Lessons for Future Action: Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

Information and Awareness Raising

One of five summary briefs for decision-makers, produced from the outcomes of the Lessons for Future Action conference: access to key insights, lessons learned, good practice and the gaps and needs for future action

Introduction

Effective decision-making on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction requires access to timely and relevant information in a form that is easily understood.

Knowledge and information allows planners and policy makers to project potential impacts, assess the extent and scale of associated risks and develop measures to increase resilience. Among Small Island Developing States (SIDS), regional climate models and baseline data, although increasingly available, are still lacking for many sectors and in many countries.

It is not sufficient, to generate information alone. In order to be integrated into regional, national and local plans, there needs to be effective communication of climate change and disaster information. Awareness raising need to be relevant to the audience, which requires the clear expression of user needs to those generating information

Such a complex chain of information exchange from scientists and researchers to users, from the local to the regional scale requires a concerted effort.

Effective mechanisms and networks aim to address knowledge and information gaps and communicate findings in an inclusive, participatory and clear way.

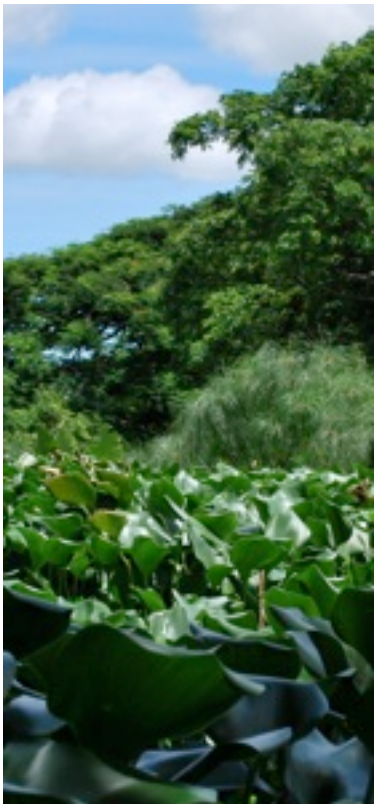
Benefits

Many climatic models currently exist, and increasingly these models include socio-economic and broader environmental criteria. In parallel, early warning and monitoring systems provide information on impending and current disasters in many areas.

Such information and systems, when paired with traditional knowledge, can provide targeted information for policy makers on risks and ways and means to improve resilience. For example, downscaled models on the projected impacts of climate change on precipitation patterns, allows for long-term adaptation planning for the agriculture sector including such resilience-increasing steps as the appropriate selection of crops and crop varieties, the establishment of appropriate irrigation systems and the provision of crop insurance.

Furthermore, when packaged in a manner that is easily accessible and locally relevant, climate and disaster information can influence individual, community and institutional behaviour and policy development. This is particularly true when a clear cause and effect relationship can be established between climate change, disasters and livelihoods and cultures. As such, gathering and sharing information on issues such as crop yields, fish catches and exposure to water stress can serve as an effective catalyst for action while garnering public support for policy development.

"All knowledge and capacity that will help manage the magnitude of this challenge, knowledge from what has been done, not designed for future climates, and understanding and consideration about what's been done somewhere else maybe relevant to a specific region or country." Jo Mummery. Australian Government Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency



Benefits from a Regional Approach

The Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) Regional Climate Change Implementation Plan (IP) 2011-2016 includes an implementation plan for regional modelling activities. The plan will generate information at the regional level that will result in outputs that can assist decision-makers at the national and local level in understanding projected climate change and associated impacts and socio-economic effects in the Caribbean region.

The modelling initiatives are divided into three sections:

- Caribbean Climate Modelling Initiative (CCMI),
- Impact Studies Modelling, and
- Economic Modelling.

Together these three approaches will provide an improved analysis and understanding of the systems and challenges relating to climate change at work in the region. It will also provide the basis for the development of practical and effective adaptation strategies at the national and sub-national level by developing and disseminating information in formats based on the demands and needs of on-the-ground implementers.

Challenges

Although the use of knowledge and information and its effective communication to stakeholders has already yielded significant benefits, there remain significant challenges. These challenges relate both to the availability of scientific information and the integration of traditional knowledge as well as to the development and transmission of targeted and relevant messages.

"If we keep talking about climate change solely as an environmental matter we will never get the kind of support we are looking for, so while the governments have taken the issue to a new level, there is still a whole lot more to be done." - Kenrick Leslie, Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)

Policy challenges

As the generation of knowledge and information concerning climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction continues, policies are required to manage and make use of findings. Policies to establish mechanisms to collect and disseminate information, such as clearing house mechanisms, are lacking in many SIDS. Furthermore, policies to prioritize information needs and to support regional research need to be further elaborated.

Policies are needed to support further investments in science and traditional knowledge so that a clear picture of the timeframe in which impacts will be felt and the intensity of the projected impacts can be drawn.

Finally, in order to ensure that investments are best able to respond to the most up-to-date and accurate information, there is a need to identify ways and means to translate information into policy and sector specific terms and communicate it to relevant stakeholders. Such actions require a clear understanding of who is best positioned to act as this translator between the scientific community, holders of tradition knowledge and policy makers.

Implementation challenges

Building awareness on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction requires a clear understanding of the messages, the audience, the key players in the delivery process as well as adequate resources.

In order for implementation to be effective, the relationship between the different groups involved in the generation and use of knowledge and information must be understood. The particular role of women as both holders and users of knowledge should be better acknowledged.

Finally, the implementation of projects and programs should consider the role of technology, both positive and negative, as well as the local circumstances of communities, especially remote communities who are often neglected.

