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## **Integrating Climate Change Adaptation with Local Development: Exploring Institutional Options**

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**Abstract:** As the effects of climate change become increasingly evident in Nepal, development agencies and policy actors are experimenting with different ways to facilitate climate adaptive development at the local level. This paper analyses the current approaches to local-level adaptation planning and identifies the challenges to and opportunities for integrating climate change adaptation and local development in Nepal. Drawing on field research carried out in two districts of central Terai and two of western hills and supplemented by a review of adaptation plans and national climate change-related policies, this paper demonstrates that the current approach to mainstreaming adaptation in local development is institutionally fragmented and politically naive. There are attempts to involve some community groups, with weak links to local governments, and without enough thinking on how local development vision can be realised in the face of increasing climate risks. We argue that such approach is institutionally misplaced, as there is a tendency to focus certain aspects of adaptation and certain forms of institutions while ignoring others. More importantly, as most efforts are driven by non-state development agencies, there is little political ownership and accountable mechanism to integrate adaptation with local development. It shows that local governments are either ignored or at most marginally involved in the process of local-level adaptation planning. This paper concludes that the current approach—characterized by institutional fragmentation and token involvement of communities and local governments—could paradoxically lead to unaccountable climate governance at the local level.

**Keywords:** Climate change, community-based adaptation, local governance, institutional plurality

### **INTRODUCTION**

It has been widely recognized that climate change impacts are inherently local and context-specific; so, need has been felt for focusing climate change activities at the local level (Agrawal *et al.* 2009). In Nepal, many International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and donor-funded bilateral and multilateral projects have been promoting and supporting community-based adaptation planning across the country. In this process, more than 2,000 community adaptation plans (CAPs) have been developed. CAPs consider various community groups like community forest user groups (CFUGs) and groups of poor and vulnerable communities as units of planning and implementation. This has been

done with the assumption that community groups have the potential to collectively address both climate change and developmental concerns, and can provide a firm local institutional base to implement these plans. However, there has been limited understanding of the relative advantages of natural resource-based institutions like CFUGs and groups of poor and vulnerable communities in implementing CAPs. Similarly, the issue of whether community adaptation planning is linked with local government planning processes needs to be explored, considering the fact that the local government has a pivotal role in local development planning and implementation.

In this backdrop, this paper examines two aspects of community adaptation planning: first, what are the relative advantages of CFUGs and groups of poor and marginalized communities in planning and implementation of local adaptation activities; and, second, to what extent such adaptation plans are lined with local development planning processes. This paper will also explore the challenges and opportunities of integrating CAPs with local development planning processes.

The paper draws on field research carried out in two districts of the central Terai (Dhanusa and Mahottari) and two districts of western hills (Lamjung and Gorkha) where CARE Nepal has supported the CAP process. Field data were collected using different qualitative tools, including focus group discussions (FGDs), interview with key stakeholders of the district, including District Development Committee (DDC) and district line agencies. Similarly, interviews were also done with the staff of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who were involved in facilitating the CAP process. Besides the field visit, contents of CAPs were reviewed, which were taken from the districts covered by the field visit, Kanchanja Conservation Area, where CARE and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) have jointly facilitated the CAP process and Western Terai where the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP) of the Department for International Development (DFID) have supported the process. We have also reviewed major climate change policy documents, including the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA), Climate Change Policy 2011 and the National Framework for Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA). The findings of the field study and review of policy documents were presented at a national workshop held in Kathmandu, where experts and stakeholders shared their views and perspectives.

