



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

EXPERTS' MEETING ON CLIMATE CHANGE VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT UTILITY AND UPTAKE

AFRICAN AND LATIN AMERICAN RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE (ARCC)

April 15-16, 2014; Arlington, VA

OVERVIEW

Research findings in climate change vulnerability assessments and reports need to reach decision makers if they are to have the desired impact on policy. But what can the research community do to ensure that “uptake” occurs, that research results are adopted by stakeholders and translated into action on the ground? The Experts' Meeting on Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Utility and Uptake, held April 15 – 16, 2014, tackled this question.

UPTAKE: LEARNING FROM ASSESSMENTS

Meeting participants from many different parts of the globe shared how they designed climate change vulnerability assessments to support uptake of results by decision makers. They identified key attributes of assessment results and described the methods by which uptake has been achieved. These included:

- **Credibility** – Use the best available data and integrate it with local knowledge. Acknowledge and discuss uncertainty. Focus on the specific details of vulnerability rather than general concepts and long-time horizons. Provide a shared learning process for stakeholders to discuss technical aspects—from the design of the vulnerability assessment to the results.
- **Salience** – Ensure that results are driven by stakeholder/community needs and are timely. Integrate assessments into planning processes, if possible. Develop results that provide decision makers with options. For example, in the case study from [Kenya](#), the timely release of the vulnerability assessment made it highly relevant to decision makers who needed information to help determine where and how to invest climate funds. Similarly, results from the vulnerability assessment conducted in [Uganda](#) were design to inform USAID's investments and strategic plans.
- **Legitimacy** – Ensure that all socio-economic groups impacted by the study are included in the process—as presented in the [Vietnam](#) case study. Engage stakeholders throughout the assessment process and particularly in the validation of the study results. Ensure the assessment has a common purpose for stakeholders to rally around.
- **Knowledge Brokers** – Engage local organizations and people who have relevant technical expertise and understand the local context to help make technical information, such as complex climate findings, accessible to a wider audience. Work with knowledge brokers to validate evidence-based information and enable them to become dialogue facilitators, to build trust and cooperation. For example, the Environmental Planning and Coordination Organization (EPCO) provided data and technical expertise for the assessment in Madhya Pradesh ([India](#)) that strengthened the assessment's credibility and salience.
- **Champions** – Identify effective people and organizations, including political leaders, who understand the value of the study and who are committed to becoming technical experts in the assessment results over the long-term. Champions will use assessment results and/or help communicate assessment findings to key decision

Table Discussion on Uptake of Assessment Results



makers well into the future. In a case from [El Salvador](#), the Minister of Environment championed the assessment because he understood that the results could improve national agriculture policies in the future.

- **Communications** – Use multiple communication media, from written summaries to mobile applications, to reach target audiences. Use graphics to communicate ranges of uncertainty. Use existing planning and meeting processes as forums for dissemination. Engage stakeholders around a theme (e.g., sea level rise). Communicate results in terms of people and risks of inaction. Seek the right balance between scientific rigor and simplified messages in order to facilitate action. Plan to communicate results over the long-term.
- **Contextual Factors** – Ensure that the assessment fully considers external factors including economic variables, social/cultural environment, political dynamics, institutional capacity, and geography.

Table Discussion on the Role of Knowledge Brokers and Champions



In many contexts, the vulnerability assessment should be seen as a first step to a larger process of promotion, communication, and fostering decision making and managing resources for investment in adaptation. Credibility, salience, legitimacy, knowledge brokers, champions, communications, and influencing contextual factors all play important—and varying—roles in both the design and uptake of assessment results.

RECOMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS

The development community is learning more about the importance of the assessment process and the need for a “VA-plus” strategy that focuses on enabling a country or locality to develop its own programs and policy out of the assessment process and results. General recommendations for improvement in the design and implementation of assessments that lead to uptake include:

- Ensure that the design of a VA includes consideration of uptake pathways and is framed around the needs of decision makers, whose incentives may be very different than those paying for or conducting an assessment.
- Incorporate assessments into existing planning platforms from the outset. This approach seems to be the best way to ensure the creation of a “living VA” that is capable of integrating new information and is responsive to new circumstances over time.
- Capacity-building among assessment users should be built-in throughout the process to promote learning, ownership, and action.
- Identify and understand the needs of diverse users of climate evidence. The assessment process and results developed to assist farmers or urban planners in their decision making should be tailored to the user’s needs (e.g. influence farmers adaptive strategies vs. evidence for creating or modifying an urban master plan).
- Understand which incentives influence decision makers to take action, including scientific evidence, funding availability, and power. These should be considered throughout all stages of the assessment process. Power dynamics among various sectors, social groups, and institutions play a crucial, if sometimes hidden, role in determining if and how research results will influence policy or programs.
- Uptake and awareness of assessment results often depend on one person or institution that adopts and/or champions the assessment findings. It is useful to explicitly seek such a champion and bring that person or organization into the assessment process so they better understand the results of the assessment and are positioned to act.

CONCLUSIONS

A climate change vulnerability assessment can and should be much more than an evidence-based study. It can provide powerful leverage for change if it is deemed credible, salient, and legitimate by stakeholders and decision-makers who are vested with the knowledge and authority to strengthen resilience and improve adaptive capacity.

The African and Latin American Resilience to Climate Change (ARCC) Program is a three-year program funded by USAID to provide technical, analytical, and project assistance as well as capacity building to promote adaptation to climate change to improve the ability of vulnerable populations to respond to climate challenges and safeguard economic growth.

USAID Africa Contact: Tegan Blaine, tblaine@usaid.gov **ARCC Chief of Party:** Patricia Caffrey, Patricia.Caffrey@tetrattech.com