Lessons Learned

In order to ensure that knowledge and information are generated and shared, policy makers and practitioners may wish to:

- Build at least a basic understanding of stakeholders and their needs;
- Establish a clear set of priorities for further research based on user needs;
- Invest in the increased collection of data;
- Make sure that information and knowledge is locally relevant and describes impacts on livelihoods and cultures;
- Simplify the message to better facilitate communication between scientists and end users;
- Focus on the message 'the climate has changed; the climate will continue to change; the climate demands change'; and
- Use a variety of methods to deliver messages: local and regional media, community champions, broadcast and targeted information channels.

Good Practice Examples

Jamaica – Voices for Climate Change Education Project

The Voices for Climate Change Education Project is a public education campaign on the issues and impacts associated with climate change. The purpose of the project is to build local knowledge and support to help with adaptation planning.

In order to maximize impacts, the project mobilized well-known personalities and artists to develop a package of awareness raising material, disseminated through social media channels and consisting of:

- A theme song titled Global Warning and a music video to accompany the song;
- A series of public service announcements written mainly by the artists themselves; and
- A mini album of songs on climate change.

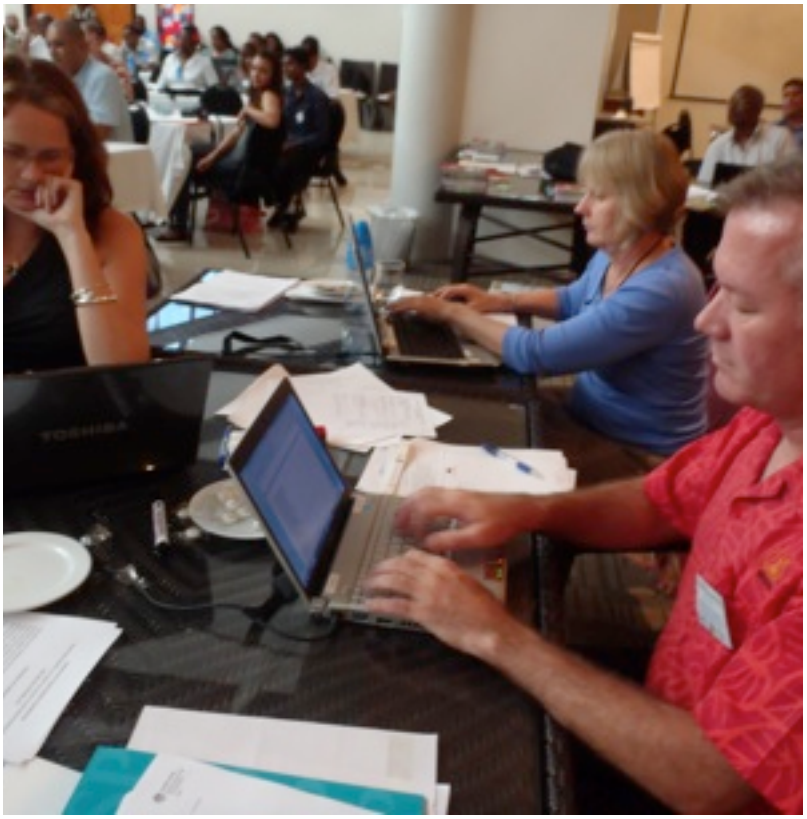
Global – Climate Change Media Partnership

In order to improve media coverage of climate change issues in developing countries, Internews, Panos and IIED established the Climate Change Media Partnership. The Partnership provides training and access to policy makers and scientists for developing world journalists. The main outcome is a fellowship programme focusing on international climate change negotiations.

The partnership has achieved:

- Increased capacity of journalists to produce greater quality and volume of climatic reporting;
- Higher levels of public awareness and debate;
- The mainstreaming of climate change tools in media;
- Broader discussions to include marginalised people; and
- Opportunities for journalists to build networks and develop better climate reporting.

"The climate has changed; the climate will continue to change; the climate demands change." - Michael Taylor, Caribbean Climate Modelling Consortium



Areas for Further Investment

Filling the current gaps in information and awareness raising will require a strong political commitment to science and regional cooperation to identify and fill information gaps and disseminate information in a usable format.

Further investments should address knowledge gaps including, baseline climate and disaster information as well as downscaled models and the collection of traditional knowledge addressing user needs. Such investments may support projects at the local, national and regional levels depending on the type of data.

With regards to sector specific data, relevant sectors identified as high priorities with specific information needs include: health, agriculture, tourism, coastal zone management, water and infrastructure.

Resources should also be made available to ensure that scientific information is compiled and translated into a form and format that supports action at the policy and local level.

Investments in innovative communication methods as well as the scaling up of established good practices will produce a population that has a clear understanding of climate change and disaster risk as well as the steps that can be taken to build a more resilient society.

The Lessons for Future Action Conference identified a number of good practices as well as gaps and needs concerning information and awareness raising. Translating these into further action will require political support, local action as well as support from the donor community.

To support future action, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which includes, as priority activities:

- The establishment of collaborative research networks to examine common challenges and needs (initially focusing on coral reefs, coastal processes and coastal modelling); and
- Exploring means to provide better climate change information to stakeholders that enable countries and communities to access and contribute information that is pertinent to their circumstance and in a form that is readily understood.

Through establishing an educated community of practice, the Conference increased the likelihood of an effective and programmatic approach to ensuring that islanders are better prepared to face the dual challenges of climate change and natural disasters.

"When we work together, when we keep networking, we come a little closer. We are still working together to find the means and ways." - Jeannette Larue, Seychelles Department of Environment

SPREP
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