This paper is organized in six sections. The next section will identify the institutional issues in the wider literature in relation to local-level adaptation to climate change. We will then offer a review of how Nepal's climate policy framework has sought to address such issues. Section Three will present the evidence of community-based adaptation practices in Nepal, drawing on field evidence. In Section Four, we analyse the degree to which local government is linked to community-based adaptation practices. We review the performance and capacity of local governments in coordinating and leading local-level adaptation initiatives, and through this, demonstrate the weak involvement of the local government. We then offer explanation of why the local government system is left out in the adaptation process, drawing on both empirical evidence and insights from the wider literature. Finally, we conclude that the local government system is critical of integrating adaptation with local development, identifying key policy implications.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE: INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES AND POLICY CONTEXT**

Though climate change is a global phenomenon, it has highly localized impacts and needs adaptation at the local level (Agrawal *et al.* 2009; UNCDF *et al.* 2010). Though there have been some autonomous (spontaneous response from affected community) responses to the impacts of climate change, very few activities have been initiated by the local governments. The Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) of Nepal provides for autonomy for local governments in development planning and implementation (HMG/N 1999). Similarly, the LAPA framework envisages a pivotal role for local governments in planning and implementation

of adaptation activities (GoN 2011b). However, climate change policy, particularly NAPA and the Climate Change Policy 2013, despite such mandates, have not clearly spelled out the role of local government in terms of planning and implementation of adaptation activities. Such policy contradictions exist not only in Nepal, but also in many least developed countries (LDCs) (Agrawal *et al.* 2009). As argued by Agrawal *et al.* (2009), NAPAs in many LDCs have failed to provide adequate role to local institutions, including local governments.

On the other side, the local governments of many LDCs were reported to be passive in respect to climate change activities (UNCDF *et al.* 2010: 4). The ministries responsible for local government (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development [MoFALD] in Nepal) do not perceive climate change issues as their mandate.

Review of the climate change-related policies of Nepal showed that the major policy documents do not provide a clear and coherent institutional framework for implementing climate change adaptation activities at the local level. The three key documents—NAPA (GoN 2010), the Climate Change Policy 2011 (GoN 2011a) and the LAPA framework (GoN 2011b) –often contradict each other.

At the local level, NAPA has made a provision for mobilizing the existing community institutions such as CFUGs, water user groups and farmers' groups for developing and implementing adaptation plans. However, it has not spelled out the role of local governments. The Climate Change Policy also broadly follows the NAPA approach, though it is less explicit in suggesting the role of community institutions. On the whole, these policy documents have not adequately recognized the role of local governments in planning and implementation of adaptation activities. However, the LAPA

framework has put absolute focus on local governments in planning and implementation of adaptation activities and is silent on the role of community-level institutions. Moreover, LAPA does not recognize the ongoing process of CAPs that has been promoted by a number of development agencies across the country. It mentions that adaptation planning can be integrated into local development planning process at the level of Village Development Committee (VDC) or municipalities, but it does not provide a framework for such integration. LAPA seems to follow the spirit of –the LSGA (HMG/N 1999), which empowers local governments in managing local affairs.

In addition to the possible institutional base for adaptation planning, the national policy documents also show a different understanding of the relationship between adaptation and ongoing development planning. NAPA assumes that sectoral ministries will mainstream the climate change adaptation into their sectoral plans instead of developing separate adaptation plans. Therefore, it does not spell out any separate adaptation plans outside the sectoral planning arrangement. However, LAPA's focus seems more on developing separate climate change adaptation plans at different levels of local governance. Though LAPA emphasises integrating climate adaptation into development planning, it provides a framework and process for preparing a separate plan for climate adaptation without integrating it into local development plans.

### **COMMUNITY - BASED ADAPTATION PLANNING: EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE**

Many development agencies in Nepal, including CARE, have been supporting preparation of CAPs and usually follow a specific set of process to ensure that relevant issues are identified, captured and addressed in the plans. The CAP

process has adopted diverse participatory tools<sup>1</sup> in vulnerability mapping, assessing adaptation options and planning activities. The tools include preparation of a timeline of disaster events, resource mapping, identification of major hazards and their impact, development of a seasonal calendar, analysis of livelihood options, disaster vulnerability matrix and so on. After comprehensive assessment of vulnerability and adaptive capacity of community, different adaptation options are identified and potential sources of funds are explored. Each CAP documents the appraisal of vulnerability assessment, adaptation options and an action plan.

