



Community-based adaptation: an approach to build resilience and sustainable development in West Africa

Participants from 12 West African countries confirmed the urgent need for community based adaptation to respond to the adverse effects of climate change at a West Africa Learning Event in Cotonou, 3-6th September 2013. 72 participants from a diverse range of 36 NGO and research organisations and 14 government organisations shared and reflected on their experiences, successes, challenges, opportunities, questions and future perspectives across the region.

This communiqué is the collective product of these deliberations conveying strong messages on the crucial need to develop effective adaptation practice and policies to secure livelihoods and realise resilient development and economic growth in the face of an uncertain and changing climate.

Climate change challenges in West Africa, the case for CBA

Climate change and variability is already changing rainfall patterns, temperatures and causing previously unknown extreme weather events across West Africa. These phenomena are challenging both traditional mechanisms for maintaining resilient livelihoods in the face of a wider set of shocks and stresses and the effectiveness of development opportunities, resulting in increasing vulnerability. More impacts are anticipated in future as climate conditions become more complex and uncertain: increases in crop failures, livestock losses, pest and disease outbreaks and the further degradation of natural, land and water resources are likely.

While climate change response strategies are in place or planned at national level, and Community-based adaptation (CBA) is increasingly recognized as part of a sustainable and effective response to climate change, coherent support to practical adaptation by the most vulnerable groups is still at a beginning. CBA adds a new analytical lens and measures to existing sustainable development and risk reduction efforts, but the same criteria for successful results apply.

Key messages

CBA ensures successful adaptation and resilience through complementary actions in response to locally specific vulnerability, from local level to national policies and financial investments.

Effective CBA requires participatory and coherent approaches and methods for :

1. Understanding and working with differential vulnerabilities, risks and capacities in relation to climate change in different agroecosystems, promoting gender equality and recognising the contribution of women and youth.
2. Creating relevant climate information and communication systems accessible to the most vulnerable and used to inform adaptation decisions.
3. Strengthening adaptive capacity to enable ongoing and flexible adaptation as the climate continues to change.
4. Integrating adaptation into local development and sector planning, disaster risk reduction and early warning systems.

For continuous adaptation, these approaches need to be supported through:

5. Creating an enabling policy and investment environment, informed by monitoring and evidence, which is sensitive to the new timescales and localised nature of climate change impacts.
6. Improving capacity, coordination and coherence across development, DRR and emergency responses.
7. Mainstreaming and financing CBA approaches into national planning and relevant sectors to achieve ongoing adaptation at scale in West Africa.

CBA in practice: key messages for successful adaptation

1. Vulnerability analysis, empowerment and equality

Successful adaptation to climate risks depends upon good analysis, planning and flexible decision making processes at the right levels to determine the best adaptation choices, technologies and interventions.

- **Vulnerability, risk and capacity analysis** which is informed by current variability and future climate projections, and which recognises differences among and between communities, and the diversity of contexts in West Africa (pastoralist in the Sahel, guinea savannah, forests, coastal areas) are the starting points for ensuring relevant adaptation actions. Since climate change is a threat to many sectors, this analysis should be mainstreamed in all development sectors and disaster risk reduction (DRR) systems, and not limited to adaptation specific programmes.
- **Inclusive and meaningful participation** of all community groups, particularly the most vulnerable, is needed throughout a CBA process (analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring), with coordinated implementation involving all stakeholders (traditional and political leaders, opinion leaders, CBO representatives government).
- CBA requires an inclusive and comprehensive **gender analysis**, as part of analysing differential vulnerability to climate change. Understanding the dynamic realities of change, risk and uncertainty in relation to gender, diversity and cultural and social norms is needed to ensure sensitive or responsive adaptation plans and implementation which empower men and women across the community.
- Because they are often more vulnerable and marginalized, it is vital to **value the contributions and potential of women and youth**, as well as support their access to knowledge, build their capacity and their equitable involvement in CBA governance.

2. Climate information and communication systems

Climate science and meteorological services are developing more accurate forecasting and climate projections which are an important new resource for adaptation and climate resilience.

- Support is needed for **climate science to develop forecast products which respond to community information needs** and to communicate the content and use of forecasts to the end user meaningfully. This involves accessing real time scientific information on an ongoing basis, and promoting understanding

of timescales (short range, seasonal and long term), and how to understand and interpret information regarding uncertainties and probabilities.

- Climate information and communication systems informed by scientific and local knowledge, have great potential for linking into and improving existing **early warning systems**.
- Mechanisms for **communities to access climate information** to support their decision-making process need to be developed and sustained, in local languages where possible, and making use of a range of communication technologies (radio, mobile and smart phones).
- **Community weather recording** and traditional forecasts should be promoted as a significant source of information to enable local downscaling of forecasts.

3. Strengthening adaptive capacity

- **Planning and decision making for adaptation by and with those directly affected** allows for flexible responses to changing risks, the real needs and priorities of communities and local ownership and management at the most appropriate level, all of which are informed by the local context and local knowledge.
- Facilitation and support **to innovation and community adaptation action plans** based on their own analysis and priorities will be more successful than pre-determining adaptation actions, as will fostering their innovation and flexibility in implementing choices made. This will enable continuous adaptation as the climate continues to change.
- Developing approaches to **strengthen community capacity to analyse, understand and use uncertainty and risk information** is critical for their decision making on livelihood choices and to spread and manage risks.
- Strengthening **community leadership, organisation** and knowledge of their entitlements and the linkages between them and other local institutions (government, service providers) will improve coordination, representation, coherent decision making and governance.

