

Community-based adaptation to climate change: an update

Over a billion people – the world’s poorest and most vulnerable communities – will bear the brunt of climate change. For them, building local capacity to cope is a vital step towards resilience. Community-based adaptation (CBA) is emerging as a key response to this challenge. Tailored to local cultures and conditions, CBA supports and builds on autonomous adaptations to climate variability, such as the traditional *baira* or floating gardens of Bangladesh, which help small farmers’ crops survive climate-driven floods. Above all, CBA is participatory – a process involving both local stakeholders, and development and disaster risk reduction practitioners. As such, it builds on existing cultural norms while addressing local development issues that contribute to climate vulnerability. CBA is now gaining ground in many regions, and is ripe for the reassessment offered here.

Policy pointers

- **CBA or community-based adaptation** is increasingly recognised as a key way for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people to build capacity to cope with the impacts of climate change.
- **In the runup to the Copenhagen climate talks** in December 2009, lessons learned from the growing number of CBA case studies can inform policy dialogue.
- **To maximise CBA’s influence**, practical ways of consolidating lessons, sharing knowledge and scaling the approach up are needed, so it is relevant to larger-scale adaptation policymaking yet does not compromise the participatory and community-driven nature of the approach.

Coming of age: CBA gets organised

As an approach to building the resilience of the poor to the impacts of climate change, community-based adaptation has made significant progress in recent years.

At the Third International Workshop on CBA in February 2009 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, it was evident that the time

had come to reassess CBA — look at developments over the past few years, and the challenges that remain.

Over 140 people attended this oversubscribed workshop, a significant increase over previous years (see Backstory). They included representatives from governments, NGOs, community-based organisations, UN agencies, and major donors including the World Bank, UK Department for

Backstory

Community-based adaptation or CBA emerged out of a growing recognition in the developing community that those most vulnerable to climate change are the poorest people in the world’s poorest regions. Many are marginalised, and live in remote regions out of reach of government services.

The usefulness of mainstream, top-down adaptation approaches in these communities began to be questioned. As a result, many agencies started to work with local communities to identify not only climate-related risks, but also factors that make people vulnerable to those risks. The process was a first step in developing community-driven initiatives that could help build adaptive capacity in the most vulnerable communities. As climate impacts progress, the need for this effort is increasingly clear.

In 2005, agencies and others working on what was now known as community-based adaptation came together for the First International CBA Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to share experiences and lessons. Here, more than 80 experts, policymakers, NGO representatives and grassroots practitioners discussed the possible impacts of climate change on communities, and how to enable them to adapt in the future. Experiences were shared, contacts made, and the concept of CBA was firmed up. At the second CBA conference in Bangladesh two years later, there were 110 participants – practitioners, major donors and representatives from the international climate treaty, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Field visits to vulnerable communities allowed attendees to gain firsthand experience of the ‘entry point’ for CBA. And what was now the CBA community began to self-organise, for instance by creating the CBA Exchange (CBA-X), an online platform for sharing tools, case studies and guidance.

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International Development (DFID), Swedish development agency Sida, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). The CBA Exchange – an online platform for sharing CBA news, views and practice – was updated and formally launched. Called CBA-X, the network now has over 200 members and is expanding rapidly.

The workshop also saw the launch of the Global Initiative on Community Based Adaptation (GICBA). The GICBA will reflect on ongoing action by promoting CBA nationally and globally; generate and share knowledge and experiences; and

support the CBA-X website and international conferences. This knowledge-sharing platform will be a forum focusing on building CBA's profile, collating and refining learning, lessons and tools for how to do CBA. GICBA is supported by IIED, CARE, Oxfam, ActionAid, TearFund and WWF.

Critical mass: firming up CBA

Recently, understanding and knowledge of CBA has grown exponentially. At the second CBA workshop, the task was to convince development practitioners working with communities that climate change was relevant to them, and that vulnerability to climatic variability was the entry point for building adaptive capacity.

As noted by reports on that workshop, however, discussions round CBA were 'lacking in structure'. This posed a problem for CBA practitioners, funding bodies

and others who require signposts to distinguish good practice.¹

The report of the third CBA workshop notes the exchange of views on CBA as more 'nuanced' than that at previous workshops.² The battle to convince people of CBA's value now largely won, discussions were much more constructive. They focused, for instance, on how to distinguish CBA from community-based development; demonstrate the value of CBA, and develop indicators for monitoring and evaluation; scale up CBA and make it policy-relevant; and integrate climate science into CBA while maintaining a community-driven process.

A working group on terminology and concepts was formed, which is continuing to work with the CBA-X online platform to develop and communicate its outputs. Large-scale CBA initiatives are being designed to try to answer some of these questions through action research (see 'ARCAB: a grassroots-to-government project in Bangladesh', below, and 'Continental shift: CBA in Africa', opposite).

Many major donors are now actively engaging in CBA. At the third CBA workshop, for instance, FAO announced possible funding for CBA projects. A UN Development Programme (UNDP) representative outlined a proposal for a CBA Fund Facility, in partnership with UN agencies, governments, civil society and private foundations. This would offer broader types of support for CBA-type activities than are currently available under formal climate change finance mechanisms. UNDP has also recently

ARCAB: a grassroots-to-government project in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, extreme poverty meets extreme weather. The country is frequently flooded and battered by storms; and many Bangladeshis are already poor, or likely to be pushed into poverty by the next severe weather event or even by trends such as shifts in rainfall. For them, climate adaptation is essential. The process must take into account increased risks from both extreme events that could become disasters, and more subtle changes in patterns of rainfall, temperature and diseases that affect livelihoods.