Based on the review of CAPs and field visits to two regions (central Terai and western hill districts), the study found a diversity of institutional bases for these plans. While hamlets of poor, vulnerable and socially excluded groups (PVSE) are the locus of planning in the Terai (Dhanusa and Mahottari, where CARE Nepal has supported the CAP process), CFUGs are taken as the institutional base in the hills (Lamjung and Gorkha, where CARE Nepal facilitates CAP under the Hariyo Ban Programme)<sup>2</sup>. In both cases, community-based adaptation planning conceives communities as an organised unit of collective action founded on common threats, interests and a resource base. It is assumed that community-level institutions will provide a robust vehicle to advance the adaptation initiatives at the local level. It is expected that they will own the process and take a lead role in developing and implementing CAPs. In case of CFUGs, these plans are endorsed by their general assemblies so that CAPs become part of their operational

plans and CFUGs use their funds to implement them. In case of the two hill districts, the Hariyo Ban programme has provided USD1,500 per CFUG to implement these plans in its project districts. In the central Terai, however, CAPs are not implemented and the funding support to PVSE groups remains obscure.

It is learnt that the CAP preparation process has sought to engage with diverse local actors. First, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) that have been working for long and are familiar with the area are directly involved in the process. For example, in central Terai, nine NGOs, including five local ones, are involved in the preparation of CAPs. Second, a wide range of stakeholders are invited to the training and planning meetings. Major stakeholders include VDCs, DDCs, District Forest Office (DFO), District Agriculture Development Office (DADO), District Soil Conservation Office (DSCO), District Livestock Development Office (DLDO), the Red Cross Society and political parties. These stakeholders are involved in training, vulnerability mapping and in identifying priority action areas. In most cases, junior staff other than invited officials from DDCs and district-level line agencies have participated in these meetings.

We also analysed the substantive aspects of the selected CAPs by reviewing their content and practice under different projects: Churia Livelihood Improvement Programme (CHULI), Hariyo Ban, Sustainable Conservation Approaches in Priority Ecosystems (SCAPE) and LFP (Table 1). CAPs were compared

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1 Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) (CARE 2009) and Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, Reflections and Learning (PMERL) (Ayers *et al.* 2012) developed by CARE and others

2 Hariyo Ban programme is a USAID-funded programme on natural resources management and climate resilient development and is jointly implemented by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), CARE Nepal and Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN)

considering the identified climate-induced problems, priority plans and stakeholder involvement. The comparison showed that the key problems and priority plans varied slightly

between the hills and Terai. Apart from ecological differences, variations can partly be attributed to different institutional choices: PVSE and CFUGs.

**Table 1 : Comparison of CAPs in four different contexts**

Cases	Description
Bhutahi Paterwa	A small hamlet of about 55 households (HHs) of Musahar—a poor, marginalised and landless community—in Dhanusha. CARE Nepal supported CAP through locally formed Disaster Risk Management Committees (DRMCs)
Rajdevi CFUG	A CFUG in Gorkha with 242 households (HHs). The Hariyo Ban Programme supported the CAP process
Gauthali CFUG	This lies within the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in Taplejung where SCAPE is supporting CAPs
Lohose Chisakharka CFUG	This CFUG lies in Parbat where LFP supported development of CAPs

Variations were observed in the analysis of vulnerability and observed climate change impacts as a part of the CAP process. In Bhutahi Paterwa, drought, hailstorm, disease among crop and livestock, flood and thunderstorm were considered as the major impacts of climate change. In other CFUGs, landslide, flood, erosion, snowfall, drought, forest fire, invasive species, drying water resource and wind were the frequently observed biophysical changes. The consequential impacts were observed in terms of increased water scarcity, increased incidence of disease attack, and decreased crop and livestock production. From the comparison of the CAP contents in cases where CFUGs were the institutional base, it was seen that the priority problems were more aligned with forest and natural resources.

