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COMMUNITY BASED CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Abstract: It is important to note that climate change impacts have been different for communities due to different subjective and objective realities. It is within this context, that community adaptation and resilience has gained traction as a policy objective to deal with climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and planning, and development in general. Consequentially, there have been increasing efforts to involve local level actors in practices of planning and adaptation. Taking this as the starting point, the purpose of this lecture paper is to conceptually understand community-based climate and disaster risk reduction efforts and related challenges.

Key words: Community, adaptation, climate change, disasters, barriers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communities have been adapting to changes in their immediate environment since time immemorial. These changes, social, environmental, political or economic, have acquired complexity (with the interconnectedness and interdependence due globalisation processes) and produce new, and at the same time exacerbated existing risks. The impact of extreme weather events, disasters and the failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation constitute top five global risks to communities. Inturn, these risks have raised concerns regarding the ability of human beings to adapt and respond to such changes. It is important to note that climate change impacts have been different for communities due to different subjective and objective realities. It is within this context, that community adaptation and resilience has gained traction as a policy objective to deal with climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and planning, and development in general. Consequentially, there have been increasing efforts to involve local level actors in practices of planning and adaptation. Critical views on community based adaptation galore, ranging from upscaling of activities, issues of representation to assessment of successful practices. This lecture will focus on introducing concepts related to community based adaptation and some important challenges related to it.

1.1. Community

The concept of community has been used carelessly in scientific literature that often assumes a sense of homogeneity and sameness. Early works on conceptualisation of community has often related it to emotional attachment to a place or feelings of oneness based on certain characteristics (Bruhn 2011). Contemporary conceptions of community relate it more to the multidimensional understanding based on form or type of social organisation. These dimensions are closely related to its spatiality, comprising of shared location and resources; social networks within the community and; cultural symbolic dimension comprising of identity and culture (Hunter 2007).

The conception of community based efforts in disaster and climate risk reduction stems from the legacy of community development work to popularise a bottom up and participatory approach. This approach was popularised by the world bank in its largescale development assistance projects aimed at poverty alleviation in the 60's and 70's (Mansuri and Rao 2004). Community forms one of the pillars in any community based programme. It serves as a starting unit where the project or the programme activities are to be implemented. Most development policies imply communities as being homogenous and internally harmonious, involving people living in an administratively defined area or people with common interests such as a weaving community. However critical studies have shown that this might not be the case as communities can hardly be defined as homogenous as within the same neighbourhood one might find differences in terms of caste, ethnicity or religious identities that can actually make participation in the community based activities quite problematic in the first place. In other words it becomes

essential to consider power relations to disguise issues of access and control within a community, and avoid uncritical assumption that underlies a community.

The UNHRC defines community as *“can be described as a group of people that recognizes itself or is recognized by outsiders as sharing common cultural, religious or other social features, backgrounds and interests, and that forms a collective identity with shared goals. However, what is externally perceived as a community might in fact be an entity with many sub-groups or communities. It might be divided into clans or castes or by social class, language or religion. A community might be inclusive and protective of its members; but it might also be socially controlling, making it difficult for sub-groups, particularly minorities and marginalized groups, to express their opinions and claim their rights“*

Assumptions about communities that they are harmonious or there are no conflicts there could be problematic. This is not to assume that community engagement at the grassroots level is not necessary but rather point out that a community has multiple meanings and heterogeneity is at the core. There are several examples of how community engagement has been successful but at the same time it becomes necessary to point out that it refers to people who cooperate with each other that may not necessarily include people living in the same location or even exclude some of them (Cannon 2008). In other words communities are places where *“inequality, exploitation, oppression and maliciousness are woven into the fabric of relationships”* (ibid:12). Thus a note of caution is necessary to avoid uncritical usage of the concept of community.

1.2. Participation

To understand community based or community driven programmes understanding the concept of participation is indispensable as it forms the tool through which community involvement takes place. The very logic behind community participation is to include local knowledge in the decision making process of the project/programme cycle. The assumption is that local people are aware of the local problems and hence will be able to contribute towards locally sensitive decisions, that will lead to better designed projects and also shape the success of the project. Although this might hold true, the very nature of participation can defeat the purpose which is often community empowerment. The table below shows the types of participation based on Pretty's (1994) categorisation:



Table:
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Type of Participation	Features
Manipulative Participation	Pretence, with nominated representatives having no legitimacy or power
Passive Participation	Unilateral announcements without listening to people's responses
Participation by Consultation	External agents define problems and information-gathering processes and so control analysis
Participation for Material Incentives	People participate by contributing resources (labour) in return for material incentives
Functional Participation	External agencies encourage participation to meet predetermined objectives
Interactive Participation	People participate (as a right) in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions
Self-Mobilisation	People take initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems

projects involve the community with a rationale of targeting benefits and also to display the steps ensured to attain success of the project. Critical development literature points out that most projects lie between manipulative to functional participation, although efforts are being made to encourage interactive participation. Nonetheless, participation of the community to facilitate self mobilisation is an exception rather than the rule. The nature of participation in the development programmes has been criticised as creating extra burden on the vulnerable groups and creating forced unpaid labour (See Jones and Chant 2009; Ribot 1996). The case for participation may be a step in the right direction, but without the power to make concrete changes, leaving issues up to individuals to pursue in their professional roles could lead to overburdening of already existing responsibilities, as seen in the case of many gender focussed participatory approaches (Leach and Mearns 1996). Hickey and Mohan (2004) point out that participation will be successful where :

- Where they are pursued as part of a wider radical political project;
- Where they are aimed specifically at securing citizenship rights and participation for marginal and subordinate groups; and
- When they seek to engage with development as an underlying process of social change rather than in the form of discrete technocratic interventions.

