



Adaptation Learning Highways: Working with Communities to Adapt to Climate Change

Bridging the gap between communities, scientists and policy makers: A strategic process for making local governance more responsive to community needs

Planning adaptations that are responsive to community needs

While governments discuss how to respond to climate change, rural communities are compelled to act immediately to secure their livelihoods. At present, few structured processes exist for communities to talk to scientists and policy makers about climate change adaptation. As a result planned adaptation processes are not sufficiently responsive to community needs and fail to consider or support spontaneous community adaptation measures already in place. An inclusive planning process is needed – one that incorporates learning from existing community adaptation measures and addresses community concerns.

Adaptation Learning Highways is a strategic process that fosters information and knowledge exchange between communities, scientist, and policy makers to inform the decision-making process and make it more inclusive. By basing planned adaptation on autonomous community adaption it is hoped that planned adaptation will be more effective, targeted, and responsive to community needs. To do so, the

Adaptation Learning Highways initiative engages communities in a number of fora at different stages, namely: community-to-community knowledge exchange fora (C2C KEF); community-scientists interface fora (CSIF); forum for interaction and exchange with policy makers (FIP); and state/regional consultation workshop on adaptive strategies.

Community-to-community knowledge exchange fora (C2C KEF)

The first stage in the Adaptation Learning Highways is the establishment of community-to-community knowledge exchange fora (C2C KEF). C2C KEFs brings community members from villages or village clusters together in focus group discussions to share what they are doing to adapt to climate change. These exchanges are facilitated by a mentor or facilitator and are conducted in the presence of representatives from technical agencies (research institutions and line departments) who are involved as observers, participating only when their expert opinion is sought. Discussions are centred around community responses to stresses brought about by change and the impact



of such change on household livelihood security. Community members are encouraged to share their concerns and facilitators draw out coping and adaptation mechanisms. Ideally, each focus group discussion focuses on a theme, which means that exchanges need to be held on multiple occasions.

The discussion should result in a participatory verification, assessment, and peer evaluation of the reported coping and adaptation mechanisms. As part of this assessment, the strengths and weaknesses of promising adaptation measures are discussed to determine the potential for upscaling, particularly through community-led initiatives and cross-community exchange. The potential for upscaling is discussed to identify gaps in relation to supportive services and determine the help required from different agencies at the local and higher levels. At this stage the role of the expert observer becomes proactive. The C2C KEFs should help to identify how local bodies, line agencies, the local administration and research institutes can be more responsive to the needs of the community. The proceedings of the C2C KEFs are documented audio-visually by a process documenter, preferably from the media or with a strong understanding of media functioning, for a wider dissemination and use at subsequent fora.

Stage 2: Community-scientists interface fora

The main objective of the community-scientists interface fora (CSIF) is to stimulate dialogue and exchange between community members and scientists on the coping and adaptive mechanisms documented during the C2C KEF and to initiate a participatory assessment of such adaptive mechanisms. The CSIF is also a catalyst for changing scientists' perception of community innovation and fosters appreciation and respect for community-based knowledge and practices.

The CSIF consists of community representatives, particularly knowledge innovators (developers of promising adaptation mechanisms) and key informants identified during the C2C KEFs; representatives of technical line departments who participated in the C2C KEFs; members of the scientific community; and representatives of civil society organisations. CSIFs are conducted by experienced facilitators to ensure that the exchanges between community members and scientists take place on an equal footing, with each group respecting the other's viewpoint. At no stage should scientists be allowed to act in a 'superior' way of become dismissive of community innovations.

Promising adaptive mechanisms identified during the C2C KEFs are introduced at this stage for discussion and evaluation. Community members and scientists are both encouraged to express their viewpoints to ensure an objective assessment of each adaptive mechanism. Adaptive mechanisms are then selected for subsequent scientific validation, which is conducted 'on-farm' rather than on experimental plots in research stations. Finally, a process of participatory assessment and monitoring is agreed upon and a way of sharing results established, to facilitate wider dissemination and upscaling.

Stage 3: Forum for interaction and exchange with policy makers

The third stage in the Adaptation Learning Highway is the establishment of a mechanism for regular interaction and exchange with policy makers at the local or district level. The forum for interaction and exchange with policy makers (FIP) is initiated by the implementers of the Adaptation Learning Highway or a local development partner in conjunction with the local administration. It can be of strategic use to work with the government climate change adaptation planning





process structure at the local level or to partner with such structures at the higher level.

The FIP involves key knowledge innovators, representatives from civil society, and members of the scientific/technical community, and is facilitated by senior members of the partnering project. Activities at this stage involve reporting the results of the C2C KEF and CSIF including sharing promising adaptation mechanisms and innovations and highlighting issues, concerns, and gaps in support systems raised during these exchanges. The objective of the FIP is to identify ways in which supportive services can be made more responsive to community needs and to identify existing programmes and institutional mechanisms designed to address such concerns, but that need to be more proactive and responsive. Areas that require action on the part of higher authorities to make delivery mechanisms more effective are identified during this stage.

