

CLIMATE CHANGE AND LOCAL ACTION

CAMBODIA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2011



Ministry of Environment
Cambodia



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Climate Change and Local Action in Cambodia

1. Introduction

Current vulnerabilities and climate change impacts vary across different parts of the country. These highly localised aspects of climate change require actions that are tailored to local needs and circumstances, with meaningful participation of local people.

As Cambodia goes through a critical period in implementation of public administration reforms and expansion of the process of decentralization and deconcentration in accordance with the Organic Law (2008), there exists a great opportunity to think through what it would mean to address climate change at sub-national level. So far, this discussion has been rather limited. While the notion of

'mainstreaming' climate change at sub-national level appears in policy documents and strategic plans, what this might mean in practice has only very recently become a subject for discussion.

Yet local action is not only about the actions of Government. There is a need to think through the roles, linkages and partnerships between the State, the public (communities and civil society) and also the private sector (Agrawal and Lemos 2007).

2. Why local action is needed

Several reasons for the comparative advantage of local institutions are found in the literature, based on the specifically local nature of threats



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of climate change that might not be addressed at national level (see UNCDF/UNDP/UNEP 2010, Agrawal et al 2009, Leary et al 2007, Adger 2002):

- Climate change adaptation and mitigation **strategies need to be 'place-specific'**
- **Local-level interventions are most likely to allow for representation of different stakeholders' views and interests**, allowing for more equitable outcomes and for managing conflict among stakeholders
- **Local-level interventions are most likely to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in distribution and application of financial resources** to meet these local needs and circumstances
- **Local-level planning and administration mechanisms can allow for building on cross-sectoral collaboration** for more strategic long-term actions

- **Local-level institutions are most likely to allow for the degree of learning and flexibility in the face of uncertainty and heightened risks**, building on knowledge, experience and practices at community level

3. Mainstreaming climate change in Decentralization and Deconcentration

Good governance is at the core of the national Rectangular Strategy. Under the framework of the Organic Law, Cambodia has embarked on a radical set of governance reforms promoting Decentralization and Deconcentration (D&D), with the twin objectives of strengthening and expanding local democracy and of promoting local development and reducing poverty (RGC 2010).



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Market information for farmers remains limited. The gap between suppliers and buyers, as well as the large number of intermediaries, means that most farmers are unaware of consumer preferences and have weak bargaining power in the marketplace.

D&D requires Ministries to delegate authority to sub-national level, and most Ministries and Government line agencies have indeed delegated some degree of authority. For example, the Disaster Risk Management sector, responding to the very local and specific nature of its mandate, has created a tier of committees from central to village level. Health service delivery at local level involves a network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and village volunteers working in partnership with relevant line agencies.

In addition to the formal D&D process, the rights and responsibilities to participate in natural resource management of communities, grassroots organisations and NGOs are enshrined in national policy commitments and legislation that support community-based natural resource management for forests, fisheries and protected areas. The main areas of responsibility for D&D are considered: agriculture; education; forestry, natural resources and environment; health, nutrition and services for vulnerable groups; industry and support to economic development; land use; electricity production and distribution; water management; infrastructure; and special needs related to tourism, historical sites and cultural heritage.

So far, climate change has only recently entered the D&D debate, but the most recent strategy documents call for it to be mainstreamed. This is important, as it clearly identifies climate change as a cross-cutting rather than a stand-alone issue. Discussions of what this would mean in practice have only just begun, but clearly, there will be important implications for each of the key areas of local responsibility

outlined above to apply a climate change lens to their planning and action.

Local action can be targeted in the following priority areas:

- **Water resource management.** Without greater engagement between the State, the private sector and the public, effective Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) will not be possible. Much of the planning and implementation is required at local level, starting at watersheds within river basins.
- **Land use planning and monitoring.** Responsibility for land use planning is in the process of being devolved to Commune Councils through Commune Land Use Planning (CLUP) under the guidance of the State Land Management Committee (SLMC) at provincial level. All communes are now required to have a CLUP in place. This will be particularly useful in priority areas of high conflict, ambiguous or ineffective land management, or significant ecological importance.
- **Irrigation.** The effectiveness of irrigation systems also depends on their design and implementation fitting in with local needs and local circumstances. The State has often struggled to provide irrigation systems, with farmers also struggling to take on board the operations and management responsibilities required to ensure that irrigation is sustainable. There exists a clear need for more innovation, particularly for promotion of small-scale irrigation systems and planning of irrigation according

to local ecological and socioeconomic circumstances.

- **Agricultural extension services.** Ensuring that agricultural extension – of techniques, technologies, credit, inputs, and value chain and market development – meets local needs also requires a high degree of local participation, ensuring that extension approaches are accessible to farmers, particularly those more marginalised or with limited assets.
- **Environmental quality and safety.** Much of the effort around natural resources management, restoration and enforcement of environmental standards needs to occur at the local level, with full and effective support from national authorities.
- **Fisheries and forestry.** The role of sub-national authorities in natural resource management is being reviewed, but with the policy push toward community-based management of forests and fisheries, there exists great potential to enhance the role of provinces, districts and communes and to encourage action across different local scales.

4. Moving forward

Moving away from a ‘predict and act’ approach to local development requires a more adaptive and inclusive planning process, taking into consideration the challenges of risk and uncertainty.