Action points for adaptation matched with the problems identified. In Bhutahi Paterwa, the use of alternative seeds, pesticides (both organic and inorganic), timely treatment of animal diseases, isolation of diseased animal and cropping ahead of time were identified as priority

actions. However, the proposed activities largely overlapped in the other three sites. These include plantation, conservation of water sources, rainwater collection, early weeding, compost making, organic farming, improved stove, improved irrigation system, retaining wall and fire control.

Collaboration among different agencies during planning, and especially implementation of CAPs, is an important issue. In most of the CAPs process, VDC, DDC, government line agencies, local NGOs and other development agencies were involved in different capacities. In most cases, their roles have been expected in specific areas of CAP, which are not necessarily committed by the agencies concerned. In particular, the source of funding was uncertain.

**CAPs ARE POORLY LINKED WITH VDC PLANNING**

Historical legacy of development approach and target group of development agencies have influenced the choice of institutions for

preparing CAPs. In central Terai, CARE and its partners were for a long time involved with the poor, landless, women, *dalit*<sup>3</sup> and other PVSE groups through disaster risk management schemes. Empowerment and equity remained important elements in choosing these groups as the institutional vehicles for adaptation planning. Choosing PVSE groups for adaptation planning would help focus on most vulnerable groups and directly address their needs. However, it has a weak prospect of influencing wider stakeholders and is less likely to integrate with the VDC and DDC-level adaptation initiatives. In the other three contexts, the support agencies primarily worked with the CFUGs and, therefore, chose them as institutional base for preparing CAPs. It is expected that the CFUGs, as compared to PVSE groups, will provide a larger scale and permanent natural resource base for planning and implementing adaptation. There are, however, some concerns from the equity standpoint. Though the CFUGs in most of the cases have developed equitable governing system based on well-being ranking, there are several gaps in practice. The field evidence shows the potential trade-off between the PVSE groups and the CFUGs in terms of effectiveness, equity and potential of integration at higher levels. Despite these variations, they have a common feature among them: weak interface between these institutions and VDC.

Diverse institutions, including local communities, NGOs and line agencies, were implementing different disaster risk reduction/ climate change adaptation initiatives on their own. That also applies to the preparation of CAPs. The major form of coordination that occurs during the CAP preparation process is the invitation of stakeholders to some events. Unfortunately, these invitations and

participation are limited to symbolic presence and are not in the form of active functional engagement in the process. The remarks made by a development activist indicate the challenges in getting active participation of local governments in the CAP process:

“Various stakeholders, including VDCs, health posts and representatives of political parties have been invited during the preparation of CAPs. However, most of them show little awareness of climate change issues. Moreover, they are too busy in their own routine work and can hardly contribute to these community plans.”

-A development activist from Dhanusha

Local governments' participation in the CAP process has been maintained through personal relationships of NGOs, monetary incentives in the form of allowances or individual interests. The representation of officials has hardly turned into functional institutional ownership of local governments. The experience of support agency staff clarifies the picture:

It has not been easy to involve VDC and DDC office-bearers in the process. Their participation has largely remained symbolic and not functional. In many cases, monetary benefits in the form of allowance have ensured their participation.

- An NGO staff in Dhanusha

Coordination with DDCs often becomes a real challenge. The frequent transfer of staff, their frequent travels to Kathmandu and their huge administrative responsibilities make it hard to get their time and attention. The VDC secretary of Khutta VDC (Mahottari) said:

Not one Local Development Officer remained in the DDC even for the whole year (2011). One worked for two to four months, got acquainted with the people and the system, and then was replaced by another, who again went through the same cycle.

<sup>3</sup> Dalits are the socially excluded and disadvantaged communities in Nepal which was established as a result of the caste based hierarchical system.