Thus it becomes necessary to understand– Who participates? Who creates spaces of participation? What is the nature of participation? And what are the conditions for participation.

2. THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTYTATION

The need to achieve sustainable development for all also mentioned as the golabl goals lies at the heart of discussion when it comes to community based DRR and CCA. Increasingly the impact of climate change and extreme weather events is reportedly being felt at the local scales that is projected to escalate in the near future. According to the Sendai Framwork (2015-2030) over a period of 10 disasters have effected society on lutliple scale from individual, communities to the national level affecting 1.5 billion millions of lives. Over 700 thousand people lost their lives, over 1.4 million were injured and approximately 23 million were made homeless as a result of disasters. Overall, more Women, children and people in vulnerable situations were disproportionately affected. The total economic loss was more than \$1.3 trillion. In addition, between 2008 and 2012, 144 million people were displaced by disasters. In particular Small Island Countries and Landlocked countries have been pointed out as the most vulnerable and requiring community based approaches to deal with the impending crises (Dumaru 2010a). Additionally community based approaches in DRR and CCA are being encouraged to build capacity, resilience and empower communities to deal with problems directly rather than having external actors coimg to their rescue. Furthermore, the need to undersand social vulnerability at the local level and the context in the resouce poor countries aided this process (Forsyth 2013). The UNDP programme of community based adaptation is being implemented in 52 countries and started in 2008. It is implemented by UNDP and funded largely by GEF project (Global Environmental facility grants) and donors such as Australia, Japan and Switzerland.

Community based DRR and CCA approach is people and development oriented. It views disasters as part of people's vulnerability. It empowers people to address the root causes of vulnerabilities by transforming social, economic and political structures that generate inequality and underdevelopment (Shaw and Okazaki 2004). CBDRR approach covers prevention and mitigation, preparedness, emergency response and recovery. CBA (Community based Adaptation) have a particular focus to create awareness concerning climate issues and inlcude future climate risks in the project cycle (Dumaru 2010b).

2.1. Characteristicts of Community based Adaptation

Some of the characteristicts of community based adaptation can be noted by (Ayers and Forsyth 2009) :

- Operating at the local level (i.e. neighbourhood, settlement, village) in communities that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change;
- Identifying and implementing community-based development activities that strengthen the capacity of local people to adapt;

- Generating adaptation strategies through participatory processes involving local stakeholders;
- Building on existing cultural norms and addresses local development concerns that underlie vulnerability.

2.2. Potential Advantages of having a community based adaptation plan

- Instrumental and transformational where community themselves define problems and solution.
- Capacity development of the community by embedding new knowledge concerning climate and disaster risks in the existing community structures
- Sensitive to local needs and risks as community members take ownership of the project.
- Awareness raising and incorporation of future risks into design of project activities that enables community members to make responsive efforts while combining it with their local knowledge.
- Promotes co-learning and management between different stakeholders.

2.3. Challenges

2.3.1. False assumptions about community

As noted in the earlier arguments the assumption that community is homogenous or taking an uncritical approach to it will lead to disguising of the local structural inequalities and power relations embedded in the community itself. The process of adaptation itself has been pointed out as conflictual where contestation and negotiations of interests, rights and responsibilities takes place (Eriksen and Lind 2009; Nightingale 2017). Such assumptions simplify the local environment which could lead to unequal participation of persons at the local level.

2.3.2 Top down approach. Contextual sensitivity is essential and its absence could lead to facilitators potentially overrinding existing legitimate decision-making processes. The tyranny of the urgent matters could take over. In other words matters considered important by the facilitators could take over that donot mirror the ground realities of the community in quation. Such examples can be seen in many community based resource management projects particularly in the global south where traditional ways of resource use have been disregarded.

2.3.3 Shifting of responsibility. Locaaly insensitive participatory approaches may be seen as shifting ‘responsibility’ from the agencies and the development workers onto the participating people and thus creating burden of responsibility. Thus it becomes necessary to investigate what form of participation is being carried out and under what circumstances to avoid unpaid labour and nominal participation without transformational change.

2.3.4 Assuming efforts of people are deficient from the start.

The UNFCCC divided adaptation into planned and autonomous adaptation, where planned is defined as purposeful often associated with formal adaptation and autonomous considered as unplanned, associated more with informal forms of adaptation practices as that of the community. It becomes important to point that this may not always be the case and that the way communities have been adapting is not just due one particular change but a complex combination of changes, followed by prioritising of risks before adaptation actions are carried out. Thus claiming adaptive actions of community as inefficient and spontaneous from the start may be a misleading starting point.

2.3.5 CBA risks focusing on only one aspect of multiple dimensions of vulnerability or only one sector and scale.

Community based adaptation are based with climate as the central focus. However it also becomes essential to understand that people may not be adapting to climate change or even want to do so but rather people are dealing with everyday risks especially related to livelihood (Forsyth and Evans 2013). Thus it becomes necessary to understand how climate change translate into everyday risks, particularly livelihood risks for the community (ibid). In other words CBA must focus on reducing social vulnerabilities or pre-existing contextual vulnerabilities to realise the success and legitimacy of adaptation efforts.

3. CONCLUSION

Community based adaptation efforts is certainly required. It carries within itself significant advantages particularly that of locally shaped problems and solutions. This can itself be a crucial factor in directly reducing contextual vulnerabilities. But at the same time challenges galore, ranging from top down approaches to misleading assumptions of the community itself that may render well intentioned efforts futile. The success of community based adaptation thus to a large extent depend on who gets to participate and what context; how this form of participation can help address social vulnerabilities and risks; and how adaptation efforts that donot fall under the umbrella of formal adaptation accepted.

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