



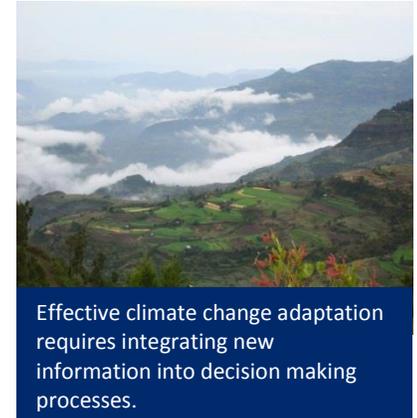
USAID WORKSHOP SUMMARY ON: INFORMATION & CAPACITY FOR ADAPTATION DECISION MAKING IN AGRICULTURE

25-26 February 2013; Washington, D.C.

OVERVIEW

Recognizing the need for evidence-driven approaches to understand climate change impacts and appropriate responses, USAID's adaptation objective under its Climate Change and Development Strategy has a focus on "improving access to science and analysis for decision-making." As society endeavors to bring adaptation investments to scale, there is a need to consider information needs for evidence-based decisions and how to provide this to formal government decisionmakers and local actors. During a two-day meeting in Washington, D.C., a group of 35 academics, development professionals, and host country government representatives discussed practical experiences of project implementers and government representatives in using information to make science-driven decisions on adaptation in the agriculture sector, and the challenges of communicating climate change relevant information. By and large, participants rejected the notion that there is a common set of information or a single set of tools required for adaptation decision making, even within an individual sector like agriculture. But participants widely agreed on general principles and processes for collecting and using information for decision making:

- Start with user needs and specific decision contexts;
- Raise awareness of climate impacts and responses;
- Ensure that uncertainty does not lead to a lack of action;
- Develop the use and capacity of boundary organizations;
- Build experience with integrating information;
- Create dialogue between information providers and users;
- Use existing information sources more effectively; and
- Adapt local information to formal decision processes.



START WITH USER NEEDS AND SPECIFIC DECISION CONTEXTS

While recognizing the need for a variety of types of data—from ecological baselines to social vulnerability, economic livelihoods, and climate and weather projections—participants agreed that identification of information must be based on individual user priorities and specific decision contexts. Participants in breakout group sessions considered information and capacity challenges in decision contexts related to municipal planning, scaling up local innovation, strengthening extension services, integrating adaptation into land-tenure policy, and early warning systems. Participants noted that while climate projections may be used, not all adaptation decision-making processes should necessarily start with climate information. Presenters described the different information needs in an adaptation planning process related to developing a baseline, identifying climate and non-climate stressors, and characterizing adaptation options. Filters to narrow information included starting with an understanding of how existing decisions are made; clarifying the short- or long-term timeframe of decisions processes; and planning for data synthesis. Participants said that useful information is salient, understandable, un-biased, of sufficient depth, timely, scientifically credible, and accompanied by a characterization of its uncertainty.

DEMYSTIFY CLIMATE CHANGE

Participants acknowledged that capacity to integrate adaptation decision making into development practices lacks in most sectors, and that there is a need to "demystify" climate impacts and response strategies at all levels. This need is particularly important in some areas of agriculture adaptation such as extension services, where staff will need to communicate basic climate change processes and integrate adaptation into existing extension messages. In most of the considered country contexts, government efforts to develop and communicate climate change information have been focused on building awareness of climate change adaptation within education systems and the public sector. There is an assumption that this baseline knowledge creates the groundwork for integrating climate change information into formal decision making. In all cases, however, greater efforts are still needed to actively encourage the use of evidence-based climate change-relevant information in project and program decisions, and to effectively integrate climate and non-climate drivers of change.

