

Lessons from Adaptation Leaders: A Grassroots-Donor Dialogue on Locally Led Action

May 21st, 2020

This regional virtual dialogue between grassroots' organisations, development partners, and donor representatives reflected on successes and lessons learned in furthering locally led climate adaptation action in Africa. Grassroots organisations, networks and federations are invited to help lead future regional dialogues aimed at identifying present gaps to advance locally level action and help get money to where it matters. These are expected to shape the Global Commission on Adaptation's Locally Led Action Track, enhance climate action under the UNFCCC Marrakech Partnership, and influence investments by governments and donors. The Dialogue was co-organized by the Adaptation Fund, Climate Wise Women, the Global Resilience Partnership and the World Resources Institute.

Key Messages

Inclusion, from inception onward

“Are we seeing people just as recipients or do we view them as partners?”

- Involve communities in program design and implementation, and share ownership over interventions to elevate local knowledge and promote more inclusive and relevant solutions. Circular decision-making, which is demand-driven and inclusive of community input, serves vulnerable people far better than vertical, top-down decisions—each community has their own way of handling things that often goes overlooked.
- It is key for both donors and local actors to engage national leaders and national designated authorities, especially with respect to the climate funds; local empowerment is incomplete if those voices are not being listened to by key decision makers and legislators.
- Strive for relational connection; this eliminates the power dynamics that characterize most traditionally funded grantor- grantee hierarchies.

Trust, accountability, and capacity building are a two-way street

“Trusting and transparent partnerships are bolstered by courage and founded on shared values plus a mutual respect for divergent socio cultural and economic constructs.”

- Mutual trust is built when transparency is promoted at all levels—at global institutions as much as grassroots—about how choices are made, how much money is allocated and where. The predominant narrative is that donors are building capacity within communities, but local communities likewise build capacity for donors in terms of knowledge base, establishing best practices, donor name recognition and more.
- Monitoring and evaluation promote an organizations' credibility among donors. Inviting visitations is a relatively inexpensive way for grassroots organizations to boost their visibility and build trusting relationships; releasing reports is more costly but also effective, and attending conferences is an opportunity to deepen connections.

- The onus of being highly visible and communicative should not fall entirely to grassroots groups; international organizations should allocate a substantial portion of their operational focus and costs to seeking endogenous solutions for climate change and climate resilience in both established and new locations

Funding modalities need to be flexible

“You know, there's so much [knowledge from the development space] that's not pulled into climate finance discussions because it's not about climate. The knowledge sets, skills, experience and the lessons are all there for us to build on, and yet structurally we're not set up to [use it]. So we don't.”

- In climate finance, there is a widely accepted additionality argument for separating out climate change from development. This schism cuts out hard-earned, development-sector knowledge from working with communities. We must address this dichotomy at the international climate finance level to ensure we can raise additional money without creating artificial and harmful barriers to implementation.
- Accreditation requirements can be a barrier for local and national actors to access climate finance. Climate funds like the Adaptation Fund (AF) and Green Climate Fund (GCF) have programs like the Readiness Programme, which support local and national entities seeking accreditation to climate finance funds. The South-South Cooperation Grant under the AF Readiness Programme provides peer support to countries seeking accreditation with the Fund. National and local actors' accreditation to AF is facilitated through a streamlined accreditation process and a fast-track accreditation to GCF. Both AF and GCF offer dedicated funding windows to support locally led actions including the enhanced direct access modality and small and large grants for innovation.
- Starting this year, the GCF will have a focal team in the Secretariat who will be coordinating the GCF Enhancing Direct Access (EDA) Pilot. The team is currently working on guidelines on how to prepare GCF EDA projects and programs and intends to socialize them through online trainings and webinars by the end of 2020 and 2021. It has also created a specific email contact address for any EDA related communication and can be reached at eda@gcfund.org.

Engagement should be long-term and build local agency to act

“One problem with time-bound projectized funding modality is that it is a hammer looking for a nail to hit while local level adaptation requires time and patience and needs glue, tape, other instruments and definitely NOT a hammer!”

- The average three or five-year intervention model used by many donors is not enough time to build trust or new institutions, nor to invest in the groundwork that is needed for a program to be sustainable, meaningful and responding to local realities. A one-time investment deal is not transformative, nor should it be expected to be.
- Donors should avoid creating dependency with their work, especially on transient programs, and should instead equip grassroots groups to train each other, thereby expanding impact.
- Capacity building elements are important but only if they respond to the real needs on the ground, taking into account local context and community dynamics, so that the acquired skills can elevate local agency to act and not be simply “checked off” as part of a static requirement in project implementation.
- Locally led adaption can be trapped in short-term horizons unless it moves from pilot or project-based interventions to sustained finance that is structurally part of a national budget.

Tie up loose ends

“I think we're using the wrong metrics, sometimes, in the way that we develop and evaluate the resourcing of these projects...we cut back on these things that are critical for building an enabling environment for the long term”

- The narrative that high administrative fees are cost prohibitive must be shifted. Local level work is rarely resolved as well as it could be because there is pushback on administrative and monitoring and evaluation costs. Cutting costs in the ways that we develop and evaluate the resourcing of this work jeopardizes creating a long-term enabling environment.
- Grassroots feedback to the donor is important, but so is going into the field and receiving feedback from the beneficiary. We must be careful not to overuse mechanisms like surveying and mapping; talking by phone and having personal connections is better.
- Learning, especially peer learning, is a critical aspect of monitoring and evaluation which should be pursued as much by global institutions as by grassroots organizations. As with every stage of grassroots-donor partnerships, community members should be involved in an institution's M&E.

Knowledge is power

“There is often a hierarchy of knowledge. Technical and scientific knowledge is on top and then we have grassroots, indigenous, local knowledge at the bottom. We need to change that.”

- We can begin to invert the hierarchy of knowledge by documenting grassroot successes in the form of compelling stories. Real stories generate the noise that shakes things up. Packaging lessons in this way will shape what people do and transform knowledge into power.
- It is increasingly important for donors and grassroots to work together to develop indicators that can measure change in adaptive capacity, demonstrating the effectiveness of local action over time.
- Local universities have faculty and students who can be a significant resource for learning. University networks like LUGCC focus on research with local vulnerable communities in least developed countries.

Key questions raised during the dialogue

The discussion raised a number of important questions for consideration and follow-up for our collective work to promote locally led adaptation

- If we are trying to keep interventions localized and granular, how do we bring them to scale?
- How can we develop universal indicators that measure change in adaptive capacity that are relevant in a local context?
- There are so many capable, local-level groups working on cross-cutting development issues that indirectly boost resilience. How do we involve and fund these new actors when we are operating in a system that only funds projects which deliver direct climate change benefits?
- How do we put systems in place that combine accountability with flexibility?
- How can local interventions better serve women and other historically marginalized groups? For example, microfinance Institutions are often presented as solutions for credit access for rural communities. How can this solution be more equitable, considering that many women in these places do not have access or ownership of land?

- How do we link platforms of peer learning and South-South exchanges so these practitioners have access to latest research, evidence, and stories coming from groups like CGIAR, BRACED and others?