

A photograph of two women in a professional setting, likely a conference or meeting. The woman on the left is wearing a yellow blazer over a white top and is smiling broadly. The woman on the right is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and glasses, and is also smiling while looking towards the first woman. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and what appears to be a conference table.

Influencing adaptation policy:

The role of policy entrepreneurs in securing ownership and climate action in South Asia

There is now a large body of evidence on technical approaches to mainstreaming climate change adaptation in policymaking. Tried-and-tested interventions include, undertaking risk assessments to develop the evidence base, building capacity by training key decision makers, providing decision aids such as risk screening and climate budgeting tools, etc. However, informal approaches to influencing policy and action on adaptation play an equally important role and need to be explicitly considered within adaptation programmes. Informal influencing approaches consider social norms, customs or traditions that shape thought and behaviour, and an understanding of the mechanisms of local political networks.

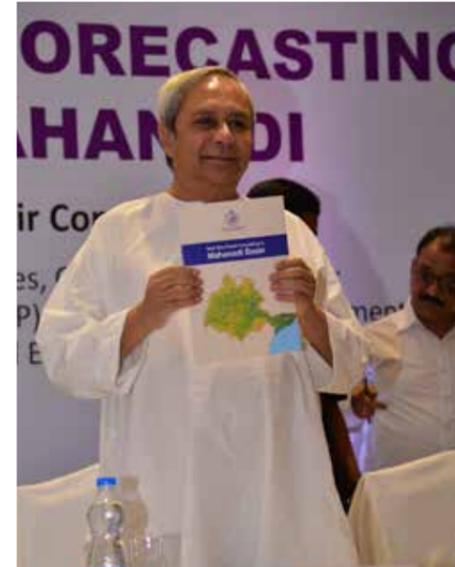
The Action on Climate Today (ACT) programme has been working in partnership with ten national and sub-national governments in South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, to strengthen systems of planning and delivery for adaptation to climate change. This learning brief highlights the role of policy entrepreneurs, who navigate the political complexity of formal and informal systems of governance to promote successful adaptation mainstreaming processes. Drawing on examples from the ACT programme in South Asia, the paper presents a typology of influencing strategies for mainstreaming adaptation into policy making. Some of these strategies for influence are more focused on the agents of change, such as building trust, developing champions, or working with those who implement policy down the bureaucratic hierarchy. Others are more linked to the specific tactics used for influence, such as policy narratives, advocacy and networking.

A full description of ACT's work can be found in the associated ACT learning paper, **Influencing adaptation policy: The role of policy entrepreneurs in securing ownership and climate action in South Asia.**



STORIES AND NARRATIVES:

In Assam, India, the absence of policy narratives on climate change presented a challenge and opportunity for ACT's influencing efforts. ACT has taken a phased approach in expanding its influence on climate adaptation policy in the state. The programme's first initiative was to support the Government in drafting and adopting the Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change (ASAPCC). ACT had to convince sectoral departments beyond the Department of Environment and Forests of the purpose and value of the plan, and of Action on Climate Change in general, in a language that aligned with their departmental priorities. In particular, ACT highlighted the link between tackling floods – an overarching issue for these departments and an increasingly severe threat for the state – and the need for action on climate change. Following this, ACT found that narratives that linked climate adaptation and SDG agendas got traction at the highest level of Government.



CHEERLEADERS AND CHAMPIONS:

Often, an effective approach in ensuring policy influence is to secure the interest of a high-profile champion. In some cases, the champion has been a senior politician: In Pakistan, the programme works closely with the Prime Minister's Special Advisor on Climate Change. In other cases, it has been a senior official: The Secretary of the Water Resources Department in Odisha, who has a background in disaster management, recognised the need to address flooding issues, and championed important work within the programme. For ACT's work on adaptation and tourism in Nepal, ACT benefitted from the fact that the two primary points of contact had both previously been posted in the Ministry of Environment. They were able to link climate impacts with tourism and thereby influence the adoption of the issue within the Department of Tourism. Across locations, ACT has mindfully targeted and cultivated individuals as 'champions' for various interventions.



ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING:

In Afghanistan, ACT sensitised journalists to the issue of climate change in the country through targeted training programmes. The team also set up a network of reporters interested in writing on the issue. This has led to a spike in media coverage on climate change in the country. ACT also linked a group of Afghan civil society organisations (CSOs) working on environmental issues with the Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSAs) and trained them on tactics of engaging, campaigning, and working with the government on climate change. Subsequently, this group was recognised as Afghanistan's first National Steering Committee of CANSAs, giving them a formal voice and platform. Such efforts ensure that CSOs can work as an informal pressure group to ensure continued government action on adaptation, even after the ACT programme concludes.

POLICY INFLUENCING STRATEGIES

TOOLS FOR INFLUENCE



STORIES AND NARRATIVES:

Using simplified and contextually relevant stories that help decision-makers make sense of complex realities, linking climate action with development objectives



RAPPORT AND TRUST:

Building trust in the programme and its staff to deliver



ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING:

Harnessing and developing networks on adaptation inside and outside government

AGENTS FOR CHANGE



CHEERLEADERS AND CHAMPIONS:

Nurturing and rewarding leaders and leadership



DOWNSTREAM IMPLEMENTERS:

Influencing action on the ground by working with those who actually implement, rather than set, policy

POLICY OUTCOMES



DOWNSTREAM IMPLEMENTERS:

In some cases, where ACT did not have an immediate entry-point at the senior official or political level, ACT started working with mid-level officials to build up the programme's credibility, and subsequently, further engage at the higher level. In Afghanistan, mid-level bureaucrats were the main point of influence, precisely to take the message both up and down the hierarchy. In Odisha, India, while senior bureaucrats in the Environment Department were consulted and were the main point of coordination from the programme, ACT worked primarily with technical staff in the Water Resource and Agriculture departments on flood management and mainstreaming adaptation into the government's water resource and agriculture planning systems. Working with implementers also ensures greater programme continuity as this group is less prone to frequent government transfers, as compared to senior bureaucrats.



RAPPORT AND TRUST:

In Bihar, ACT engaged with the locally-based Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI), which had credibility with the government on social, political, and economic issues, but without any significant prior experience of climate change. ACT worked through ADRI to recommend and support an expansion of the Department of Environment and Forestry's mandate to include climate change, which was formally approved by the Government in 2018. In addition, ACT supported ADRI to build a team of experts and establish a climate change centre within the organisation. In this way, ACT enhanced its sphere of influence on climate change in the state, by using an organisation that the State Government trusted to carry out and communicate its policy advice on mainstreaming.



Key Lessons from ACT's Experience:

ACT's ten tips for enhancing policy influencing and entrepreneurship within a technical assistance programme:

1. Design programmes with policy entrepreneurship in mind, using adaptive management approaches, providing flexible, rapid and deployable resources. Report on outcomes and not just deliverables, and include requirements in job specifications to seize unexpected opportunities for policy influencing.
2. Develop the skill set of policy entrepreneurs to undertake different types of policy influencing approaches.
3. Engage programme staff who have prior experience and relationships with relevant local bureaucracies and adaptation issues.
4. Undertake regular analysis of the changing political economy landscape (that can influence approaches to adaptation mainstreaming), including assessments of both immediate and more distant policy drivers and salient policy narratives.
5. Identify, map, and engage with the informal shadow networks that operate alongside formal decision-making structures.
6. Construct policy narratives around adaptation approaches such that they align with the interests and incentive structures within a government, remaining cognisant of bottom-up perspectives and priorities.
7. Calculate and communicate the benefits of adaptation, tailoring these to appeal to different groups including those inside and those outside government.
8. Start with areas of government that are best prepared for adaptation action, and expand the network to reach others.
9. Engage with high-level champions to tag adaptation issues onto higher-level policy agendas, and work with mid-level implementers to convert policy directives into action while maintaining programmatic continuity.
10. Build awareness, capacity, and leadership at multiple levels, from top-level decision makers to downstream implementers, to help institutionalise and sustain the process of mainstreaming.

These and other lessons from the ACT programme are elaborated in the ACT learning paper: Influencing adaptation policy: The role of policy entrepreneurs in securing ownership and climate action in South Asia

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