

Civil Society and the Integration of Climate Change Risks into Planning and Policy-making



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Climate change vulnerability is determined not only by exposure to climate events, but also by social or institutional assets within a determined society. This paper will present some roles that can be played by civil society organizations to promote climate change integration into planning and policy-making processes. The examples given are all from Peru.

In an inequitable scenario, the most vulnerable to climate change are not those most responsible for its causes, access to climate information at the local level is absent or nonexistent, and livelihoods are highly dependent on climate conditions. In such situations, one of the main roles of civil society, in order to achieve the incorporation of long-term climate risks, is the promotion of greater equity in power relations between the State and the population, both at the national and local level. This can be accomplished through accountability processes that ensure greater and better interaction, not only with the population, but with government entities.

The following text explores: the functions that should be carried out by CBOs to ensure citizen engagement in achieving the incorporation of climate risks; the role of disaster risk reduction in climate adaptation strategies; and the conditions that should be provided by the government for including CBOs in decision making regarding climate change adaptation.

Incorporation of long-term climate risks in decision making and citizen engagement

Improving access to climate information

The incorporation of climate risks into decision making will be the result of a participatory and accountability process that begins with access to the information that enables a timely identification of what climate risks should be taken into account. Information at national level is not sufficient for decision making. Information at the local level is necessary, especially when bearing in mind that climate change impacts are differentiated even between communities, groups and individuals.

Access to information about climate projections at local levels (national and sub-national) is particularly difficult in developing countries. Andean countries such as Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador face significant obstacles due to the fact that the information recorded by the few existing meteorological stations often cannot be extrapolated at the local level due to different altitudes and ecosystems.

Moreover, access and capacities to read satellite images are also limited. When climate information exists, and is robust, it is usually conveyed in a language that is hard for stakeholders to understand, and in consequence it is not used in decision making. This is one role that might be played by civil society organizations, creating a bridge between research institutions and the population, and encouraging a more direct dialogue between the two, so that meteorological services become aware of the most efficient way to present their information, and stakeholders are able to make use of it.

Box 1: Meteorological Information in Peru

In Peru, there is wide disparity of meteorological information. In the province of San Ignacio in Cajamarca, in an area of 4990.30 km¹, at altitudes between 460 and 3800 m.a.s.l., there is a single meteorological station in operation, located in the capital city. On the other hand, Puno region has 42 meteorological stations, the highest number of meteorological stations in the country. However, agricultural producers of the Puno provinces of Huanané and Moho (also having one station in each province) have no access to — and, therefore, do not use — the information provided by the National Meteorology and Hydrology Service (SENAMHI, by its Spanish acronym).

However, not only climate information is needed to ensure long-term incorporation of climate risks. Climate change adaptation consists of the adjustment of human or natural systems to climate stimuli or their effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. And, taking into account that these stimuli will change over time (since there is no historical precedent), civil society will also have to prioritize the strengthening of decentralized institutions at local levels to ensure that these adapt to present and future changes, and that such adjustments occur in a continuous basis.

Strengthening the voice of the most vulnerable groups

Inequity levels and corruption in developing countries tend to tilt policy balance toward groups with greater lobbying power. Climate policy is no exception. From global to local level, the race to be considered most vulnerable to climate change² is caused by pressing needs - estimated by UNDP at up to US\$ 86 billion per year as of 2015 - and scarce financial resources. Therefore, economic activities that involve the greatest potential for GDP contribution are likely to be prioritized, while low-scale activities, “invisible” for national accounts, will be left aside. Groups that live near the poverty line face the risk of income variations due to climate fluctuations and, given their existing capabilities, are more exposed to falling under the poverty line than those with greater access to diverse resources and institutional networks (Agrawal 2010). Therefore, giving voice to these groups and ensuring acknowledgment of their high vulnerability in public policy, through policy advocacy, is another role that might be played by civil society organizations.

Box 2: The Central Bank Reserve of Peru

The Central Bank Reserve of Peru commissioned a study entitled “Climate change and its effects on Peru” (2009) which identifies agriculture and fishing as the activities most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Vulnerability analysis was performed taking into account regions where over 20% of GDP comes from the agriculture and fishing sectors, which depend on their links with foreign markets. Thus, the areas considered vulnerable were those where export agriculture prevailed, leaving aside thousands of small producers in the Peruvian highlands, whose links with foreign markets are minimal, and who make no significant contributions to GDP.

Legitimacy and accountability to attain citizen engagement

Citizen engagement is related to inclusion in decision building and making. Civil society organizations can promote this engagement provided that they are considered legitimate actors. For this purpose, it is necessary to have an inclusive, participatory and transparent relationship with the population on behalf of which diverse resources are managed, despite the fact that accountability processes for this type of institutions is not mandatory (Cano, 2010).