This will inform demand driven provision of needed resources and services and raise underlying causes of vulnerability that must be addressed (for example land rights, gaps in infrastructure and basic services, inequality).

4. Integrating adaptation in development planning

- **Integration of adaptation into local development and DRR plans and budgets** will enable an effective local government response and can ideally incorporate community plans.
- Actions by different land users may affect the ability of others to adapt to climate change. **Hence, integrating adaptation into planning needs to be done at scale**, with dialogue between vulnerable groups, analysis of costs and benefits and identifying mutually beneficial actions in relation to the ecosystems they depend on. Strengthening links between adaptation, mitigation and ecosystems services may lead to increased benefits.
- Improved **coordination between development and DRR planning** will ensure that risk management and contingency strategies are in place for livelihood and economic choices made.
- Adaptation by vulnerable communities requires **local to national commitment** for example in development of climate proof infrastructure and coordination between related sectors (agriculture, water resource management, livestock etc).



Horticulture in Azagor Niger, ALP 2013©Awaiss Yahaya

Enabling environment for CBA: key messages for coordination, policy, capacity and finance

5. Effective evidence based policy responses

- Policy and decision makers across all development sectors and all levels from local to regional in West Africa need to be more aware of the risks, consequences and negative impacts of climate change as well as evidence of adaptation impacts, so as to commit to build on existing national and regional policies, strategies and plans and ensure support to effective community based adaptation.
- Improved **monitoring & evaluation systems** for measuring and documenting vulnerability and risk analysis, adaptation results, impacts and learning at all levels are essential to track changes and responses to change over time, inform on what works best and does not and demonstrate evidence of impact.
- **Adaptation benefits** include changes in the behaviour of community members and their perception of benefits, going beyond observed changes in the biophysical and economic status of the community.
- **Capacity building for policy makers** to better understand the role of climate information and the necessity for adaptation responses and investments to be locally determined, coordinated between multiple stakeholders and flexible in response to a changing climate would help to ensure long term resilience.

6. Continuum of emergency responses, disaster risk reduction and development

- Emergency responses, disaster risk reduction and development are frequently planned in isolation. CBA is a holistic approach which recognises that all three components are interlinked and demands **for planning along a continuum of support** which maintains local strategies for development and resilience to recurrent extreme events and natural hazards. With new hazards causing previously unseen emergency situations in West Africa, coordinated responses which work together towards resilience over the long term are essential.

7. Mainstreaming and financing for CBA

- Mainstreaming the principles of CBA into relevant sector policies and strategies as well as local governance development planning processes requires **policy and resource commitment** as well as coordination with development and DRR activities and resources. Policy instruments could also support innovative approaches that leverage private sector support for CBA and investment into climate smart and equitable technologies.
- Stronger **multi-stakeholder linkages and learning platforms** among development actors, researchers and policy makers across West Africa will help continued learning and responding in the face of a changing climate, and enable the level of coordinated response that is required. Multi-stakeholder networking and coordination bringing together these actors with climate scientists, vulnerable communities and the media are needed to adequately respond to the challenge of climate change. Platforms are in place in many countries which can be further strengthened.
- **Flexible financing mechanisms** are needed which support access to information, decision making processes, state/civil society/private sector collaboration and allow local governments and

communities to make their own plans for adaptation action. Adequate resource allocation and capacity for mobilising and managing funds is needed for CBA interventions that benefit smallholders, pastoralists and other vulnerable groups with special focus on women and the youth .

- **National funds and mechanisms** to fund adaptation strategies through national budgets which are well coordinated across sectors and multiple actors and linked to global mechanisms would allow adaptation interventions to be responsive to local and national priorities and could enable long term decentralized, bottom up processes.



West Africa learning event participants, 2013©Efik Surveyor

The West Africa Learning Event was hosted by the Adaptation Learning Programme of CARE International (<http://www.careclimatechange.org/adaptation-initiatives/alp>), the CGIAR Climate Change Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) Program (www.ccafs.cgiar.org) and the NGO ENDA Energy, Environment and Development (www.endaenergie.org). CARE Benin/Togo, Southern Voices Program, Niger NAPA Project, Niger PPCR Program, Ghana Farm Radio International and Canadian Hunger Foundation (CHF) also sponsored the event.

Participants came from 50 organisations working in: Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo in West Africa and from Kenya and UK.

Acknowledgement to Communiqué group members: Omar Tankari, ALP Niger; Mathieu Ouedraogo, CCAFS, Mali; Jacques Somda, IUCN/CCAFS, Burkina Faso; Samba Fall, ENDA Energie, Environnement et Développement, Senegal,; Reuben Ottou, Ghana Wildlife Society/Climate Adaptation Network, Ghana; Fiona Percy, ALP Coordination; Allassane Ba, Agence de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable /CCAFS, Mali; Bonaventure Nzavugambonyimana, CARE Benin; Apiriola Victoria Tosin, Women & Youth Development, Nigeria; Joseph Kogbe, Climate and Development Network, Togo; Colette Benoudji, Association LEAD Tchad, Chad; Rakiatou Ali Gazibo, Oxfam Niger

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