

Whose Adaptation? Achieving Greater Local Ownership over Adaptation Planning in Nepal

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Climate change adaptation plans for whom?

In recent years the government of Nepal and its development partners have accelerated efforts at planning for adaptation to climate change impacts. The focus is usually on policy development at the central level and the development of climate change adaptation plans at local government (VDCs and municipalities) and community levels. These efforts typically aim at reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience. For a country identified as one of the most vulnerable to climate change,¹ these efforts are indeed commendable.

Three major projects in the country have so far supported the development of 445 local adaptation plans of action (LAPA), 1388 community adaptation plans of action (CAPA) and 10 watershed or landscape level plans (Table 1). However, it is important to examine the question of whether and how these efforts would bring about effective adaptation outcomes at the local level. Specifically, it is critical to assess whose plans are these after all. Here we investigate the critical issue of "ownership" in adaptation planning as a predictor to the potential success of plan implementation.

This Policy Brief offers important observations on potential outcomes from the ongoing practices of climate change adaptation planning amongst aid supported projects/programmes, which emphasize the number rather than the quality and process of adaptation plan preparation. We recognize the urgency of facilitating adaptation plan in an effort to deal with adverse impacts of climate change. At the same time it is important that adaptation planning goes on in a right direction to be able to achieve its goals by enhancing the ownership of local communities in plan making and thus increasing the effective implementation of the plan.



Photo credit: Multistakeholder Forestry Programme

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Main messages

1. Significant effort is underway in Nepal on climate change adaptation, which is undertaken through policy development nationally and adaptation planning at local and community levels.
2. Projects are rushed at developing more and more climate change adaptation plans at VDC and community levels. However, they have achieved little on securing ownership of key stakeholders on planning processes.
3. Commitments for coordinated effort and investment on the adaptation plans are not forthcoming from important stakeholders, jeopardizing their effective implementation.
4. To achieve broad-based ownership of adaptation planning and thus its effective implementation, more effort and resources should be invested on engaging with key stakeholders for a more rigorous planning process and setting responsibilities and accountabilities right.

We developed this Policy Brief by drawing on a series of carefully organized deliberations with government officials, project officials and NGO personnel working at national, local and district levels. These deliberations were held in the course of regional workshops between March to June 2014ⁱⁱⁱ. Each of the workshops were attended by about 35 officials, and practitioners engaged in forestry and climate change support. The selection of these participants was based on purposive sampling and snow balling methods. We also held several field visits with the participants to local communities where CAPA implementation was underway and have incorporated key insights into this Policy Brief.

Table 1: Number of LAPA/CAPA from Nepal's three major programmes, Dec 2014

Plan	Programme/Project			Total
	MSFP*	Hariyo Ban ⁱⁱ	NCCSP**	
Community adaptation plan of action (CAPA)	1075	313	-	1388
Local adaptation plan of action (LAPA)-VDC level	300	45	100	445
Watershed/landscape adaptation plan	-	10	-	10

Notes: * Multistakeholder Forestry Programme; **Nepal Climate Change Support Programme.

Why ownership matters?

The issue of ownership in adaptation planning is crucial for several important reasons. On a broader debate on international aid, "ownership" often refers to the receiving country's commitment to a development policy or intervention as well as the appropriateness of the policy or intervention. Ownership is often associated with success or failure of a policy or programme (Castel-Branco 2008). But, there are important practical reasons why broad ownership in adaptation planning is needed (see Box 1).

Box 1: Why enhanced ownership at local level matters for adaptation planning?

- Developing a common understanding of problems created by climate change in the district and locality
- Achieving broad-based commitment to solutions
- Sharing responsibilities in adaptation planning and implementation
- Reducing conflicts in implementation of adaptation plans
- Achieving cost effectiveness in implementation

Our concern in this Policy Brief is mainly on implementation of climate change policies through donor-supported programmes or projects, such as Multistakeholder Forestry Programme (MSFP), which take up adaptation planning as a significant step toward adaptation interventions. Accordingly our focus is with the way projects or programmes engage with stakeholders in the development of climate change adaptation plans at the local and community levels. In this context adaptation plans represent a local level policy instrument, the success of which depends on how and to what extent local stakeholders take the ownership of it. On the corollary, looking at ownership also provides us insights on whether the approaches are relevant and tailored to the stakeholder context in district and local levels in Nepal.

