Build Robust Local Organizations (Policy Brief)

Document Version
Final published version

Citation for published version (APA):
Aijazi, O., & Hsiao, E. (2014). *Build Robust Local Organizations (Policy Brief)*. (Conflict-Sensitive Adaption: Use Human Rights to Build Social and Ecological Resilience). International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Citing this paper
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

OPEN ACCESS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Avoid actions that reduce the capacity of local people

✓ Use human-rights standards as a threshold for assessing planned actions.

✓ Use human rights as a normative basis for building consensus on design and implementation of adaptation programmes.

✓ Recognize and fulfil procedural rights including access to information, meaningful participation, fair process and access to justice.

✓ Recognize and incorporate substantive individual and collective rights to life, a healthy environment, water, education and culture, freedom of movement and organization.

Ensure effective local response and resilience

✓ Support local governance structures and institutions and strengthen their early warning systems, coping mechanisms for natural and other disturbances, and conflict resolution.

✓ Acknowledge local and traditional knowledge, practices and systems of governance.

✓ Facilitate participation in assessments of vulnerability, peace and conflict impact, and environmental security to promote local peoples' understanding of risk and support them to identify transformative coping strategies.

✓ Develop enabling frameworks of policy, legislation, implementation and administration that ensure context-specific approaches.

✓ Engage or develop systems of collaborative natural resources governance.

BUILD ROBUST LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Local organizations play a valuable role in managing scarcity and competition as well as in pioneering new approaches to adaptation. Thus they are critical actors in avoiding and resolving conflict. Ensuring that local communities enjoy full recognition and fulfilment of their human and cultural rights to pursue locally-valued and legitimate governance, including their traditional normative and governance systems, is an intrinsic part of facilitating decisions that are conflict sensitive.

Climate change adaptation interventions bear the risk of adding to conflict triggers if they are not context sensitive and context specific (Briefs 1 & 2: Conflict Sensitivity; Human Rights). Disregard for, or improper integration of and consideration for local systems, organizations or norms can also contribute to conflict.

Recognizing and respecting local values, knowledge, and perspectives on climate change, development and conservation is crucial for the legitimacy of adaptive activities and help ensure stability, sustainability and human security. Supporting the development of robust local organization is one way to ensure this inclusion.

Local people are only able to play a strong role when they are fully empowered to participate in planning, decision-making and management, and possess sufficient knowledge and skills. These capabilities are dependent, among other factors, on the recognition, protection and fulfilment of fundamental procedural and substantive human rights.

Communities prioritize local organization and governance changes for adaptation

In the IUCN participatory vulnerability assessments of communities in Zambia, Mozambique, and Tanzania (as part of the Climate Change and Development Project), participants evaluated their existing strategies to adapt to climate change and designed future options.

The communities identified building strong local organizations that respect local values and conflict management approaches as a foundation for enhancing the assets on which their livelihoods depend, and good social relations. For example, in Zambia, investment in local farmers' organizations increased financial resources by creating new export opportunities. In Tanzania, integrated water resource management that recognized traditional conflict resolution was seen as a strategy for sharing water and addressing social tensions. In addition, improved tenure and related governance of natural resources to encourage long-term perspectives to ecosystem management, sharing and resolving conflicts were suggested. Strategies agreed to also include a need to promote social and gender equality and equity in institutional arrangements to avoid deteriorating vulnerabilities and growing social inequity. They also suggested that respect for local values and conflict management approaches would support resolving differences among local people.

In any community, the impacts of climate change are experienced first at the local level, even when linked to global networks, for example where food is sourced from international markets.

Because the impacts of climate change are context specific and regionally differentiated, local organizations will need to be adequately prepared to respond to these disturbances. In those countries that are conflict prone or where conflict triggers exist, this risk will need to be taken into account in developing adaptation responses.

Responding to local realities must be a priority

The Least Developed Countries as well as other vulnerable countries, including post-conflict states, that have high levels of dependence on natural resources, and those experiencing political, social, economic or environmental insecurity are most at risk of conflict as climate change unfolds.[1] How this is manifested at national and sub-national levels will vary from country to country. In post-conflict Nepal, for example, repairs to the Koshi River barrage which was damaged during severe flooding that displaced more than 60,000 Nepalese in 2008, was seriously hampered by on-going civil war rivalries that continued among unions and political parties.[2]

As local people are the key actors in defining social relations and managing adaptive resources, their involvement is critical in avoiding and resolving conflict. For example, in the IUCN-Climate Change and Development Project the involvement of local communities in assessing their vulnerability led to the identification of local organization as key for building resilience and in particular strengthening their natural, financial, physical, human and social assets. In addition, recognizing traditional and locally-adapted knowledge and governance is crucial for reducing dependence on external interventions and building resilience. Nevertheless, as shown in the box below, the linkages communities have to other communities locally, regionally and further afield can also be decisive in shaping capacity.

The role of institutional linkages in shaping local adaptation in Mexico[3]

Local institutions and the linkages they have to other institutions play a crucial role in influencing the adaptive capacity of communities and their adaptation choices.

A study of three different communities in Mexico shows a range of adaptive responses across the communities. These variations are in large measure the result of the differences in institutional linkages within and outside the locality. In one community, households engaged in a diverse set of productive activities, intensifying their involvement in non-farm work including public works programmes and emergency food distribution campaigns. In a second community, households were primarily engaged in wage-labour based migration within Mexico and selling livestock to buy maize. In a third, extensive labour demands and high investments in irrigated agriculture led many households to accept the migration of some members to the United States.