MANAGE UNCERTAINTY

While participants acknowledged the uncertainty associated with projecting social, economic, and climate trends into the future, there was wide agreement on the need to integrate uncertainty into processes and to not let it stall decision making. Participants considered the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) revised guidelines on presenting uncertainty in two forms: systematic uncertainty due to limited knowledge of a system, and inherent uncertainty due to randomness of events. Discussions covered the cascading growth of uncertainty within decision contexts as new layers are added to analysis. To cope with uncertainty, participants considered developing “robust” decisions that are adapted according to a range of future scenarios. They also discussed the need to move away from presenting only average annual change and to focus on changes relevant to different sectors; for example, changes in extremes for the risk management sector, or seasonal variability for the agriculture sector.

DEVELOP BOUNDARY ORGANIZATIONS

Governments will rarely have adequate “in-house” expertise to analyze climate-relevant information. This situation calls for “honest brokers” of information to work iteratively with decision makers to identify, analyze, and communicate information. Boundary organizations are institutions that straddle the divide between politics and science, producing outputs in both domains and facilitating the transfer of useful knowledge between science and policy. These organizations are often universities or think tanks that may promote research and capacity building, provide tools and methods for assessment and decision making, translate information to knowledge, and foster and sustain linkages.

Despite these opportunities, some participants warned that often, governments have complicated and inherently distrustful relationships with universities; others noted the challenge of making decisions when seemingly contradictory information comes from multiple reliable sources.

Kenya’s Consultative Forum: Recognizing that the information and advisory services required to make strong adaptation decisions exist both inside and outside government, Kenya has created a Consultative Forum for Climate Change in Agriculture composed of academic institutions, intergovernmental research organizations, and government institutions. The forum supports government decision making processes with a diversity of information and analyses.

ADAPT TOOLS AND PROCESSES TO INTEGRATE DATA

Recognizing that decision makers are often overwhelmed by the diversity of qualitative and quantitative information, participants stressed the need to plan early for how information will be integrated. They shared examples of developing narrative scenarios to make results accessible. While acknowledging the need to make decisions that are robust to a range of potential future climate and socio-economic scenarios, they lamented that, in many cases, government planners have only one or just a few available scenarios. This limitation restricts options for improving decision making and consideration of uncertainty.

CREATE DIALOGUE FOR COMMUNICATION

Gambia Early Warning System:

Engaging a diverse group of extension agents, from local women’s groups to youth organizations to community radio and drama groups with government extension agents, has created confidence in the service and increased the likelihood that information will be used for decisions.

In terms of common communication challenges, participants noted that some terminology, such as “resilience,” remains purposefully vague. In other cases, jargon overwhelms both local actors and formal decision makers. Many highlighted the advantages of adopting multiple channels of communication to reach a variety of local actors and decision makers, and the need to consider gender differences in preferred modes of communication.

Participants stressed that dialogue should be embedded in existing programs to ensure relevance and lasting impact. Dialogue was also highlighted for its usefulness in developing feedback mechanisms to make information more decision-relevant over time.

BUILD ON EXISTING PROCESSES

While climate change adds a new lens to understanding and helping decision makers respond to vulnerability, adaptation professionals can adapt vulnerability frameworks and use baseline data and indicators from existing processes. For example, in Ecuador, the World Food Programme’s Adaptation Fund project has adapted its food security framework to integrate climate change information. While this approach creates challenges in aggregation and comparability among adaptation activities, it provides a specific decision context lens for understanding project impact. In other situations, the long-term datasets of programs such as FEWS-NET can provide valuable resources for validating adaptation models; and over time, adaptation professionals should work with early warning professionals to integrate medium- and long-term warning into adaptation planning. Building adaptation into the messaging of early warning programs and broader resiliency efforts is also a win-win strategy.

BUILD ON LOCAL INFORMATION

Throughout the workshop, participants noted the importance of farmer-to-farmer sharing of innovations and the need to further encourage these efforts at the local level, and also the need for mechanisms to scale up efforts to larger geographic areas. In all processes, participants underscored the need to better integrate local formal and informal information in adaptation decision-making processes. They stressed that this approach is a positive way to start to build trust and strengthen relationships, calling for more communication between local, regional, and national levels.

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