Why is there lack of ownership?

Our deliberations in the workshops held in Dhankuta, Pokhara, Surkhet and Dang with government and non-governmental officials indicated that the ownership of adaptation planning comprises a major challenge. Table 2 presents a list of key challenges to ownership and their consequences experienced at the national level as well as project levels.

At the national level, main challenges relate to the confusion over legal basis of LAPA/CAPA, institutional arrangement on the leadership, sectoral and expertise roles. These pose difficulties for district officials and project managers to arrange support for adaptation interventions. Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MOFALD) and Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) do not recognize the LAPA/CAPA developed by MSFP or Hariyo Ban programmes, leading to confusion on the legal basis of CAPA/LAPA being prepared by major donor funded projects. For the government agencies, the rush of development agencies on CAPA process represents putting the horse before the cart. For development agencies, this is seen as an early effort which provides valuable learning for the stakeholders and helps further evolvement of policies. Similarly, while CAPAs are frequently annexed into community forest operational plans and approved by DFOs, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation does not acknowledge its role in community adaptation planning and implementation.

Related to the above, while MOSTE is the lead agency on climate change, the functional roles of other ministries and departments are unclear, in terms of mandate, budget and accountability. This rolls out into the local level where the roles have been widely dispersed for the implementation of the adaptation plans, with no clear responsibilities and commitments for finance (see Khatri, Paudel and Karki 2013).

Table 2: Main challenges to ownership of adaptation planning and their consequences

Bottleneck	Description	Consequence
A. National level		
1. Formal basis of adaptation plan	MOSTE and MOFALD do not recognize plans prepared from major forestry projects	Confusion on the formal / legal basis of LAPA/CAPA No resource commitment from DDC even if plans are approved from VDC council
2. Institutional arrangement	Unclear mandate and arrangement for leadership, coordination, and expertise amongst ministries	Lack of assignment of responsibility to district officials in key ministries Unclear accountability Adaptation seen only as project driven initiative
B. District/project level		
3. Local institutional anchorage of LAPA/CAPA	Use of many institutional forms for adaptation plan development	Dispersed responsibility and unclear accountability
4. Rushed preparation of LAPA, CAPA	Plans prepared on consultancy arrangement in a rushed manner	Inadequate buy-in and ownership by VDC and community groups
5. Unrealistic LAPA/CAPA	Plans have 'wish-list projects'	No implementation due to lack of resource commitment
6. Exclusionary use of knowledge and capacity	Projects do not coordinate with DISCO and other which has long experience with activities relevant to adaptation Local knowledge and social capital not mobilized	Reinventing the wheel Missed opportunity of mobilization of expertise of DSCWM of other line agencies

At the project and district levels, main bottlenecks exist on specification of local institutional basis for plan preparation and endorsement, rushed preparation and endorsement of CAPA/LAPA, inclusion of unrealistic projects in the plans, and exclusionary mobilization of knowledge.

Firstly, district agencies and project managers have difficulty of which local institutional arrangements are to be mobilized in the preparation and endorsement of LAPA/CAPAs. The government has recently issued Environment-Friendly Local Governance Guidelines (MOFALD 2013). But development agencies are using different institutional formats for anchoring adaptation plans at VDC level. In some places, adaptation plans are endorsed through Village Forest Coordination Committees (VFCC), while elsewhere it is endorsed through Agriculture, Forestry and Environment Committees (AFECs) in VDCs. In areas supported by USAID, such as in some VDCs in Rupandehi district, Village Climate Change Coordination Committees (VC4s) have been established. There are still other structures in some districts. This leads to dispersed responsibility and lack of clear accountability. Stronger involvement of local government, with the capacity to mobilize resources from line agencies seems essential.

Second, adaptation planning is carried out in a rushed manner, without sufficient time given to local level discussions. Decision-making is therefore prematurely conducted with limited consultation with and participation of government agencies. For many stakeholders, adaptation plans are a way for bringing in financial resource from donor-aided projects, often with confusion between what comprises 'development' and 'adaptation'. Project teams suggested that too little time and resource was allocated in the process of preparation and on stakeholder engagement. Accordingly, there has been little commitment from most government agencies for technical and financial support on adaptation.