In the first community, institutions facilitated connections between officials in public works programmes and local households; lacking such linkages, households in the second and third communities migrated. However, the character and scale of migration differed again as a result of institutional connections. Informal relationships among households, cemented over decades of interactions, helped migration to the United States in the third community. In the second community, in contrast, migration took place within national boundaries.

Robust local organizations are effective for adaptation

Where local organizations play the primary role in shaping the direction, effectiveness, and allocation of external assistance or interventions for climate change adaptation, approaches are more likely to be sustainable.

In the Shinyanga region of northern Tanzania, a project under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism has, through working closely with traditional institutions, revived the Sukuma people's traditional conservation practices and begun to restore this once forested region. Using indigenous knowledge, the agropastoral Sukuma people practice a natural resource management system called *ngitili*, a Sukuma word meaning enclosure. Working through local organizations and systems, farmers are engaged in agroforestry in degraded croplands and rangelands, employing traditional village guards, and conserving vegetation by closing off *ngitilis* for regeneration. Through planting activities and community involvement, this approach has provided livelihood resources for communities in the region when environmental conditions deteriorate. A critical factor in this case was the recognition, fulfilment and protection of cultural rights of communities including to pursue their traditional normative and governance systems.[4]

Similarly, using collaborative natural resources governance in managing conflict is apparent in various contexts relevant to climate change adaptation. In the forest communities of Nepal, where relatively robust systems of community-based natural resources governance existed, communities were better able to mitigate the impacts of civil conflict on their communities and forests. In fragile, vulnerable, conflict or post-conflict states, practices that strengthen resilience to conflict, as demonstrated in the Nepalese community-managed forests, could improve the community's ability to respond to negative impacts of environmental change.[5] In contrast, in the Turkana and Kitui districts of Kenya, resource conflicts and violence among different groups which were exploited by local politicians, among other factors, increased community vulnerability to climate change impacts such as drought.[6]

An example of the critical role of local organizations in NGO adaptation efforts can be found in the post-disaster work of NGOs in the Philippines.[7] Between 1995 and 2000, more than 75% of the disasters and 95% of disaster-related deaths in the Philippines were caused by climate hazards, with typhoons and tornadoes, flooding, and landslides being the most prominent hazards. Many development NGOs in the Philippines integrated relief and rehabilitation strategies into their action programmes. These strategies included socio-economic projects to reduce local vulnerability, mediation of the flow of government and international assistance, community-based disaster management, small-scale infrastructure development, and training for capacity building. In one case, NGO staff focused on vulnerable communities to identify local leaders, conducted hazard and vulnerability analyses, initiated training related to disaster management, and established village-level committees to foster effective disaster responses. Other NGOs provided financial and technical assistance to help with community-based disaster management activities.

Local people can be effective agents of change where their own forms of organization, knowledge, rules and value systems are respected and supported. Consequently, supporting local people to build robust local mechanisms of organization is an effective adaptation strategy.

There is an important difference between organizations and institutions. Organizations include groups of persons bound together by a common purpose that mutually maintain social relationships and jointly manage resources, while institutions refer to the wider set of rules, norms and agreements that structure human interactions.[8]

Policy Pointers

Actions are needed in three areas to help create an enabling environment for local organizations and institutions.

Supporting local governance structures and institutions

- Recognize community and indigenous peoples' rights of self-determination at all levels.
- Support the development of local capacities, including traditional forms of governance and cultural practices where relevant, to promote and implement conflict-sensitive adaptation at all levels.
- Encourage local organizations to develop their own adaptation plans with locally sensitive conflict management mechanisms that encourage non-violent settlement of conflicts with external entities.
- Ensure that adaptation plans are adaptive and developed through participatory iterative processes that reflect learning from successful and unsuccessful practices.
- Facilitate collaboration and communication among local organizations for information and knowledge sharing.
- Ratify and implement relevant international and regional human-rights conventions.
- Ensure that human rights are not negatively impacted, and simultaneously take advantage of opportunities to improve the enjoyment of these rights.

Developing systems of collaborative natural resources governance

- Foster recognition and acceptance of all stakeholders at various levels by promoting broad and meaningful dialogue among stakeholders throughout design and implementation stages.
- Work towards equitable power sharing in governance and ownership of natural resources.[9]
- Develop equitable programmes for sharing, access, and benefits sharing, particularly concerning scarce natural resources, essential resources, and high-value natural resources.
- Undertake participatory human-rights assessments that collaboratively identify rights, including unused or abandoned rights.

Empowering communities to address peace and conflict issues

- Require participatory peace and conflict impact assessments or environmental security assessments in national and transboundary social and environmental impact assessment law for all adaptation.
- Develop adaptive and participatory assessment tools and capacity building to mobilize their use within respective organizations (local, national, regional or international).
- Ensure findings and recommendations of assessments, particularly those related to local narratives, are incorporated into programme implementation and strategic planning. This includes identifying conflict transformation and peacebuilding opportunities.

End Notes

1 Hamza and Corendea 2011
2 Smith and Vivekananda 2009
3 Agrawal et al 2008
4 UNFCCC local coping strategies database
5 Bharal and Heinen 2006

6 Eriksen and Lind 2005
7 Luna 2001
8 Bouma 1998

Authors:

Omer Aijazi is a member of the IUCN CEESP Theme on Environment, Conflict and Security. He is a PhD Candidate at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on social repair and recovery in post-disaster and post-conflict Pakistan.

Elaine Hsiao is a member of the IUCN CEESP Theme on Environment, Conflict and Security. She is a PhD Candidate at the University of British Columbia, where she is working on a socio-legal assessment of transboundary peace parks.