Using indigenous knowledge to enhance community resilience to climate change in the mountainous region of Viet Nam

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Indigenous people have developed complex farming systems, cultural practices, and a knowledge base well-suited to their environments. Indigenous knowledge (IK) has the potential to further the processes of developing and promoting sustainable and local community development. Many communities globally, especially those populated by indigenous people, already have the contextualized and relevant knowledge for addressing problems, including many climate risks. For many of these crops, farmers can also save seed, thereby reducing costs and benefitting from local conditions.

The study found that ethnic minorities produce many native crop varieties and animal breeds. The varieties cultivated are said to be more resistant to drought and suffer less pressure from pests and disease.

In addition to native crops, farmers use native or heritage livestock that are adaptable to the local climate and are more disease resistant. For example, black pigs and black chicken, many of which have been raised in the area for over 50 years.

If indigenous knowledge were better integrated into adaptation planning and policies, its conservation and application would enhance resilience to climate change in indigenous communities and beyond. However, traditional coping and adaptation strategies as employed by the indigenous people might not be sufficient. Indigenous people’s observations and weather forecasting systems in the future may become less meaningful or even misguide them in their decisions. In this way, communities might be well adapted to their current climate, but less able to adapt to climate change as existing knowledge is typically based on past experiences.

LESSONS LEARNED

Combining indigenous and scientific knowledge on social-ecological systems is crucial for understanding their resilience.

Working within this collaborative framework, governments should seek to support this dualistic problem-solving approach and enhance access of local communities to relevant scientific information that both supports them and accommodates their knowledge. The best strategy in the context of uncertain climate change is to increase the adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities.

GAPS AND NEEDS FOR RESEARCH AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Number of local people including Tay, Dao, and Hmong people with increased capacity to implement agricultural practices that are more resilient to climate change.

Risk and resilience in the Pacific: Influence of peripherality on exposure and responses to global change

The current trend of increasing dependency of developing countries on their richer counterparts for addressing the impacts of climate change is unsustainable. Developed countries and international aid agencies need to consider shifting their focus towards growing the autonomy of developing countries to address their own climate change adaptation needs. Over the last few decades, most externally-sponsored interventions for climate change adaptation in the Pacific have either been ineffective or unsustainable. Research shows that this is because these involve unfamiliar global/western worldviews, scientific reasoning and foreign languages, none of which encourage the adoption of these interventions by local communities.

Many Pacific communities (and others in the Global South) have considerable stocks of cultural knowledge for coping with environmental adversity. Such knowledge is often superior to external/global knowledge because it is locally applicable and has been tried and tested and is, therefore, trusted by key stakeholders. Research concludes that local or traditional knowledge should be foregrounded in adaptation interventions as these are to succeed. There is clearly much work to be done to revive and disseminate such traditional knowledge within the Pacific in order to ensure its sustainable future.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Many western/gLOBAL researchers talk about the barriers to climate change adaptation they encounter in developing countries without realizing that people in these countries also perceive similar barriers—around worldview, language and justification for adaptive action. There should be more research into equitable conversations for adaptation in the Global South.

In many developing countries (including those in the Pacific), sustainable futures depend on combining traditional knowledge and climate science. For while the present climate emergency may be unprecedented, Pacific peoples have had similar experience of climate change and disasters in the past. The exclusion of traditional knowledge will never produce the deep engagement with diverse communities that is needed to sustain climate change adaptation. Such knowledge is often superior to external/global knowledge because it is locally applicable and has been tried and tested and is, therefore, trusted by key stakeholders. Research concludes that local or traditional knowledge should be foregrounded in adaptation interventions as these are to succeed. There is clearly much work to be done to revive and disseminate such traditional knowledge within the Pacific in order to ensure its sustainable future.

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