Third, another challenge to ownership of adaptation plans comprises the inclusion of unrealistic projects into LAPA/CAPA (see Box 2). While giving local people a voice in planning is commendable, it is equally important to ascertain that plans are supported technically and financially. But existing adaptation plans include a wish-list of projects, without consideration of the limitations of agencies that are expected to support. This limits plan ownership and implementation.

Box 2: Unrealistic LAPA/CAPAs: why is it hard to own and implement?

- "CAPA/LAPAs prioritize large schemes, which require considerable budget, expertise and longer time period than project life."
- "Why to prepare LAPA/CAPA unless we have adequate budget to implement?"
- "Adaptation activities proposed in the CAPAs/LAPAs cross across different departments, but there is no resource commitment from these offices."

Finally, existing adaptation planning process is seen as exclusionary in the mobilization of knowledge and capacity of local people and institutions. The Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management (DSCWM), which has had experience in activities closely relevant to adaptation, is missing from the scene on adaptation from national to local levels. At the community level, consultant or project staff members make limited effort to identify local adaptation knowledge and mobilization of social capital other than local forestry groups.

The workshop deliberations provided an important message that adaptation planning should be tailored to enhance ownership of the vulnerable groups, local institutions, local governments, and key government line agencies in the district. Many of LAPAs/CAPAs prepared so far have proposed activities concerned with six thematic areas, as outlined in NAPA. The endorsement of these plans however is done by a single agency, without capacity to effect buy-in from others. Therefore it is essential to engage and win support from the government agencies with mandate on these areas, including DFOs, DADO, Irrigation division office, and drinking water offices.

Conclusion

The issue of ownership in adaptation planning is critical for effective implementation of the plans and thereby achieving their objectives. While achieving 'ownership' is an ideal in aid-supported projects and may hardly be fully achieved, it is nevertheless a useful predictor for the level of commitment from different levels of government for designing and implementing adaptation interventions. Achieving ownership in CC adaptation planning offers an important predictor for effective plan implementation and eventual success of adaptation efforts. In district and local settings, it is absolutely essential to have a reasonable degree of ownership and participation of key actors while developing adaptation plans. It is essential that key government agencies, affected local populations, and local governments are engaged in developing the plans for which they could commit support and resources. Without this support, the plans face the risk of ending up as just another paper work.



Photo credit: Multistakeholder Forestry Programme



Photo credit: Multistakeholder Forestry Programme

Recommendations

1. **Allocate more time and resources to engage broader set of stakeholders at the district and local level.** More time and resources should be allocated to conduct a more rigorous adaptation planning, by widening stakeholder base and giving time for engagement with them so as to secure support and commitment. This requires a willingness on the part of aid-supported projects/programmes to go beyond the boundaries set by project's design in order to ensure effective engagement with local government entities and with at least those agencies that are mandated for forest management and soil conservation; agriculture and livestock development; and irrigation and drinking water.
2. **Develop and implement a clear responsibility and accountability framework for district line agencies.** The government should allocate relevant responsibilities to line ministry offices related to forest and soil conservation; agriculture and livestock development; and irrigation and drinking water. The responsibilities should be complemented with commitment for appropriate funding and human resource and a mandate to coordinate with local government bodies and projects working on CC adaptation.
3. **Develop planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) frameworks to reflect broadened ownership status.** Aid projects and programmes should include in their PME frameworks required process indicators and results about participation and ownership of relevant stakeholders on CC adaptation.
4. **Ensure cross-learning across agencies.** Aid projects should facilitate a process of collaborative learning between and across projects/programmes, government line agencies and local governments about processes and outcomes of reducing climate change vulnerability and building resilience.

ⁱAccording to Maplecroft, which assessed 170 countries in the year 2010 with climate change vulnerability index (CCVI), Nepal is ranked the fourth most vulnerable country and is one of the 16 countries with 'extreme risk' (source: <http://maplecroft.com/about/news/ccvi.html>).

ⁱⁱWWF Nepal. 2014. Hariyo Ban Semi-annual report 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱThese workshops, entitled "Towards Effective Adaptation and Resilience Building: Intensive Knowledge Sharing" were held by Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) and Multistakeholder Forestry Programme (MSFP) with participation of MSFP and its partner officials from five clusters: Dhankuta, Pokhara (which included Terai and Dhaulagiri clusters), Dang, and Surkhet. The workshops included three-day sessions on main themes on adaptation, field level practices and issues and the opportunities for multistakeholder effort.

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