

Linking National and Local Adaptation Planning: Lessons from Nepal

Nepal's National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) provides a clear guideline for the disbursement of at least 80 per cent of adaptation funds on implementation at the local level. To support implementation the government of Nepal has recently developed a national framework for a Local Adaptation Plan for Action (LAPA). The LAPA framework aims to make adaptation planning a bottom-up, inclusive, responsive and flexible process that will identify the most climate vulnerable people and allow

them to make informed decisions on priority adaptation actions. It provides an opportunity for undertaking developmental activities that are climate resilient with strong co-benefits for poverty reduction. The integration of local level Climate and Energy Plans with the LAPA could facilitate some triple-wins and produce low carbon climate resilient development (LCCRD). However, the biggest challenge to achieving these aims will be the quality of governance at all levels.

Delivering national climate adaptation plans at the local level can deliver co-benefits if...

- Social exclusion is addressed. The poorest and most marginalised groups of people complain of being excluded from development planning and decision-making and not being able to access state resources.
- The process is used to refresh development efforts that focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised people. The narrative on climate change in Nepal emphasises inclusive governance and a commitment to using available funds for local level implementation.
- Mechanisms for improving chains of communication are developed. Effective communication can help to reduce the mismatch between autonomous and planned adaptation, facilitate the use of traditional knowledge in planning processes, and theoretically lead to more successful adaptation interventions because they have community support.
- Support for governance reform and capacity development is continued. This may well be one of the most effective ways in which donors can contribute to enhancing the prospects for the LAPA in Nepal.

Learning lessons for linking national and local adaptation planning

1 Countries need both a national policy framework plus high resolution local plans

Developing a LAPA *can* help bridge central planning and local priorities, connecting higher level mobilisation of resources for adaptation and channelling those resources into the hands of those who need them.

2 Recognise that local climate change responses may contribute to improved governance as well as poverty co-benefits

Planning in Nepal may be better able to move beyond centralisation as a result of the LAPA experience, becoming generally more flexible, iterative and allowing

for various future scenarios. Local level responses to climate change could help produce and promote new forms of partnerships and perhaps even a more democratic society in the context of a fragile state. Only focusing on the LCCRD co-benefits risks overlooking broader co-benefits such as this prospective 'governance co-benefit'.

3 Explore opportunities for integrating energy planning and adaptation planning at local levels

There are prospects for integrating low carbon solutions to energy poverty into adaptation planning via District Climate and Energy Plans.

4 Invest in and support governance reform to achieve the intended outcomes

Limited government capacity at all levels creates serious governance challenges. This is particularly the case at local levels and for financial management. Most pressing of all, concerns around accountability, corruption and capacity at the local and national levels will have an important bearing on efforts to strengthen the LAPA.

5 Continuously monitor and learn from the progress of implementation

The LAPA is still at a relatively early stage just beyond piloting, and monitoring the progress of implementation over the next few years to see how well it contributes to a low carbon, climate resilient development path, while also improving local governance can support wider learning on what works (or not) and why (not).

Nepal

- in the heart of the Great Himalayan region
- the 15th poorest country in the world
- over 55% of the population live under the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day
- over 10 million of its population are at greater risk of natural disasters including floods, drought, disease outbreaks and forest fires
- emerging from a 10-year civil war with a fragile peace process

Priorities for Nepal to tackle climate change:

- ✓ Poverty reduction
- ✓ Climate resilience
- ✓ Peace-building
- ✓ Inclusive governance

A closer look at the LAPA in Nepal

The advantages of a LAPA

Key benefits expected from alignment of the NAPA and LAPAs are improved integration between planned and autonomous adaptation, targeting of resources to the most vulnerable, and bridging the gaps between vulnerability assessments and planning and implementation. The LAPA is intended to be practical so that national and top-down assessments of climatic risks are integrated with bottom-up planning of adaptation needs, options and priorities. The LAPA framework is a practical approach to analyse local climate adaptation planning issues in a way that encourages people's participation.

Taking planning to the local level will be crucial in order to understand, enable and respond to what people actually do in response to the opportunities and constraints they face in the context of climate change. The LAPA therefore offers a way to reconcile autonomous and planned adaptation, bridging the ostensible gap between adaptation 'by the people' and adaptation 'for the people'. It also enables better recognition of the highly differentiated nature of adaptive capacity within the local level itself: differences between households and geographic locations and between age, gender and ethnic groups can be better accounted for.