D&D reforms in Cambodia present a considerable opportunity to take on board much of the action

associated with climate change adaptation. The challenge now is how to ensure that these processes are strategic, engaged with different stakeholders, based on wide sources of information, and encompass the principles of what is required of local institutions and processes in the face of climate change.

Applying scenarios

Since the science of climate change is uncertain, this means it is necessary to consider a range of different possible futures or different scenarios over different time periods – for example, 20, 50 or 100 years into the future. Scenario planning is thus explained as using *“uncertainty in a constructive way to imagine multiple futures and consider how they might be influenced”* (SOS/IIED 2009).

Strategic assessments and climate proofing

Because the impacts of actions to adapt to and mitigate climate change need to be carefully considered, this raises the profile of a range of impact assessment tools.

In moving from assessing impacts toward considering options and alternatives, SEAs (Strategic Environmental Assessments) are increasingly being applied (MRC/ICEM 2010). This allows for development to consider different options and ensure that sustainability is not undermined.

In addition, local planning and development will need to apply standards for climate proofing to assess the extent to which plans and actions consider the risks of climate change. For example, rural infrastructure development will need to be planned for a future in which

the incidence and intensity of flooding might increase. This will mean that roads will need to be designed accordingly, for example, by being raised higher and ensuring adequate drainage systems. Climate proofing will require the application of clear criteria and standards and a mechanism to assess additional costs and benefits.

Applying ecosystem-based approaches

Much of the work on climate change in Cambodia so far has been based on sectors. Increasingly, there needs to be a shift toward considering territories and developing a basis for more integrated planning and action. While this principle underpins much of the D&D reform, practical and technical obstacles remain considerable.

One of the greatest challenges posed by climate change is the need for putting ecological considerations more firmly at the heart of economic activity. This requires reconciling administrative boundaries with ecological boundaries and landscapes. Moreover, this becomes especially significant for implementing more integrated, cross-sectoral approaches, and for managing key resources such as water, forests, fisheries and agriculture that are likely to be vulnerable to climate change and to face intensified competition.

A key unit for territorial integration exists in water catchments and river basins. With its commitment to IWRM and the D&D process, Cambodia has an opportunity to build local institutions within the framework of D&D



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As the infrastructure requirements of climate change adaptation shift, the types of public works that would be undertaken may address not only flood protection, but can also move toward investments in ecosystem restoration and climate proofing of existing and planned infrastructure.

reforms linking watersheds and coastal zones that might cross river basins and cover several provinces.

Management of land and associated resources, particularly forests and fisheries, is central to the territorial approach for rural agricultural areas. With forest degradation and agriculture both serving as major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and comprising key elements of resilient rural livelihoods, any long-term planning for climate change must address issues of land use.

Stakeholder engagement: Setting visions for the future

Planning requires bringing different stakeholders together and creating a forum for debate. This

is a basic principle of the current governance reforms and of decentralization. But putting such principles into practice has proved to be an area of weakness so far.

A key stumbling block is that public planning and decision-making arenas are often 'uneven', making it difficult for rural people with limited formal education to engage. More transparent, equal engagement is essential to address the challenges of climate change.

Access to information

The principle of ensuring public access to information is clearly enshrined in the Organic Law, and is a prerequisite for accountable, transparent and participatory planning and development. Similarly, effective, coherent



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resource management demands that information on resource status and potential is freely available among stakeholders.

Currently, information that is absolutely critical for sound resource management decisions is not freely available, and indeed, many Government agencies carefully guard their own information. While information might be channelled upward through tiers of Government, it is rarely channelled back down again.

Strengthening community-based adaptation

There are well-established arguments for local action to occur at community level. Interest in community management has often focused on the management of complex natural resources systems that are owned publicly as common property, such as water, forests and fisheries. In response to the failures of State- and market-based management arrangements to ensure sustainability of use, or fair and equitable access to resources, rural communities have managed these resources sustainably according to their own rules and regulations, and their own knowledge and values.

Building adaptive, learning institutions

The climate change literature argues the case for institutions to be flexible, adaptive and learning-oriented so as to be better placed to learn from current actions and able to alter future actions with regard to climate change. In many ways, this is a straightforward argument: The uncertainty of climate change means that

future actions are always contingent on future circumstances.

Again, putting these kinds of principles into action is less straightforward. Basic principles of accountable governance call for a degree of predictability in the ways that local institutions operate – and that the rules that guide their actions are clearly understood by all.

5. Summary

Cambodia possesses considerable strengths for effective local action. Rural communities are highly adaptive, if assets are protected and enhanced and adequate support provided. The moves towards decentralization and deconcentration that form the basis of future rural development create an institutional framework that fits well with the challenges of implementing more integrated, accountable and transparent decision-making and action. But it is also important that local institutions fit better with ecological boundaries.

It is at this local level that decision-making can be closer to the specific needs and circumstances of citizens. However, this depends to a large degree on effective governance mechanisms and civil society institutions that can ensure fair representation and accountability. Evidence clearly demonstrates that when these kinds of systems are put in place and people's voices strengthened through improved access to information and participation, with adequate checks and balances, more sustainable and equitable outcomes are likely to result (Foa 2010, Foti 2008).

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