

Challenges of community based adaptation initiatives in Nepal

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INTRODUCTION

Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. In an effort to overcome the challenges posed by the changing climate, the country has pioneered in local climate change adaptation planning, especially towards the community based adaptation initiatives. Nepal conceptualized the idea of Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) and was one of the first nations to develop the national framework for LAPA. Piloting and expansion of LAPA in several districts is underway. Similarly, many development partners (bi-lateral projects and International Non-Governmental Organizations - INGOs) have initiated community adaptation planning, producing over 3000 community adaptation plans (CAPs). However, the current initiatives on adaptation are limited to planning and very little progress is made in terms of implementing those plans. Therefore, there is an urgent need to revisit the ongoing initiatives, identify critical gaps and explore ways to address them. This policy brief which critically examines the community level adaptation planning and identifies the gaps, is based on ForestAction's research and development engagement in a number of adaptation initiatives.



MANY FOLDS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

It has been widely reported that climate change has impacts to peoples' lives in many ways, especially to those dependent on natural resources. As shown in table 1, the impacts are visible on ecological and economic aspects including loss of property and human lives, decreased agricultural production and decline in the availability of water. Moreover, people are subjected to frequent flooding, landslide, droughts and diseases among other direct impacts of climate change. The table below brings few representative cases from across the country, demonstrating diversity of ecological and socio-economic impacts.

KEY MESSAGES

- √ Impacts of climate change are diverse and therefore, context specific innovations are imperative in addressing climate related threats.
- √ Current community based initiatives are largely limited to planning, lack inbuilt financial resources and institutional support system for implementation
- √ Institutional plurality has induced innovations but undermined the role of local governments
- √ Gaps in national policy and institutional framework have posed challenges in mainstreaming adaptation into local development planning

Table 1: Climate variability and its diverse biophysical and socio-economic impacts

S.N.	Location	Biophysical Impacts	Socio-economic outcomes
1.	Limi valley of Humla	Glacial lake outburst flood due to melting of snow	Loss of houses, livestock, bridge, trails and erosion of farmland
2.	Mustang	Changing vegetation (tree) line along the Himalayas, drying of water sources, shrinking pastureland areas	Increased incidences of animal diseases, deteriorating taste of apple, traditional mud roofs leaked
3.	Joginiya, Saptari	Increasing incidents of flood in Koshi river, damage to houses and crops and loss of livestock	Displaced settlements, broken bridges and roads, reduced market access
4.	Central Terai	Increasing frequency and intensity of cold wave	Increasing death, disease, loss of crop and livestock productivity
5.	Ilam	Late monsoon, inadequate rain, low humidity, increased temperature	Decrease in tea production (average 85%, in one village, the production reduced from 200kg to only 22kg in a year)
6.	Ghajari Pipal, Salyan	Increasing drought periods, high temperature, drying up of water sources	Scarcity of drinking water, increased time and labour need to fetch water, reduction in crop production

Source: Adhikari 2013¹

ADAPTATION INITIATIVES AT LOCAL LEVEL

Local level initiatives on climate change adaptation in Nepal have two important dimensions. First, the government has advanced piloting and expansion of LAPAs in several districts. LAPA piloting is based at the local government levels (Village Development Committees/Municipalities and District Development Committees). Second, most development agencies (especially INGOs and some bilateral projects) have been supporting to develop CAPs. As of December 2012, about 3,000 CAPs have been prepared. In this policy brief, we focus on community based adaptation planning.

Review of the CAPs revealed that majority of them is closely aligned with forestry and natural resources management initiatives. As a result of this, the community forest user groups (CFUGs) have been considered as the grass-root institution to those adaptation plans. The logic behind such choice is that they provide a good scale and resource base. In some cases, development agencies (especially CARE Nepal through CHULI project in central Terai districts) were working directly with the poor, landless, women, dalits and other marginalised groups. The argument here is that the initiative would directly address the issues of most vulnerable groups. However, given the weak influence of these groups in the local government and other local institutions, there is a challenge to integrate the CAPs with the VDC and DDC level planning. Table 2 presents the relative strengths and weaknesses of two types of community based organizations (CBOs) involved in the community adaptation planning process.



Table 2: Relative strengths and weaknesses of particular CBOs in CAP

Institutional choice	Strength	Weakness
Socially marginal groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct engagement with, and active participation of the most vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As everyday living is their primary concern, they can hardly prioritise long term resilience
Community forest user groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are robust local institutions and well recognised by the policy and law. • They manage a reasonably sizeable land and resource base • They have a better access to financial resources for adaptation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relying on CFUGs may result in exclusion of non-members in the territory. • These are not part of local government and therefore challenges of vertical integration of the CAP remains

Source: Paudel et al. 2013²

¹ Adopted from Adhikari, M. 2013. Collection of Climate Change Impact Events: A Manual for Facilitators (In Nepali). Kathmandu: ForestAction Nepal

² Adopted from Paudel, N.S., Khatri, D.B., Karki, R. and Gurung, N. 2013. Avenues and Challenges of Mainstreaming Community Adaptation initiatives into Local Development Planning in Nepal. Kathmandu: ForestAction Nepal.