Through ARCAB, a new project led by the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) and IIED, researchers and some 20 communities of farmers, fishers and forest-dependent people will work together to discover and share new ways of adapting. ARCAB will use participatory action research to gather evidence of effective adaptation from households and

communities in areas dominated by a particular livelihood, such as farming, and share the methods and lessons learned with other villages in that area. The goal is to find out what works, or doesn't work, and share that information with hundreds of other communities. So ARCAB will:

- investigate simplified 'bundles' of archetypal livelihoods at household and community level
- examine the risks these livelihoods and households face under conditions of climate change
- assess the potential for various adaptation strategies at community level
- evaluate whether these can be supported through policy
- examine the resource implications for the different groups involved in supporting the scaling-up of the project.

For more information on ARCAB, contact Terry. Cannon@iied.org or terrycannon@blueyonder.co.uk.

taken a major decision to generate resources to support NGOs and community-based organisations in undertaking CBA through its Small Grants Programme. Other donors, including the World Bank, DFID and Sida, also expressed interest in supporting CBA.

Challenges for CBA practitioners

Donor interest in CBA also raises many challenges for CBA practitioners. To attract significant levels of funding for CBA, it is necessary to:

- find practical ways of making CBA replicable in a variety of settings so it can be scaled up with the least damage to its participatory nature
- consider the role of adaptation science, including modelling, in informing CBA strategies while maintaining a community-driven approach
- find ways of demonstrating the value of CBA as different from but complementary to

community-based development, to relate projects to, and create change in, both development and climate change policy

- develop a monitoring and evaluation framework that speaks to donors' demands while allowing communities fast, efficient access to CBA resources.

Many initiatives, including the GICBA and CBA-X, have gone some way towards addressing these challenges. It is hoped that by the time of the fourth CBA workshop in February 2010, significant progress in this area will have been made.

Limits to CBA: the long view

The slow global progress on mitigation, or curbing, of greenhouse gas emissions has led some leading climate change scientists³ to suggest preparing for a 4 °C+ rise in mean surface temperature, rather than the 2 °C rise currently widely accepted as the threshold of

Continental shift: CBA in Africa

Africa has been identified as one of the continents most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The reasons are the exposure of its population to climate variations and extremes, people's dependency on natural resources and the underdevelopment of much of the region. Africa is already affected by climatic extremes such as floods and droughts, which will be exacerbated by climate change. Such events are having a negative impact on livelihoods, especially those of the poor. Given the degraded environments, food insecurity, poverty and HIV/AIDS already affecting large parts of Africa, climate change poses a monumental problem for the region.

In response to these challenges, the Nairobi-based African Centre for Technology Studies, in partnership with colleagues from East and Southern Africa, Europe and South Asia, are undertaking action research on CBA. The three-year Community Based Adaptation in Africa (CBAA) project will test tools for community adaptation, knowledge generation and capacity building. Begun in 2008, the project is rolling out in selected vulnerable communities in Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The objectives of the project are to help communities adapt and share lessons from CBA activities with key stakeholders at local, national, regional and international levels, to elicit support for CBA. Pilot CBA projects are being designed and tested through participatory methodologies for identifying, monitoring

and evaluating adaptive capacity. Projects include dryland livestock and agricultural production, water and forest resource management, environmental services provision, and protection from desert encroachment, coastal resources, human health, early warning systems and energy access initiatives.

Expected outcomes of the CBAA project include:

- improved adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities in the eight African countries
- improved capacity of African scientists and research organisations, decision makers and policy institutes in conducting action research on climate change vulnerability and adaptation, and appropriate communication of research results to other stakeholders
- tools and methods for integrating climate change information into development activities at the local level, with products including workshops and dialogues with policy makers and other stakeholders in the identified countries
- targeted information on CBA provided to selected national and international policy processes through National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) in pilot countries, as well as other regional, national and international policy processes
- strong and lasting partnerships among Southern organisations to address climate change, and trust within and between vulnerable communities.

For more information on CBAA, see www.clacc.net or www.acts.or.ke.

'dangerous climate change'. As the full implications of a 4 °C+ climate change scenario become clear, warnings are emerging about the 'limits to adaptation' as now understood and implemented.⁴

Today's CBA practice, which tend to be *in situ* and project-based, could be limited in effectiveness over the longer term. Future climate change impacts could have an intensity and scope that would overwhelm isolated, piecemeal interventions. So long-term CBA strategies are clearly needed. Acknowledging that 'good' adaptation demands consideration of both immediate and long-term vulnerability and climate change contexts, CBA practitioners must look to more strategic and wider-ranging climate change policies and measures. And recognising the limits to CBA should signal a need for even stronger action on mitigation.

Taking it forward: CBA in 2010

The fourth international CBA conference will be held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in February 2010. The primary aim of the conference is to share and consolidate the latest developments in CBA planning and practices in different sectors and countries in Africa, and disseminate this knowledge more broadly.

Specific objectives are to:

- bring together different stakeholders and practitioners to share and discuss knowledge of CBA planning and practices from different parts of Africa
- capture the latest experiences and learning from CBA planning and practices in Africa
- enhance the capacity of practitioners to help those most vulnerable to climate change to improve their livelihoods
- share lessons learned, thus facilitating the integration of climate change into national and international development programmes
- disseminate lessons learned at the workshop across climate change and development networks.

Given the growth in the body of work on CBA, the Tanzania conference looks set to reveal key new tools and practice to speed the task at hand: ensuring marginalised communities find and build on resilience in the face of climate pressures.

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Further reading & websites

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Notes

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