With a focus on simplicity and rootedness so that communities can effectively understand and engage with climate planning, the LAPA devotes attention to reducing people's vulnerability and marginalisation. The LAPA may also prove to be a stimulus to the development and integration of local and traditional



Women re-planting rice in Nepalganj after serious flooding destroyed their early crop

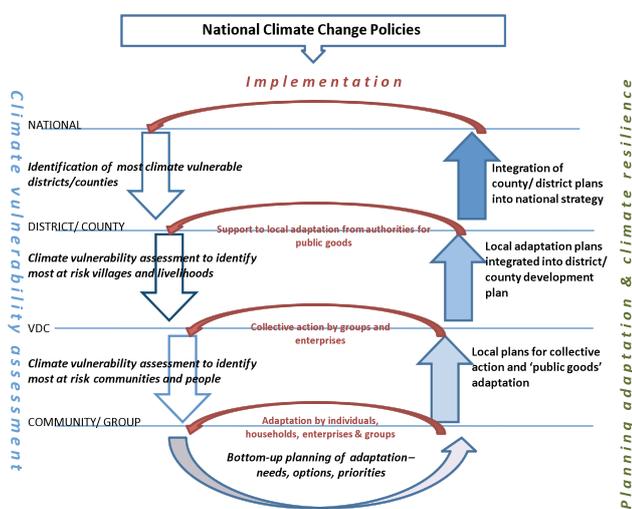
knowledge that is relevant to climate change, creating new channels for information flows both up and down through the system.

The LAPA process

External funding from DFID has been important for the piloting, design and consultation processes of the LAPA framework. In 2010, LAPA piloting took place in ten districts, leading to the formulation of the LAPA framework which has now been endorsed and adopted by the government of Nepal as the national framework for implementing NAPA at the local level. DFID and the EU have also committed significant funds to the development and implementation of LAPAs in 13 Mid and Far West Districts through the National Climate Change Support Programme.

There are seven key steps in identifying and preparing the LAPA: climate change sensitisation; climate vulnerability and adaptation assessment; prioritisation of options; developing the LAPA, integrating it into the planning process; implementing the LAPA; and assessing progress. Figure 1, below, illustrates the ways in which the LAPA will link national, district, village development committee (VDC) and community levels in vulnerability assessments, adaptation planning and implementation, within the framework of national climate change policy.

Figure 1 Integrating climate change resilience into local-to-national development planning



Source: Government of Nepal, 'The National Framework for LAPA' (draft unofficial translation in English).

New and emerging national government structures

As Nepal emerges from a decade-long civil war (1996–2006), the peace process remains fragile and government institutions are therefore young and rapidly evolving. On climate change, the government has taken leadership in coordinating initiatives, developing policies and building in-country capacity, as well as taking a prominent role in international climate negotiations. Despite this, the quality of governance, at all levels, is likely to be the biggest challenge to effective initiation, integration and implementation of climate activities including the LAPA.

Encouragingly, the Ministry of Environment (MoE), as the focal point for coordination of climate change, has been widely praised for its efforts in coordinating climate change initiatives including the formulation of the NAPA, the Climate Change Policy of 2011 and the National Framework for LAPA. The NAPA has been effective because it incorporated a wide consultation process, has strong government ownership, and was able to use lessons learned from other countries. The government's ambitious commitment that all climate change projects will set aside 80 per cent of funds for local adaptation indicates political support for effective localised planning and implementation.

Conversely, given the current level of government machineries and funds, Nepal's capacity to deal with climate challenges is low, especially for large-scale projects. Awareness is increasing and more finances and capacity are being put in place, but progress is slow. The Ministry of Environment has high level support from the prime minister and political parties for action, but will require a continuation of capacity building to be able to continue to coordinate climate initiatives in the country and to advocate and pitch for financial support internationally – both as a highly vulnerable country and one with considerable low carbon growth potential.

Challenges in coordination and ownership: the NAPA, LAPA and the SPCR

The NAPA and LAPA are not the only processes for adaptation planning in Nepal: there is also Nepal's Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience (SPCR). Whereas the NAPA is managed through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the SPCR is supported via the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience (PPCR) of the Climate Investment Funds managed by the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs).

There is a danger that struggles for control over climate finance playing out at international levels between the UNFCCC and the MDBs will lead to functionally separate planning processes at the national level. It is important that the SPCR builds on the NAPA in Nepal so that interventions are coordinated, and in recognition of the NAPA's high degree of country ownership. The SPCR's use of consultants as opposed to staff from the MoE helps achieve a fast turnaround for a results-driven approach favourable to the MDBs, but some commentators suggest this involves a trade-off against government capacity building and ownership.

Source: Ayers *et al.* (2011).