During an interaction, a senior official at the MoFALD highlighted the gaps in perception, delivery capacity and resource availability with the local governments. For instance, the DDC does not perceive itself as a local government; instead, it tends to define itself as the local agency of the ministry. Consequently, there has been some confusion in coordination with other line agencies. As local government officials are directly accountable to the MoFALD, it may have discouraged other ministries to rely on DDC/VDC in delivering many of their programmes. He also pointed out that the DDC and VDC severely lacked human and financial resources to perform all the roles stipulated by the LSGA. For example, a VDC secretary has to follow over 56 different regulations and guidelines to carry out his/her regular activities, manage and disburse over 3 million rupees over a year, prepare and issue thousands of certificates and references, and perform all the activities that a complete set of elected VDC officials used to do. This is simply impossible, but they have to do it.

It is learnt that government employees are largely unaware of climate change discourse and, therefore, are not well equipped to support the public on this agenda. While most of the VDC secretaries were quite familiar with the disaster risk management issue, they were less familiar with the issue of climate change adaptation. The members of staff at the environment section at Dhanusha DDC were unaware of the term “climate change adaptation”, though they were knowledgeable of energy-related issues. Commenting on this, one senior official at the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) explained how government employees were marginalized in accessing knowledge of climate change. He shared that when DFO staff were asked to explain about Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) among the user groups, they

complained that they were not adequately informed of the issue and could not do the job properly. It is because non-state actors participate in training and workshops on REDD+ both in-country and abroad and have become much smarter on the subject. He argued that the aid economy had weakened the government staff by pouring disproportionate resource to non-state actors. Looking at the current climate fund governance, this argument seems plausible as only few senior officials and few *Bikase*<sup>4</sup> elite have enjoyed opportunities to equip themselves with climate change debate.

Widespread corruption in the local government system has seriously undermined their legitimacy, questioned their capacity to deliver development projects and hindered their internal functioning. During our field visit, 15 members of staff of Dhanusha DDC were expelled from their jobs due to a corruption scandal. This also resulted in delayed budget release that led to freezing of a large chunk of planned budget. This was rightly put by the VDC Secretary of Basbitti VDC, Dhanusha:

The implementation of our plans has been seriously hampered by delayed budget release. Sometimes it even freezes, partly due to the fault of the DDC officials themselves.

The absence of democratically elected local representatives for over 10 years has worsened the governance of DDC/VDCs. Consequently, a few leaders of the larger political parties have controlled the resource allocation decisions. The following statement of a DDC official clearly indicates the domination of political manoeuvring over systematic review and assessment of local needs and priorities:

Though technical and social assessments are required in our norms, there is little space for independent technical assessment. The political leaders of big parties influence the decision on

<sup>4</sup>The term is popularly used in Nepali to denote development workers mostly working on donors' money.



most of the projects. Climate change agenda is not yet in their priority.

Acting Local Development Officer (LDO),  
DDC Dhanusha

The inaction of local governments to climate change adaptation can partly be attributed to the lack of a clear and explicit policy mandate to them. DDCs and VDCs have not received a clear and practical mandate and instructions for adaptation planning. They do not regard the national climate change-related policy documents as mandatory. Unless there are legal or regulatory frameworks and practical guidelines to carry out adaptation activities, they cannot make any decision towards this end. According to the Secretary of Basbitti VDC, Dhanusha: "The rules and regulations of VDC planning process are clear enough. However, there is neither clear mandate nor guidelines for planning climate adaptation activities so far." Likewise, according to the LDO of DDC, Dhanusha, "*though* environment-related concerns such as Initial Environmental Examination (IEE)/Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) provisions exist in DDC plans, climate adaptation activities are not mandatory for DDC." It became clear to us that, unless climate change adaptation is incorporated in laws and regulations, it will not become mandatory. Another equally important concern is that climate change adaptation activities have not received budgetary codes and there are no activities complemented with budgetary allocation so far. Unless adaptation activities are tied up with budgetary provisions, the local governments can hardly implement those actions.