Stage 4: State/regional consultation workshop on adaptive strategies

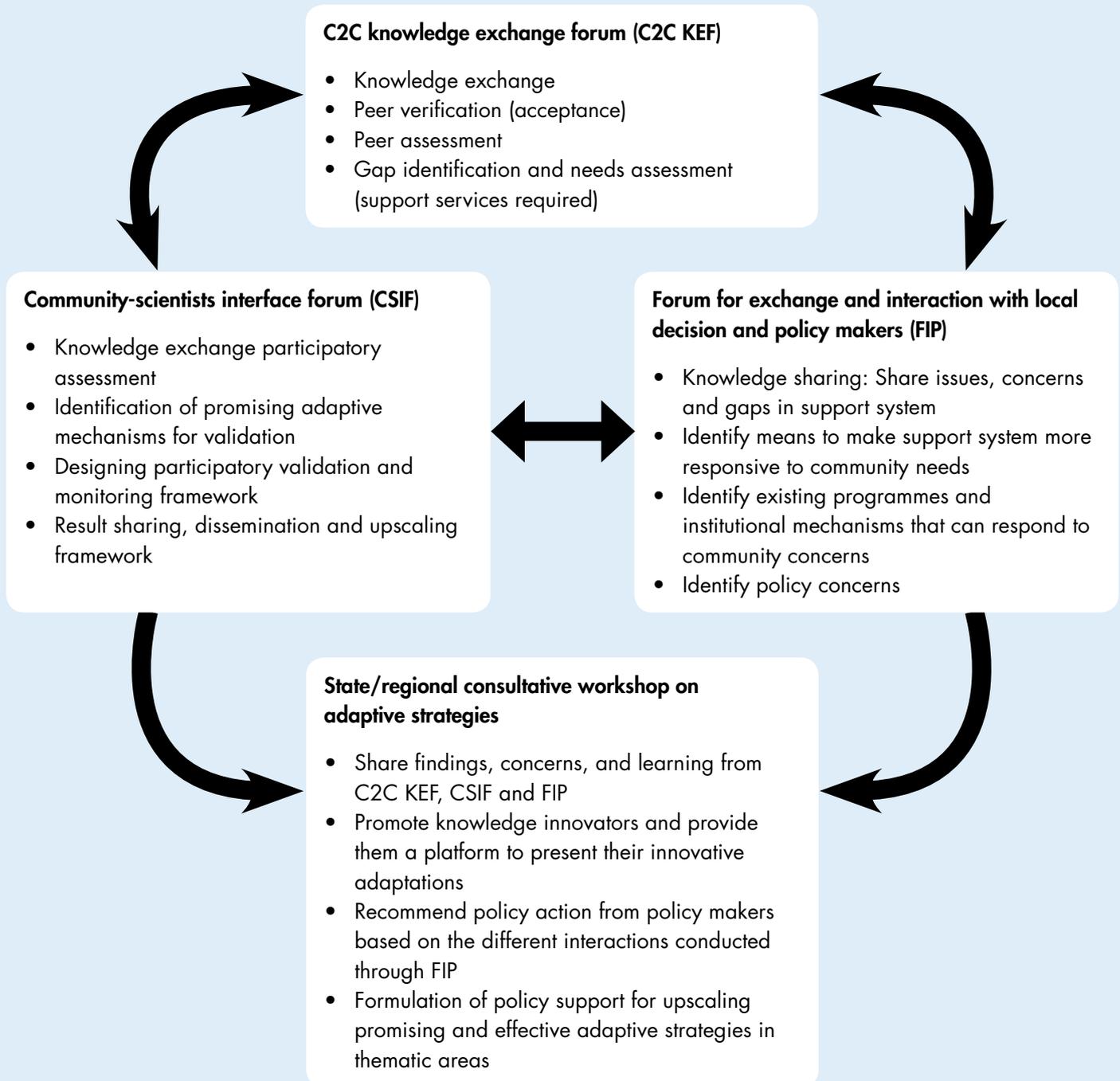
The fourth and final stage of the Adaptation Learning Highway is the state/regional level consultation workshop, which brings together knowledge innovators, members of the scientific and technical community, representatives of local administration, and line departments, as well as the facilitating project partners. The objectives are multiple, but primarily to: share the findings and lessons from all fora to promote knowledge innovators and provide them with a platform to present their innovative adaptation mechanisms; present the validation assessments conducted by scientists; request policy action from policy makers; and advocate for policy support for upscaling promising and effective adaptive strategies and identifying policy action necessary to make local delivery mechanisms more effective.

The workshop should be organised by the facilitating project partner in conjunction with the state climate change adaptation authority. At this stage, the findings from the C2C KEFs, CSIFs, and FIP are presented together with the concerns raised at each forum for discussion and to come up with solutions. The consultation workshop's primary objective is to set in motion a process that results in the formulation of adaptation strategies to respond to stress resulting from change. The consultation should highlight promising adaptation strategies developed autonomously, present the results of peer assessment and scientific validation, and raise any concerns in regard to the upscaling of such mechanisms. The workshop should also identify mechanisms required to translate community based adaptation mechanisms into formal planned adaptation strategies. Overall, the workshop is designed to contribute to policy refinement and formulation that supports building upon autonomous adaptation that makes planned adaptation more responsive.

The Adaptation Learning Highway has been initiated in India and Nepal through AdaptHimal partners – Meghalaya Livelihood Improvement Project, North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project, and Uttarakhand Livelihood Improvement Project (in India) and the Western Upland Poverty Alleviation Project and Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Promotion Project (in Nepal). The Adaptation Learning Highway has been facilitated by ECARDS in Nepal and Uttarakhand Organic Commodities Board in Uttarakhand, India. The findings from the Adaptation Learning Highway in India have contributed to the shaping of the Uttarakhand State Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation.



Adaptation Learning Highway Process



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