

A Participatory Approach to Climate Risk Management: Lessons from practice

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Climate risk management is the systematic approach and practice of considering climate-related trends and events in development decision-making to minimize potential harm or losses. Climate change is altering the nature of climate risk, increasing uncertainty and forcing us to re-evaluate conventional CRM practices. Policy and decision makers have to plan and in a context of growing uncertainties due to climate and non-climatic factors. They need to make informed trade-offs with imperfect information. There is a growing demand and need to identify major climate risks for a specific country or region, sector, ecosystem; how those risks may evolve in the future due to climate change and other socio-economic and environmental changes (land use, population growth, etc.); and what may be potential solutions that reduce vulnerability to climate risk and secure development objectives in the short and long term. Our paper presents a participatory and integrative process to assess climate risks and prioritize climate risk management options. The process was applied in different sectors, including agriculture, water and health, and at both national and sub-national scales in four Latin American and Caribbean countries, in close collaboration with national governments and other stakeholders. It consists of six generic methodological steps that can be applied to different sectors scales. It emphasizes the importance of the development context and existing capacities; the integration of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction; the combination of top-down and bottom-up methods; strong engagement and participation of stakeholders; and the need to focus the scope of the analysis on a specific development issue. A range of lessons learnt from the design and implementation of the approach are also presented in the paper: 1) climate risk management is an inherently political process, which requires clarity on the scope and focus of studies and careful in-country engagement, resource allocations among partners and communication of results; 2) thorough and continuous stakeholder engagement and coordination are critical for outputs quality and policy uptake, but require substantial financial resources and time; 3) the process should yield concrete and actionable recommendations regarding climate risk management actions, but these may not appear as novel as some stakeholders may expect; 4) climate risk assessments are good opportunities for building local awareness and capacity; 5) a combination of different research methods should be selected based on the specific context – in other words, there is no one size fits all; 6) mainstreaming gender is critical to reflect differences in vulnerabilities and capacities, but to do so properly requires dedicated resources; and 7) communication and outreach of results should be planned in advance and seen as a continuous task. While these lessons provide a useful starting point for future climate risk assessments, we also identified a number of areas where the future processes could be significantly improved. These include the thorough consideration of gender issues; the involvement of private sector actors; the identification of more transformational changes that may be necessary in certain cases; thorough linkages of different scales; and the assessment of costs and benefits of different climate risk management options.