

Capacity Building for Climate Change: Lessons from Other Regimes

Not all countries have equal capacity to adapt to climate change. As countries with the least capacity are hit first and hardest by impacts, it is critical that the Paris Agreement's capacity building provisions are implemented successfully. Climate leaders must learn from existing work under other international regimes to ensure the effectiveness of their programs. This includes support for long-term capacity building, with recipient countries taking ownership of the work.

Policy Pointers

- International and national support through institutions and financing is critical for successful capacity building.
- Capacity building must be designed to be long-term and self-sustaining.
- National ownership by recipient countries of capacity building efforts is key to ensuring their success.
- Education, training, and awareness-building on human rights is central to sustaining long-term capacity building.

Although the challenge of climate change is universal, the capacity to adapt to it and cope with its impacts is not. Many of the world's developing countries have extremely limited scope to plan and implement adequate climate policies and actions. So, capacity building, as the enabler for implementing responses to climate change, takes on central importance. This is especially true for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are hit first and hardest by climate change, but have the least capacity to adapt.

Capacity building is not a new issue, and is certainly not unique to climate change. In fact, five regime types have been identified that have addressed capacity building:

1. Development
2. Trade and regional economic integration
3. Environment and natural resources protection
4. International human rights
5. Security, cooperation and humanitarian affairs

To better understand the similarities and differences in capacity building under these regimes, we assessed approaches by the World Trade Organization, Regional Seas Programme, and Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and under programs for human rights and disaster risk reduction.

We gathered data from development agency reports on capacity building activities and analyzed specific characteristics. These included: the type of capacity building undertaken; the focus of the activities; who was leading them; who was funding them; whether they were foreign-consultancy driven; whether they were demand- or supply-driven; the extent to which recipient countries owned activities; and whether a system for continued capacity building was left behind in recipient countries once the work had concluded.

We found that there are numerous similarities, and very few differences, in the approaches these regimes take to capacity building. However, this does not speak to the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of these efforts

across programs. The primary findings are highlighted below:

- Institutional development and strengthening is a focus of all regimes, and weakness in this area can undermine regime effectiveness.
- Developing human resources through education, training, and research is key to building national capacity.
- Strong financial support for capacity building can increase member nations' compliance to regime provisions.
- National ownership of capacity building efforts is key to their sustainability.
- Networking, partnerships, and sharing of experiences are important contributors to effectiveness.
- Web-based tools can improve capacity building.
- External experts and consultants can inadvertently work against building a nation's in-country capacity.

The primary lesson from this analysis is that sustainable support at both the national and international levels is critical for successful capacity building. This means, most importantly, that support must be long-term. Additionally, donor and recipient countries

should work to establish common interests, with a special emphasis on the national needs and interests of the recipients.

Where countries take greater ownership of their capacity building, it has been shown to enhance long-term effectiveness. Finally, capacity building is most successful when there is education, training, and awareness-building at all levels on human rights. This should be a priority focus of national and global efforts.

Though capacity building provisions are new in climate policy under the Paris Agreement, other international regimes have set important precedents, from which lessons on best practices can be drawn. Leaders in the climate regime must now learn from this work to ensure that capacity building efforts, particularly those targeted for adaptation, are successful.

To read the full chapter on this research, look for the 2017 Adaptation Watch Report, to be released at COP23 in November 2017.

Author

Mizan R. Khan
North South University (NSU), Dhaka, Bangladesh

AdaptationWatch Partners

Adaptify (Netherlands)
Both ENDS (Netherlands)
Brown University's Climate and Development Lab (USA)
Centre d'Etudes du Développement durable, Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)
ENDA Tiers Monde (Senegal)
Grupo de Financiamiento Climático para América Latina y el Caribe (LAC Region)
International Centre for Climate Change and Development (Bangladesh)
Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (Nepal & USA)
Nur University (Bolivia)
Oxford Climate Policy (UK)
Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (Kenya)
Stockholm Environment Institute (Sweden)
Transparency International (Germany)
University of Colorado-Boulder's Environmental Studies Program (USA)



Publication and outreach support provided by the Stockholm Environment Institute.