One of the most effective ways of engagement is community monitoring at the local level. Promoting the recognition of citizens’ rights and demanding compliance with, and follow-up of, progress against established commitments is also key to prevent elites from taking over or distributing unequally available adaptation resources. Through this community monitoring, civil society organizations must also promote coordination of local strategies with mechanisms established at the national level (Agrawal 2009).

Box 3: Accountability and adaptation to climate change – PRAA in Cuzco, Peru

The Adaptation to Impacts of the Accelerated Glacier Retreat in the Tropical Andes Project, also known as PRAA, is a multi-stakeholder project. Participants include CARE Peru, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Scotiabank, the District Municipality of Santa Teresa, the General Secretariat of the Andean Community (SGCAN), the Global Environment Facility (GEF-WB) and the Regional Government of Cuzco. In Santa Teresa, the implementation is carried out in the micro-basins that depend on the Salkantay and Sacsara glaciers, which are in accelerated retreat.

As part of its intervention principles, accountability has been promoted through: participation in community management plan meetings, where progress in the project’s activities is presented in a quarterly basis; a monitoring committee for compliance with the commitments of each of the actors, with the participation of the Community Management Committee directors, and five residents in each micro-basin; and complaints, claims and suggestion management through a free telephone line, e-mail, and complaint and claim registration.

These spaces have not only encouraged the active participation of community members, but have also strengthened relationships with the District Municipality, both among civil society institutions and the general population. Encouraging feedback has allowed the project to understand and verify if it is achieving the necessary changes and goals.

Disaster risk management as part of climate change adaptation

Disaster risk reduction is, without a doubt, one of the key strategies within community-based adaptation, particularly when taking into account that climate change makes extreme weather events more intense or frequent. It is “the entry point

for communities suffering from severe shocks as a result of short-term climate variability” (Christian Aid, 2009).

In line with this, it is necessary to choose between complex participatory processes with high time consumption and less inclusive processes that guarantee a rapid response in case of disasters. However, this option does not exist if responses are intended to last over time and undergo development from coping to adaptation strategies.

In situations where people have no or poor access to climate forecast information and where decentralization processes have insufficient autonomy or capabilities, empowerment of stakeholders through direct and effective participation is key to establishing citizen monitoring systems that will permit early risk warning, taking into account available traditional and scientific knowledge.

Additionally, CSOs have a long history of support and joint work with governments in disaster response, including those caused by climate events, ranging from fund raising from international cooperation agencies to technical assistance and development of pilot measures for scaling-up. The experience of the relationship between CSOs and governments is a resource that should be capitalized on as part of climate change adaptation.

Facilities for the effective involvement of CSOs in planning processes

Due to their closeness to the population, and given their technical and resource mobilization capability, CSOs have been involved in local planning processes at local levels, using diverse citizen participation processes - especially participatory

Box 4: Spaces for dialogue on climate change between government and CSOs: National Commission on Climate Change in Peru

Peru's National Commission on Climate Change is comprised of representatives of all ministries and also includes representatives from environmental NGOs, workers' organizations, the public sector and universities. In addition, seven technical groups have been formed: adaptation; REDD; mitigation and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM); research and technology; financing; international negotiations, and education and communication. They are working on updating plans and strategies. These technical groups support the Ministry of Environment through the review of reports and consultancies related to climate change matters.

budgets. However, coordination bodies at national level are still limited, particularly regarding environmental matters.

The most important topics on which CSOs' field experience might be maximized at national level are the development of vulnerability analysis, multi-stakeholder coordination, and relevant climate information management.

To expand these multi-stakeholder coordination spaces, it is essential that national governments open up to address a diversity of actors (Agrawal 2009), as well as to facilitate and scale up the lessons learned from relationships at a decentralized level. It is also necessary that governments are more open toward qualitative research results, in order to incorporate this vision for public policy making, giving value to the results, especially in scenarios where hard data is scarce. This openness must come with accountability and transparency processes as a measure of the government's work quality and responsibility.

Conclusions

The following are among the most significant functions that might be performed by civil society organizations for including climate change risks in policy decision making:

1. Improving the population's access to climate information. CSOs might act as bridge between research institutions and the population, leading to a more direct dialogue between both parties.
2. Strengthening the voice of the most vulnerable groups. CSOs must ensure acknowledgment of the high vulnerability of these groups in public policy, through advocacy processes.
3. Promoting accountability through example: as a strategy to ensure quality and transparency for diverse actors' participation.
4. Promoting a participatory and inclusive disaster risk reduction approach.
5. Actively participating in inter-institutional coordination spaces at local and national levels.

Notes

¹Defining climate trends takes at least 30 years of continuous meteorological information recording.

²See CAN International's ECO 3 COP16/CMP Cancun.

Photo page 1 by Ana Castañeda

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