### **WHY ARE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS NOT ACTIVE IN ADAPTATION PLANNING?**

Realizing the fact that climate change has localized effects and need developing response

to specific contexts, Nepal's climate change adaptation initiatives have emphasized local leadership in planning and implementation of diverse adaptation activities. The national policy framework explicitly backs this idea and the development agencies who support implementation of the policy have promoted the action. There are rationales for it that adaptation outcomes can be best achieved by building on Nepal's decade-long successful experience of community-based management of forests, water, community infrastructure, health services and many more. While community institutions may provide a good locus of adaptation planning, there are growing concerns about linking such actions with national policies and plans and generating support from local government for developing effective response at the local level.

Our analysis indicated that there is a very weak connection of CAPs with local government planning process. This has undermined the possibility of local governments' role in effective planning and implementation of local adaptation activities (UNCDF *et al.* 2010). This led us to argue for the central role of the local government, which is crucial in responding to climate change. We have identified three major arguments in favour of pivotal role of VDCs and DDCs in local climate adaptation initiatives. First, addressing climate change threats requires restructuring the institutional arrangements of accessing and managing power and authority, environmental resources and public funds. These are inherently political issues and demand legitimate political process to resolve. Only local governments are legitimate political institutions at the local level which can take up these challenges. Second, climate change impacts are felt in a wide range of areas from agriculture and health to environmental security, which are at the core of the life support system. It appears that there is need for a holistic and coordinated approach to respond to these wider threats. Isolated and specific response from sectoral line agencies and locally formed

groups alone would be inadequate. Third, the priority plans of actions of CAPs are highly ambitious compared to the local community's capacity to generate and mobilise required financial resources. While only a few CAPs are being supported by aid agencies, the implementation of thousands of such plans across the country is near impossible without sustained funding. Though the annual budgetary flow is small against the magnitude demanded by these CAPs, local governments are the most reliable and sustainable source of funds to implement those plans. Thus, local governments must be at the centre of local adaptation initiatives. However, as discussed below, there is a huge gap between these expectations from local government and their actual capacity to deliver adaptation actions.

In the Asia Pacific region, poor performance and weak capacity of local governments is one of the central challenges for integrating CAPs into the local development planning (UNCDF *et al.* 2010). Observations from the field and interactions with some local government officials show that local governments are too stretched in their everyday duties and basic administrative function that there is little time, energy and understanding to look at the larger developmental and environmental agenda. This particularly applies to responding to climate change. They have neither adequate human resources and technical expertise nor financial resource to respond to these emerging issues. Moreover, the legitimacy and credibility of local governments are questioned due to entrenched corruption, as well as lack of accountability and responsiveness. While these challenges seriously undermine local governments' ability to deliver adaptation initiatives, the solution to these problems lies beyond them.

Nepal's weak local governments are the result of deep-rooted centralizing tendency of political parties, state bureaucracy, development agencies

and citizen networks. This is reflected in the reluctance to fully respect and implement the LSGA, lack of interest in local government election, MoFALD's interest in keeping local governments within its control, line ministries' reluctance to devolve their power to local governments, development agencies' tendency to work through their preferred NGO partners and citizen networks, ignoring local governments. These tendencies are reflected in the national climate change policy framework, which is not clear and coherent to explicitly project local governments in the driving seat for climate change adaptation. Consequently, there is lack of clear legal, regulatory and practical mandates for local governments to coordinate, lead and monitor local adaptation initiatives.

The community-based adaptation process has brought different types of community institutions, NGOs directly helping prepare CAPs and their support agencies in the forefront. The CFUGs, conservation CFUGs (in case of conservation areas), PVSE groups and the Disaster Risk Management Committees (DRMCs) have been projected as the key institutions in responding to climate change. The external agencies have recognized these institutions by partnering in projects, building their capacities, linking them to higher scales and providing financial resources. Consequently, non-state local institutions have assumed the critical role of planning and implementing CAPs. These institutions have gradually developed special sense of belongingness with the local people by supporting them in their immediate concerns. However, these institutions (CFUGs, PVSEs) tend to defend the narrow interests of the groups and may not represent the whole population across certain geography, landscape or political constituency. Moreover, the participatory process within these institutions would hardly be binding and would not compel the powerful actors to be accountable to their constituencies.

The current climate financing, which comes through diverse institutions, often within a competitive framework, creates incentives to protect their experiences and innovations as their institutional assets. These assets are usually packaged in the form of special brands, which are then capitalized towards accessing other climate funds. This creates perverse incentive for development agencies in sharing their initiatives and valuing others' initiatives. In addition, these agencies often prefer apolitical and quiet working environment and tend to avoid the complex everyday politics. Aid agencies and their NGO partners often work in isolation from each other and in parallel with local development planning. Consequently, as most of the adaptation planning is taking place outside the domain of local governments, these are less likely to be integrated with the VDC/DDC-led planning. As neither local governments nor line agencies own these plans, CAPs essentially remain orphan, undermining their successful implementation.

The marginalisation of local governments in adaptation planning is the result of complex systemic issue beyond the certain developmentalist approach of NGOs and development partners. Local governments lack critical human and other institutional resources to lead and coordinate adaptation planning. The current human resource is not adequately equipped or is overstretched in their work. These professionals are little exposed to updated training and other knowledge forums. This is particularly true with the emerging field of action such as climate change (UNCDF *et al.* 2010). Apart from these technical capacity gaps, there are usual attitudinal and behavioural issues associated with low responsiveness and weak accountability. This is particularly compounded by the lack of elected representatives who could have provided leadership of planning and implementation of adaptation activities with popular local participation (*ibid*). It can be

concluded that a vicious cycle of weak capacity and marginalization of local governments in adaptation planning exists.

Strong and visible role of other institutions in climate change adaptation planning may produce some trade-off with the authority of the local government. The emergence of these institutions outside the local government would, in turn, weaken the belongingness of local people with local government authorities. Gradually, the local government will become less relevant in shaping the lives and livelihoods of citizens in their respective constituencies, which will ultimately render them less relevant. This, in turn, would weaken the accountability and responsiveness of local governments (Ribot *et al.* 2008). Also capacitating and empowering parallel institutions would develop a trade-off with the local government in terms of resources to respond to the adaptation needs. Depriving local governments of badly-needed resources would limit their capacity to address issues of wider concern.

While recognising the central role of local governments, we should also be aware of their potential limitations in leading adaptation actions. Literature on local governance suggests that there are various reasons that limit the capacity of local governments in development planning. First, the local government has limited knowledge of the dynamics of climate change in their territory. In developing countries like Nepal, there are no established mechanisms through which local governments can enrich their understanding of the biophysical dynamics of the climate change (UNCDF *et al.* 2010). Second, local governments do not have trained human resources to understand and deal with the climate change-related issues. Third, local governments are too occupied with immediate developmental priorities, which undermine new agendas like climate change. Fourth, climate change adaptation requires additional financing, which the local

government can hardly generate on their own. Finally, the local government needs to be accountable to the local population to respond to their needs. However, currently, local governments in Nepal lack this legitimacy due to absence of elected representatives for more than a decade.

Two interrelated challenges are critical. First, this paper reveals the underlying confusion on the choice of right institutional vehicle for advancing adaptation activities. While community-based institutions are projected in most of the cases, there is growing interest in integrating these plans with the development planning of local governments. However, there is lack of clear and coherent direction in national policy framework and NAPA and LAPA contradict in regard to institutional framework for local adaptation planning and implementation. This has resulted in the lack of clear and explicit mandate to local governments regarding their roles in adaptation. It can be concluded that current political transition, climate governance and aid economy have reproduced and nurtured the *status quo* of fragmented and unaccountable system around adaptation. This paper showed how the cycle of marginalization of local governments and their poor performance provide a rationale for ignoring and undermining the prospect of locally-led adaptation in Nepal.

Second, the paper identified and discussed the multiple challenges of integrating community-level adaptation initiatives into wider local development planning. It is learnt that the challenges exist in both supply and demand sides. On the supply side, attempts of the aid agencies and their partner NGOs in coordinating and involving local governments are inadequate. On the demand side, VDCs and DDCs are not adequately equipped to understand, appreciate and integrate the climate change activities, including CAPs into their regular planning process.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION

Despite these issues and challenges, there are many comparative advantages to the local governments to engage in climate change agenda (UNCDF *et al.* 2010). First, as discussed earlier, climate change has many localized impacts, which need necessary response from the closest possible government mechanism (Agrawal *et al.* 2009). Second, local government can have better access to local knowledge and ability to mobilize local resources to respond to climate-related threats (Rattana and Krawanchid 2012). Third, in countries like Nepal decentralization legislation provides the local government with role to coordinate with line agencies and mobilize them in local issues.

Climate change adaptation planning should provide channels through which local lessons and experiences can influence decision-making at higher levels and ensure that higher-level decisions and programmes incorporate local strategies and actions (Lebel *et al.* 2012). This needs leading role of the local government, which can link local action to national planning and policy processes. The involvement of locally accountable government can also safeguard the interest of the poorest and most vulnerable populations from climate change (Agrawal *et al.* 2009). It requires revisiting the provision made in NAPA, which is the basis of climate change adaptation activities in the LDCs and need to envision the local government in the front seat of planning and implementation of climate change adaptation activities at the local level with enhanced capacity and accountability to their constituencies.

While arguing for a central role of local governments, we are equally aware of their weak accountability and legitimacy due mainly to the lack of elected representatives. Given the protracted political transition in Nepal, the date

of local election is not yet visible. In this context, there must be some transitional strategies, which should enhance accountability and responsiveness of the existing local government and ensure effective and equitable service delivery through other development agencies. Constituting broad-based multi-stakeholder mechanisms that can coordinate and monitor diverse adaptation and development activities could be a choice. Whatever the mechanism, these must be open and adequately inclusive, and should be subject to public scrutiny.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed how climate change adaptation concerns are integrated with development at the local level by looking at three different but overlapping approaches that are being promoted in Nepal. We analysed community adaptation planning by taking two types of community-based institutions: one is the organizations of poor and vulnerable groups and the other community groups sharing a common pool resource such as a community forest. We examined how the local government system is connected to such processes and demonstrated that the involvement of local governments in adaptation planning is limited. We have argued that it is because of limited capacity of local governments on the climate change issues and unclear policy mandate, partly because there is no elected local government at present, and also because of the project-driven adaptation planning processes led by international agencies and NGOs have undermined the political questions of local ownership.

The above analysis has several policy implications. First, there is need for policy guidelines that can help better facilitate interactions and collaboration between local communities and the local government in integrating adaptation and local development. In the current context of lack of elected

representatives in local government, a transitional strategy could include ways to identify and engage a wide range of state and non-state actors locally so that both technical and procedural issues are identified and addressed in the local adaptation planning processes. Since climate adaptive local development is part of an overall development planning, policy should also encourage trained groups of planning service providers in developing adaptation plans. Policy framework should be dynamic and flexible and offer space to learn and improve practices as and when needed, without creating bureaucratic hurdles. There should be a clear and practical mandate to local governments to lead, support, coordinate and monitor community-based adaptation practices. Budgetary allocation to adaptation planning could be one way to realize these mandates. This must be accompanied in parallel by capacity building of local governments.

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