ADAPTATION IS LIMITED TO PLANNING

A review of community adaptation planning revealed that the implementation of these plans is very poor. First, the plans are highly ambitious compared to the local community's capacity to mobilise resources. In many CAPs, the budget estimation is not included. Even if it is included, the budget is well above the annual transactions of the implementing local institutions. The agencies supporting CAP process hardly support its implementation and linkage of the CAPs with local government and line agencies is poor (see table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of adaptation plans of different institutions

	Marginal groups	CFUG in Conservation Area	CFUG
Scale	Tulsi PVSE (poor, vulnerable and socially excluded) group, Dhanusha	Gauthali CFUG (Toplejung)	Rajdevi CFUG (Gorkha)
Estimated cost	No budget estimation	No budget estimation	No budget estimation
Source of financing	No clarity on funding sources	Stakeholders support is vaguely mentioned	'Hariyo Ban Programme' will provide some support

Source: Paudel et al. 2013

WEAK COORDINATION

There is a limited horizontal and vertical coordination of climate change initiatives with local government and line agencies. The frequent transfer of staffs and their huge administrative responsibilities makes it hard to solicit their support. Besides, widespread corruption across the local governments has hindered their functioning. For example, during our field visit, 15 staffs of Dhanusha DDC were expelled from their jobs due to a corruption scandal. Though stakeholders including the local government have been invited during the CAP preparation process, these representation has merely been symbolic and driven by monetary incentives in the form of allowances or individual interests to understand these emerging issues. These individual representations in some events during the development of CAPs have hardly turned into functional, institutional collaboration.

WEAK INTEGRATION INTO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Mainstreaming or integration of climate change adaptation into development planning could address the problem of implementation of the CAPs. However,

the adaptation and development planning have become two separate parts of the game. Development planning at the local government level is highly influenced by the vested interests of the political parties and their influential leaders. Absence of the elected local government for over 15 years has seriously undermined the democratic system of local level planning. In such context, planning is highly influenced by the petty interests of few powerful leaders who may have little understanding or appreciation of climate change issues. Moreover, there is lack of clear policy mandate and practical guidelines for adaptation activities to the district line agencies and local government.

GAP IN NATIONAL POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The weak coordination at the local level, little integration with the local development planning and marginal roles of local governments in adaptation planning can be attributed to policy and institutional ambiguity at the national level, and less accountability of development actions at the local level.

The climate change related policies do not provide a clear and coherent institutional framework for implementing adaptation activities at local level. The three key documents often contradict each other. The NAPA and the Climate Change Policy have made a provision for mobilizing the existing community institutions such as CFUGs, water users' groups and farmers' groups for developing and implementing adaptation plans. But, the policy documents do not adequately recognize the role of local governments in planning and implementation of adaptation activities. Whereas, the LAPA framework on the other hand has put absolute focus on local governments in planning and implementation of adaptation activities and is silent on the role of community-level institutions.

The national policy documents also show a different understanding of the relationship between adaptation and ongoing development planning. NAPA assumes that the sectoral ministries will mainstream the climate change adaptation into their sectoral plans instead of developing separate adaptation plans. However, the LAPA framework focuses more on developing separate climate change adaptation plans at different levels of local governance. Though LAPA emphasizes on integrating climate adaptation into development planning, it provides a framework and process for preparing a separate plan for climate adaptation without integrating it into local development plans.

AID ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE AT LOCAL LEVEL

Plurality of institutions and marginalization of the local governments is partly linked with the current aid economy and development practice at the local level. NGOs are directly helping community groups in preparing adaptation plans. Multiple institutions such as the CFUGs, conservation CFUGs (in case of conservation area), the PVSE groups and the Disaster Risk Management Committees (DRMCs) have been projected in responding to climate change. The external agencies have recognized these institutions by partnering in projects, building their capacities, and providing financial resources. They have gradually developed special sense of belongingness with the local people by supporting them in their immediate concerns. Unfortunately, these institutions tend to promote their specific interests and do not represent the whole population across certain geography or political constituency. Also, the participatory process within these institutions is usually not binding and do not compel the powerful actors to be accountable to their constituency.

The development agencies usually prefer apolitical and quiet working environment and avoiding the complex everyday politics. Aid agencies and their NGO partners often work in isolation from each other and in parallel with local development planning. Consequently, as most of the adaptation planning is taking place outside the domain of local governments, these are less likely to be integrated with the VDC/DDC led planning. As neither the local governments nor the line agencies own these plans, the CAPs essentially remain orphan—undermining their successful implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The national policy framework should provide a clear institutional framework for adaptation planning and

implementation, especially at the local level. There must be a clarity in the roles and responsibilities of local governments, line ministries, development partners and community based organizations.

- Provide clear mandates to local government and sectoral ministries for mainstreaming adaptation into regular development planning through budgeted activities, guidelines and manuals.
- Adopt a concrete strategy for developing institutional and human capacity of the sectoral ministries, line agencies, local governments and community based institutions. They may need increased understanding of the issues related to adaptation, expertise to plan and implement the activities.
- Develop an effective coordination mechanism particularly at the local level. All relevant public, civic and private sector organizations must be involved in the local level adaptation planning. Many of the existing bodies and mechanisms may require restructuring to make them inclusive and effective.
- The role of local government (VDC and DDC) should be brought at the center in terms of adaptation planning and should be considered as the most legitimate local authority to plan and fund adaptation actions. This would help prepare more realistic, locally relevant plans and also ensure their implementation within the larger democratic governance framework.

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