Adaptive Capacity Assessment

Relevance	
Mitigation	
Resilience	✓
Forests	

Applicable Project Phase(s)	
Ex-ante / prospective	✓
Design	✓
Mid-course	✓
At End	✓
Ex-post / retrospective	✓

Other	
Cost	Medium
Level of Effort	Medium - High
Quantitative or Qualitative	Qualitative
Special technology needed?	No

What it is

Adaptive Capacity Assessments (ACA) identifies links between climate and development and promotes inclusion of climate adaptation activities in development programs. IPCC defines adaptive capacity as the ability of a system to adjust to climate change (including climate variability and extremes) to moderate potential damages, to take advantage of opportunities, or to cope with the consequences. ACA helps determine the capacity of human systems in order to identify and address weaknesses in planning initiatives, examine development initiatives through a climate change lens or as a component of climate vulnerability assessment (described separately as a different but related approach).

This fact sheet describes two practical ACA tools: the National Adaptive Capacity (NAC) framework developed by the World Resources Institute and the Local Adaptive Capacity (LAC) framework developed by the African Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA). One premise of NAC is that adaptation activities in different countries will be *performed* in different ways, but assumes that core *functions* of adaptation systems are the same in all countries. On a local level, rather than looking at what a community *has*, LAC analyses what the community *does* and *how* it does it.

Value Added for Climate Change Context

- ACA helps to identify where capacity building for climate change adaptation is needed (typically in areas where populations are highly vulnerable to climate change).
- ACA can be used to track whether adaptive capacity changed over time.
- For countries where adaptation activities are just beginning, NAC's assessment of institutional functions can provide an organizing frame for setting priorities and making sense of diverse and scattered information.
- LAC baseline information can support national policy makers in planning, policy/strategy development, and in working with communities to raise awareness and develop context-suitable capacity-building approaches.

Suitable Circumstances

ACA is suitable for initiatives aimed at building capacity for climate resilience at different levels, and for creating mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on changes in adaptive capacity that are tailored to each context.

Relationship to Mitigation, Resilience, and/or Forest Investments

ACA focuses on resilience or adaptation. "Resilience" here is intended to encompass and go beyond adaptation.

Types of Questions this Approach Could Address

Based on the NAC framework:

- Have quality impact and vulnerability assessments been conducted at the national level?
- Have sound national adaptation priorities been set?
- Is appropriate information and analysis reaching key stakeholders?
- To what extent are selected adaptation options implemented on the ground?

Based on the LAC framework:

- How are different livelihood groups currently affected by climate (hazard/variability) change?
- How are development interventions contributing to managing vulnerability to hazards in a changing climate?
- What is missing in current projects that would enhance adaptive capacity?
- How can planning at local level inform higher-level planning and allocation of resources?

When the Approach can be Implemented

ACA can be used prior to project selection (e.g., to help identify where to fund adaptive capacity projects), during the design stage, mid-course (e.g., to reflect on changes in adaptive capacity for monitoring, reporting or evaluation purposes), or at the end of an initiative to identify results and further opportunities for improvement.

Limitations

A national assessment of capacity still needs to be translated to implementation at local and community levels. Likewise, local capacities may or may not be applicable/appropriate for initiative replication or scale up.

Methods

- NAC: Collecting qualitative data using NAC Context Worksheet and NAC Answer Worksheet. The NAC framework is divided into categories (planning, alignment, and risk management), each with several functions.
- LAC: Using qualitative methods (focus groups, semi-structured interviews, written exchanges, and documentary analysis) to answer questions and fill out the LAC Framework tool, which covers asset base, institutions and entitlements, knowledge and information, innovation, and flexible forward-looking decision-making and governance. IFAD has used participatory mapping while conducting LAC assessments.

Challenges that Might Arise in Climate Change

Adaptive capacity is not easy to "test" except in extreme circumstances, such as extreme weather events, and even then it is one of the harder cultural/institutional shifts to identify or measure. The greater benefits of building adaptive capacity will be experienced in the future. Silva Villanueva (2011) concludes that "*expected* outcomes may only be seen in long-term timeframes" because "indicators of adaptive capacity will represent factors that do not determine current vulnerability but that enable a society to pursue adaptive on options in the future."

Where this Approach has been Used

- NAC: Bolivia, Ireland, Nepal, and possibly in African countries
- LAC: Uganda, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Vietnam by ACCRA and WorldVision. LAC and participatory mapping: Mali, Sudan, Swaziland, Rwanda, and India by IFAD

Where to Learn More

General adaptation and adaptive capacity assessment information:

- IPCC (2007) *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007 (AR_4).* See also AR_5 reports, forthcoming.
- Bours, D., et al. (2014) *Twelve reasons why climate change adaptation M&E is challenging* and *Guidance Note 2: Selecting indicators for climate change adaptation programming*, SEAChange. CoP, and UKCIP.
- Silva Villanueva, P. (2011) *Learning to ADAPT: monitoring and evaluation approaches in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction – challenges, gaps and ways forward*. SCR Discussion Paper 9.

WRI's NAC framework:

- Dixit, A., et al. (2012) *Ready or Not: Assessing Institutional Aspects of National Capacity for Climate Change Adaptation*.

ACCRA's LAC framework:

- ACCRA (2012) *The ACCRA Local Adaptive Capacity framework*; ACCRA (n.d.) *Consultation Document: The ACCRA Local Adaptive Capacity Framework (LAC)*; and Jones, L., et al. (2010) *Towards a characterization of adaptive capacity: a framework for analyzing adaptive capacity at the local level*. ODI.

Mainstreaming adaptation & resilience evaluation into development projects:

- IIED (2013) *A framework for mainstreaming climate resilience into development planning* and Levine, S., et al. (2011) *Rethinking Support for Adaptive Capacity to Climate Change: The Role of Development Interventions*