediate financing institutions, by improving monitoring. Arguably it is even more important that accountability downwards to affected stakeholders be increased. This usually would imply giving them a significant role in project design and evaluation, if not also in implementation where local skills are relevant.

Adaptive governance

The most effective ways to adapt are often not known with great certainty in specific places and sectors. But many experiments and initiatives are underway.

For this reason insight from practice, experiences in projects and with plans are crucial to learning how to improve future adaptation actions.

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Being adaptive is crucial because understanding is incomplete, uncertainties large and history may be a poor guide. Authorities have to be ready to discard assessments and policies or to adjust responses when they turn out to have been wrong. Forward looking, anticipatory, assessments to guide actions are also needed. Governance systems themselves will have to adapt to deal with long-term nature of changes like sea-level rise and new types and levels of uncertainty to which they are generally not well-equipped.¹¹ Adaptive forms of governance aim to address such challenges by emphasizing social learning and managing resilience.²⁶ Adaptive governance should also be reflexive.

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