

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A Discussion Note : December 2010





ABBREVIATIONS

APRC	Asia-Pacific Regional Centre	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CC	Climate Change	PDR	People's Democratic Republic
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism	PEM	Public expenditure management
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	PFM	Public financial management
DDC	District Development Committee (Nepal)	REDD	Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
DMP	Disaster Management Plan	ROAP	Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific
GHG	Greenhouse Gas	UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiative	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IGFT	Inter-governmental financial transfer	UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ISD	Infrastructure and service delivery	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
LDC	Least developed country	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
LG	Local government	UP	Union Parishad (Bangladesh)
LLG	Local level government (Papua New Guinea)	VDC	Village Development Committee (Nepal)
MLD	Ministry of Local Development (Nepal)		
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action		

Cover photo: Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia, February 2010. Courtesy of Nick Beresnev.

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Purpose and background

This Discussion Note serves three purposes:

1. To provide national and local policy-makers, as well as development partners, with an introduction to ways in which local government systems and institutions can and do interface with climate change (CC) issues.
2. To outline ways forward that may improve the capacity and ability of local governments (LGs) to address CC and leverage their comparative advantage in doing so.
3. To suggest ways for specialist CC institutions and agencies to incorporate LG issues into their work and adjust their framework, strategy, and approach to strengthen CC work at the sub-national level. The Note focuses primarily on LGs in developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

The Note tries to identify and articulate in practical terms what has (or has not) been done by LGs in addressing CC, and what can be done to improve outcomes from this interface. The overall conclusion is that while there is much talk about the role of LGs in addressing CC, there is little hard evidence that CC figures prominently on the routine agenda of most LGs in the developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region. There are specific projects and programmes, funded by donors and governments, which try to address CC at the local level, and which sometimes (but not always) work through LGs. If it is assumed that LGs do indeed have a potentially important role to play in addressing CC, then a good deal more needs to be done to realise this potential. The Note tries to understand why LGs appear to be relatively inactive on CC, and provides some entry points and approaches that might contribute towards greater local government involvement.

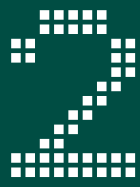
There is a burgeoning literature on CC that examines its interface with local government and local governance¹. Much of it focuses on local **assessments** of the outcomes and risks associated with CC, but pays little attention to what can or might be done by LGs to address such issues, including potential benefits. This Note tries to redress this imbalance by taking a closer look at the instruments available to LGs and how they can be used in dealing with CC².

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1 See ICLEI (2009), ICLEI Oceania (2008), Institute of Development Studies (2008), OECD (2009), World Bank (2009).

2 Admittedly, there **are** a number of important initiatives that promote LG approaches and move beyond assessment. These include the World Bank's Climate Resilient Cities Initiative and UNDP/UNEP's Territorial Approach to Climate Change. More examples are provided in the Annex.

Winter (the core author of the Note). The final version of the Note benefited from substantive inputs to various drafts by a number of individuals, including Tashi Dorji (UNDP Bhutan) and Gopi Krishna Khanal (Ministry of Local Development, Nepal). We would like to thank Jesse Ribot (University of Illinois) and Neil Webster (UNDP Nepal) for their comprehensive peer review. David Galipeau, Sawitree Limvongsakul and Nicholas Rosellini of UNDP APRC Knowledge Resource Committee kindly provided additional comments and final endorsement. We would also like to acknowledge the administrative assistance of Kullawan Arphasrirat, Issarapan Chaiyato, Panida Charotok and Pattanoot Pongpanit of UNDP APRC.



Defining climate change and local governance

This Note has been drawn up from both local governance and CC perspectives, and starts by defining a number of basic concepts.

2.1 Defining climate change

“Climate change” refers to alterations of the earth’s atmosphere leading to changes in the climate system, such as climate warming and more frequent and intense extreme weather events. There is now a consensus that CC is taking place, as is clear from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and a rise in global mean sea levels. It is also now generally accepted that human activities – in the form of emissions of increased quantities of greenhouse gases (GHGs) – have played and continue to play a significant role in CC.

The consequences of climate change are numerous – changes in precipitation (rainfall, snow, etc.), more frequent and severe flooding, rises in temperature and their effects, rising sea levels (and, as a consequence, salinisation), and more intense and prolonged droughts. These outcomes directly affect people (in particular, the poorest), making livelihoods and living conditions more vulnerable.