According to Bird (2011) financial planning is not as well developed as broader climate change planning in Nepal, particularly in terms of costing proposed public sector investments. Estimated budgets appear to be first approximations only indicated by the one line summary of costs for each of the nine priority activities identified by the NAPA. Furthermore, donors continue to have some concerns over fiduciary risk in government agencies. The mechanics of local fund management for service delivery will be crucial if the LAPA initiative is to be efficient, but according to Bird (*ibid.*) the local finance delivery mechanism is precisely where there are weaknesses.

Local governance challenges: the view from communities

When asked to list the main individuals or agencies that represent the state for them, poor and socially excluded groups at local level most commonly identified the chair of the Village Development Committee (VDC), followed by ward chairpersons and the chair of the District

Development Committee (Jones *et al.* 2009). Central government officials, in contrast, seemed far removed from popular imaginings of the state. People tended to support decentralised decision-making processes, especially when VDC or ward chairs had organised public consultations or made visits to the village. This reinforces the view that the LAPA may prove politically popular and make climate change meaningful at the local level.

Lamentably, people frequently reported multiple and deeply felt criticisms of local government officials to the ODI researchers. Corruption and patrimonialism appeared to be deeply entrenched in almost all the VDCs where the ODI study communities were located. There is a strong sense that local elites control access to information in order to maintain their positions of power and there is a perception that local – and especially national – government officials do not make adequate efforts to consult ordinary villagers about their views and priorities. Travelling to meet local government officials at their headquarters to make representations to them can be costly and time-consuming. This is barely worth the effort if officials are dismissive – a problem related to class, gender, age, education, and caste profiles.

Decentralised governance is both a challenge and an opportunity for the LAPA. A challenge because of the difficulties in reaching out to historically marginalised communities and in coordinating decision-making bodies and structures for integrating LAPAs in the overall local development planning system. An opportunity because the LAPA is expected to improve the quality of local level development planning, as officials are expected to follow the inclusive processes of sensitisation, information provision and consultation outlined in the framework.

Social barriers to adaptation

In Nepal, research has shown that caste and gender profiles, as well as factors of age, class and ethnicity, can have significant implications for the adaptive capacity of individuals and groups (Jones 2010). Social exclusion can lead to restricted entitlements and behaviour constraints that may ultimately produce mal-adaptation, even if other sections of the population are benefiting from access to more climate resilient systems.

The NAPA has emphasised social inclusion and gender considerations and the LAPA offers a way to integrate social inclusion and gender considerations into planning and local decision-making, especially where social barriers are directly linked with vulnerability. Breaking down social discrimination is a long-term outcome that the LAPA can contribute towards.

¹ Practical Action Nepal Office, *Study to Determine Outline Plans for Eliminating Energy Poverty in Nepal*, August 2009, Kathmandu.

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This material has been funded by UKAid from the Department for International Development; however, the views expressed do not officially reflect the Department's policies.

Integration of energy planning into LAPA

Only eight per cent of the rural Nepalese population has access to electricity and large proportions of households are considered to be living in energy poverty with regards to energy needs for cooking, lighting and boiling water for drinking.¹ Use of biomass as fuel also has significant impacts on respiratory health and can involve drudgery, particularly for women and children. Given the importance of energy as a gateway system that enhances adaptive capacity, integrating localised low carbon energy planning into the LAPA framework provides a good opportunity to move beyond co-benefits between climate resilience and poverty reduction to produce 'triple wins' of LCCRD.

The Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Environment that looks at energy issues, has recently developed and piloted District Climate and Energy Plans (DCEP) with the goal of expanding coordination and service provision of energy and to encourage mapping out of opportunities for renewable energy to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. These plans at the District level are expected to reach both down and up to cohere with national energy policies and local priorities. Links to the NAPA and LAPA processes are strongly encouraged in the DCEP guidelines, and DCEP teams have been involved in the production of the LAPA framework.

Further reading

Ayers, J.; Kaur, N. and Anderson, S (2011) 'Negotiating Climate Resilience in Nepal', *IDS Bulletin* 42.3: 70-80

Bird, N. (2011) *The Future for Climate Finance in Nepal*, London: Overseas Development Institute

Jones, J.; Bhatta, B.; Gill, G.; Pantuliano, S.; Singh, H.B.; Timsina, D.; Uppadhaya, S. and Walker, D (2009) *Governance and Citizenship from Below: Views of Poor and Excluded Groups and their Vision for a New Nepal*, Working Paper 301, London: Overseas Development Institute

Jones, L. (2010) 'Overcoming Social Barriers to Adaptation', background note, London: Overseas Development Institute

Authorship

This *Case Study* was written by Robbie Watts, a Research Assistant at IDS. It complements the Approaches to Planning for Climate Change Learning Cycle of the Learning Hub. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS.