

CARE Australia’s Climate Sensitivity Screening of our Project Portfolio



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Abstract

Development is about increasing goods and services, increasing access and opportunities, increasing freedom and choices, and sustaining these gains over time. Climate change can undermine or, in some cases, reverse the effectiveness and sustainability of development interventions. What’s more, some interventions can unintentionally leave people even more vulnerable than before to worsening droughts and floods, changing rainfall patterns, sea-level rise and other impacts of climate change. Conversely, well-designed development activities can increase people’s resilience to these impacts. CARE Australia has trialled the application of a Climate Sensitivity Check across a database of projects, with the aims of determining priorities and attempting to analyse patterns of sensitivity based on the screening exercise.

Introduction

As the consequences of climate change begin to be felt by communities across the developing world, it is becoming increasingly apparent that these changes will have implications throughout CARE's programming. A changing climate is altering the context in which we work, heightening the vulnerability of beneficiaries and threatening the effectiveness and sustainability of development outcomes.

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It is, therefore, critical to integrate, or "mainstream" thinking about climate change into development strategies, plans and programmes. This is especially true when pursuing goals that are most likely to be affected by the impacts of climate change, such as greater access to safe drinking water, healthy ecosystems or food security. There is therefore a critical need for CARE to better understand the implications of climate change for our programming as a whole. With this need in mind, CARE Australia has trialled the application of a Climate Sensitivity Check across a database of projects, with the aims of determining priorities and attempting to analyse patterns of sensitivity based on the screening exercise.

Climate sensitivity of development projects

Climate sensitivity varies between projects. Those focused on food security or water resource management for example, are likely to display higher sensitivity; likewise, projects located in flood-prone areas or in regions subject to tropical storms are more exposed to the impacts of climate change. The Climate Sensitivity Check was devised as a tool to assess the degree to which particular projects are 'climate sensitive' so as to show project developers whether integrating climate change into the project is a priority. Aimed at practitioners, the Climate Sensitivity Check is the first step in CARE's Toolkit for Integrating Climate Change into Development Projects, which goes on to provide practical assistance for adapting the project's analysis, design, implementation and knowledge management systems to include the challenges of climate change.

Climate Sensitivity is assessed by considering three project parameters:

1. **Geographic location:** whether the project will be implemented in an area that is highly exposed to the impacts of climate change, such as flood or drought prone regions, or in coastal areas.
2. **Project activities:** whether the project activities are sensitive to climate change. The outcomes of projects focused on natural resource management or agriculture for example are particularly affected by climate.

3. **Project beneficiaries:** the extent to which the project's target groups are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Natural resource dependent communities, landless people and marginalised groups are likely to display high levels of vulnerability.

The Climate Sensitivity Check was designed to be applied at the outset of project initiation, and these general guidelines should be supplemented and verified by field-based analysis in the initial stages of project development.

Application of the Climate Sensitivity Check

Although devised as a preliminary assessment tool for judging the climate sensitivity of individual projects, the Climate Sensitivity Check holds the potential for a wider application. In line with our commitment to progressively integrate climate change throughout our programming with a priority focus on those projects that are highly climate sensitive, CARE Australia undertook a trial application of the test across a database of our projects at a particular point in time.

The tool was applied to a database of 500 projects across 9 countries, which was compiled for this purpose. Some longer-term projects were composed of a number of smaller projects, which were assessed individually. Based on the information in the database, each project was given a score of 2, 1 or 0, indicating high, medium or low sensitivity for each of the three parameters: exposure of location, sensitivity of project activities and vulnerability of beneficiaries. These three scores were summed to determine the overall sensitivity of each project, which were then classified as high, medium or low sensitivity.

The exercise was based on the information contained in the summary project information and so was necessarily limited by the level of detail provided. The exposure of each location was determined by a review of third party literature from international, regional and national sources, and again was limited by the level of detail that was available for the location.

Results of the portfolio screening

Scoring and classifying projects into varying levels of sensitivity meant that particularly sensitive projects could be identified as a priority and that overall levels and patterns of sensitivity across the sample of projects could be better understood.

The case that climate sensitivity must be taken seriously across CARE's programming is strongly supported by the results of this exercise. Of the projects assessed, almost half (47%) were judged to be climate sensitive, with 13% displaying high sensitivity. Project activities and project locations displayed similar levels of sensitivity: 40% of project activities were judged to be sensitive to climate change, with half of these, predominantly activities centred on food security or livelihoods, assessed as highly sensitive. Almost 40% of the projects were located in areas considered to be sensitive to the impacts of climate change. A higher proportion of the projects (60%) targeted beneficiaries judged to be vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, a result that was perhaps to be expected given CARE's focus on the poorest and most vulnerable across our programming portfolio.

Climate sensitivity is an issue for projects in all the countries to which the tool was applied. In most countries, at least half of the projects were judged to be climate sensitive; in Myanmar and Laos, the

rates were even higher, with over 60% of projects displaying medium or high sensitivity. A concentration of projects in the highly exposed Ayeyarwady region of Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis particularly affected the results in this country.

The most sensitive projects displayed high levels of sensitivity across all of the three parameters. Particularly sensitive projects included those focused on agricultural livelihoods and food security. A group of projects working with communities of ex-opium growers in the remote Ko Khang region of Myanmar provide a good example of such high sensitivity. With a dual focus on food security and livelihood reconstruction, project activities focused on crop diversification and production techniques and were considered highly sensitive to climate change. Projects which included the construction of physical infrastructure, particularly water and sanitation systems were also represented amongst the most sensitive projects. Again in Myanmar, a water and sanitation focused project in Southern Chin State which involved water resource management and water supply construction was assessed as highly sensitive. Similarly, a permaculture project in Jordan, assessed as highly sensitive, focused on the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and water conservation techniques.

Outcomes from the project screening

As a tool for identifying the most sensitive projects, the Climate Sensitivity Check proved useful in its current form. The exercise raised awareness of the need to consider integrating climate change adaptation and further it tested the application of the Check itself in a wide range of projects. CARE Australia has since set a policy position to “Work to integrate climate change adaptation in our programming, aligned to our quality and impact approaches and systems”, and has started to prioritise high sensitivity projects for this attention.

More specifically in a subsequent visit to consider climate change capacity and integration, the project Reduced Poverty and Sustainable Agriculture through Permaculture Project (REAP) in Jordan was found to combine activities that are already tackling existing vulnerabilities around food and water insecurity which are likely to continue to be exacerbated under the climate projections discussed in the workshop. Based on the knowledge and experience gained through the implementation of the REAP project, CARE International in Jordan is in a strong position to build community based adaptation programming and has built practical expertise in integrated and holistic approaches to household resilience. This was in contrast to the five year project “Livelihood Security and Civil Society strengthening in the occupied Palestinian territory, TATWEER-Progress”, which was visited at the same time. A review of the specific project activities using CRiSTAL¹ found that whilst the project ranked very highly in climate sensitivity the project activities did not reflect this. On the basis of the detailed analysis done recommendations were made for modifications which are being included in immediate and medium term plans, which will also draw from the experiences in Jordan.

¹ The Community-based Risk Screening Tool – Adaptation and Livelihoods (CRiSTAL) is designed to help project planners and managers integrate climate change adaptation and risk reduction into community-level projects.
<http://www.iisd.org/cristaltool/>

It should be acknowledged that the Climate Sensitivity Check is always going to be applied within the organisational context. An exercise such as this will determine levels of climate sensitivity, but other factors will influence the priority given to integrating climate change into ongoing projects particularly in a time and resource poor environment. Whether a project is at design or nearing completion, whether it is a short medium or long term project and the scale of the project (budget and number of beneficiaries) will be additional determinants the attention given to integration. Priority and resource allocation for climate change integration will also be determined by strategic organisational priorities. For example places where CARE is planning to increase its investment in future would be of higher priority than those we might be withdrawing from. Vanuatu, for example is a strategic priority for CARE Australia which makes integration of climate change into our work there a high priority.

Challenges and limitations

The use of the Climate Sensitivity Check was not without challenges and limitations. Firstly, this exercise revealed the difficulty in maintaining consistency of judgements across a large number of projects. If the tool is to be used as a basis for portfolio screening for patterns of sensitivity, scoring must be consistently applied. The tool was devised for the assessment of individual projects in their local context within the Integration Toolkit and so this is an understandable limitation. For individual projects it is very effective as it allows project managers to complete a quick analysis to decide how much of a priority further application of the toolkit is. However in its current form because the Climate Sensitivity Check lacks agreed upon, quantified criteria upon which to base judgements there are limitations as to its use for comparing projects.

Another challenge concerned the level of detail available about individual projects and their context. This is a particular issue when assessing the extent to which project locations are sensitive to climate change. Even within one locality exposure may vary greatly; for example in the case of flood exposure physical characteristics such as elevation and housing structure contribute. As the Check was designed as a first step in integrating climate change, it is important that further analysis of exposure to specific climate hazards by specific people and groups would be undertaken in project analysis and design. CARE's Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis Handbook provides detailed guidance on understanding local issues, however the intention here is to identify priority locations of concern based on secondary and existing literature.

Whilst the Check itself was effective and the Integration Toolkit that supports project developers to act on the results of the Check at present there are several organisational challenges to address in the effective use of this important Check. CARE is moving from a prime focus on individual projects towards a broader program-based approach. This is a gradual process with different Country Offices at different stages in the process. The application of the Check in that context needs to be considered, however this should be done within the context of a wider review of the Integration Toolkit to take the program approach into account. Further, and perhaps more urgent concern is to ensure a system is in place to both trigger the use of the Toolkit itself and by association the Check as the first step. At present the use of the check relies on individuals taking the initiative and that there is adequate technical support available. Existing project management systems should be modified to include the Check within it and subsequent support be made available to those projects which are identified as both climate sensitive and an organisational priority.

Methodological learning

The Climate Sensitivity Check undoubtedly has potential for enhancing our view of the 'big picture'; the analysis of sensitivity across CARE's projects helps us to better determine climate change priorities and overall strategy. From this exercise a number of lessons and recommendations emerged for wider application:

1. More detailed elaboration of the criteria upon which projects are assessed will help to improve consistency of judgements. Providing specific examples and case studies, along with guidance on applying the test across a portfolio as opposed to individual projects will improve its utility and reliability for this purpose.
2. More information about both the projects themselves and the project context is necessary to ensure that scoring is appropriate. In particular, improved use of available data on the climate change context for each country will help to better determine the exposure of project locations.
3. The Climate Sensitivity Check is a vital first step in the process of determining priorities for intervention and resource allocation. It is useful for analysing patterns of sensitivity providing a short list of highly sensitive projects. However, the wider context of programming and strategic priorities remains important, and it is within this context that the results of the Climate Sensitivity Check must be considered.
4. There needs to be organisational integration of the Climate Sensitivity Check to ensure that its use is applied within a wider organisational system and that there is sufficient appropriate technical support for its use and the implementation of the results of the Check.