CC issues have traditionally been broken into two basic categories – those related to mitigation and those related to adaptation. Mitigation refers to efforts to reduce or stabilise GHG emissions; adaptation is about coping and dealing with the consequences of CC. However, there is increasing recognition that there is a continuum between these two areas of work, and that more integrated approaches are needed. The financing opportunities created by carbon markets, if instituted properly at national and sub-national levels, could reduce local vulnerabilities.

It is also important to understand that there is a great deal that is **not** known about CC and its (local) consequences – for example, how much sea levels will rise, how much rainfall patterns will be affected, and how such changes will affect livelihoods and the natural systems that sustain these livelihoods. Climate projections and scenarios are based on hypotheses (“emissions scenarios”), and are therefore uncertain. Therefore, addressing climate change requires an ability to take into account a range of possible futures.

In the water sector, for example, this could mean encouraging service providers to engage in portfolio planning – which would contain a number of parallel measures that can be ramped up or down according to future cost effectiveness. Such a portfolio might include a mix of building more storage, rainwater harvesting, desalination, use of recycled water, and more effectively matching water use to quality. Each of these approaches could also include measures to increase the efficiency of related energy use (ICLEI 2009a).

2.2 Defining “local governance” and “local governments”

“Local governance” refers to the ways in which local level decision-making is carried out. The normative term “good local governance” implies that decision-making in the arena of local public affairs is, to varying degrees, subject to the scrutiny and oversight of citizens, open and transparent, rule-bound, and participatory. Local governments, in that sense, are one dimension (albeit an important one) of local governance as a whole.

“Local governments” are formal institutions, mandated to deliver a variety of public goods³ and services at the local level. They constitute, in a sense, the local state. As local level service delivery units, LGs are largely predicated on the principle of subsidiarity, which stipulates that government functions should be assigned to the lowest level of government that is capable of efficiently undertaking this function. In essence, if a small LG can efficiently provide pre-school services, then (according to the subsidiarity principle) it should be assigned that responsibility. This principle generally results in a situation where, as far as possible, the area where the benefits of a public good or service are felt coincides with the jurisdictional boundaries at each level of government. For instance, since national defence benefits people in the national territory of a country, this expenditure function should be a national affair funded by the central government. However, since the benefits from a local park are mostly felt by local residents, the responsibility for local parks should be placed with LGs. Making judgements about what LGs should do is largely linked to considerations about economies of scale and externalities.

LGs vary considerably across a range of dimensions, including:

- Population size;
- Number of tiers in the local government system;
- Urban vs. rural;
- Mandates and functions;
- Human and financial resources;
- Linkages with customary institutions;
- The degree to which they are downwardly accountable and representative; and
- Their financial arrangements.

When discussing the role of LGs, it is crucial to take into account the characteristics of the LG in question, as they largely determine the kinds of CC issues it faces and the ways that it does or can respond. Much of the existing documentation on local government and CC issues tends to be insensitive to these differences⁴.

3 The rationale for public funding of such (theoretically) private goods as drinking water, education and curative health services is that, on one hand, they generate large positive socio-economic externalities to the community and the nation but, on the other hand, they are not adequately supplied to the poor – if supplied at all – by the market. Basic health, education, water, infrastructure and services are thus termed “merit goods” – they are private goods which society judges to be worthy of subsidising with public funds.

4 UNDP (2009), for example, does not systematically distinguish between tiers of the LG system. Much of the work on urban CC issues does not distinguish between large metropolitan cities, smaller towns and agglomerations.

In order to differentiate, this Note looks at three broad “types” of local government – rural, urban and “provincial” – in terms of their actual and potential interface with CC. These are clearly abstractions which necessarily simplify matters, but this classification brings into relief some key differences which have considerable implications for CC issues. The threefold classification is further broken down into sub-categories, based on the approximate population size of the type of local government in question. The following table provides a summary of the salient features of these LG types, along with some examples from the Asia-Pacific region.

Table 1: Three “types” of local government⁵

Type	Sub-category	Population size	Resources	Degree of political power	Examples
Rural	Small rural	< 50,000	Minimal, largely dependent on inter-governmental financial transfers (IGFTs)	Very limited	Nepal: VDCs Viet Nam: communes Bangladesh: UPs Bhutan: gewogs and dzongkhags Maldives: islands and some atolls ⁶ Papua New Guinea: local level governments (LLGs)
	Larger rural	> 50,000	Moderate, largely dependent on IGFTs	Limited	Nepal: some DDCs Bangladesh: upazilas Lao PDR: most districts Solomon Islands: provinces Timor-Leste: proposed municipalities Papua New Guinea: provinces
Urban	Small urban	< 50,000	Moderate, largely dependent on	Limited	Nepal: most municipalities Fiji: cities

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