

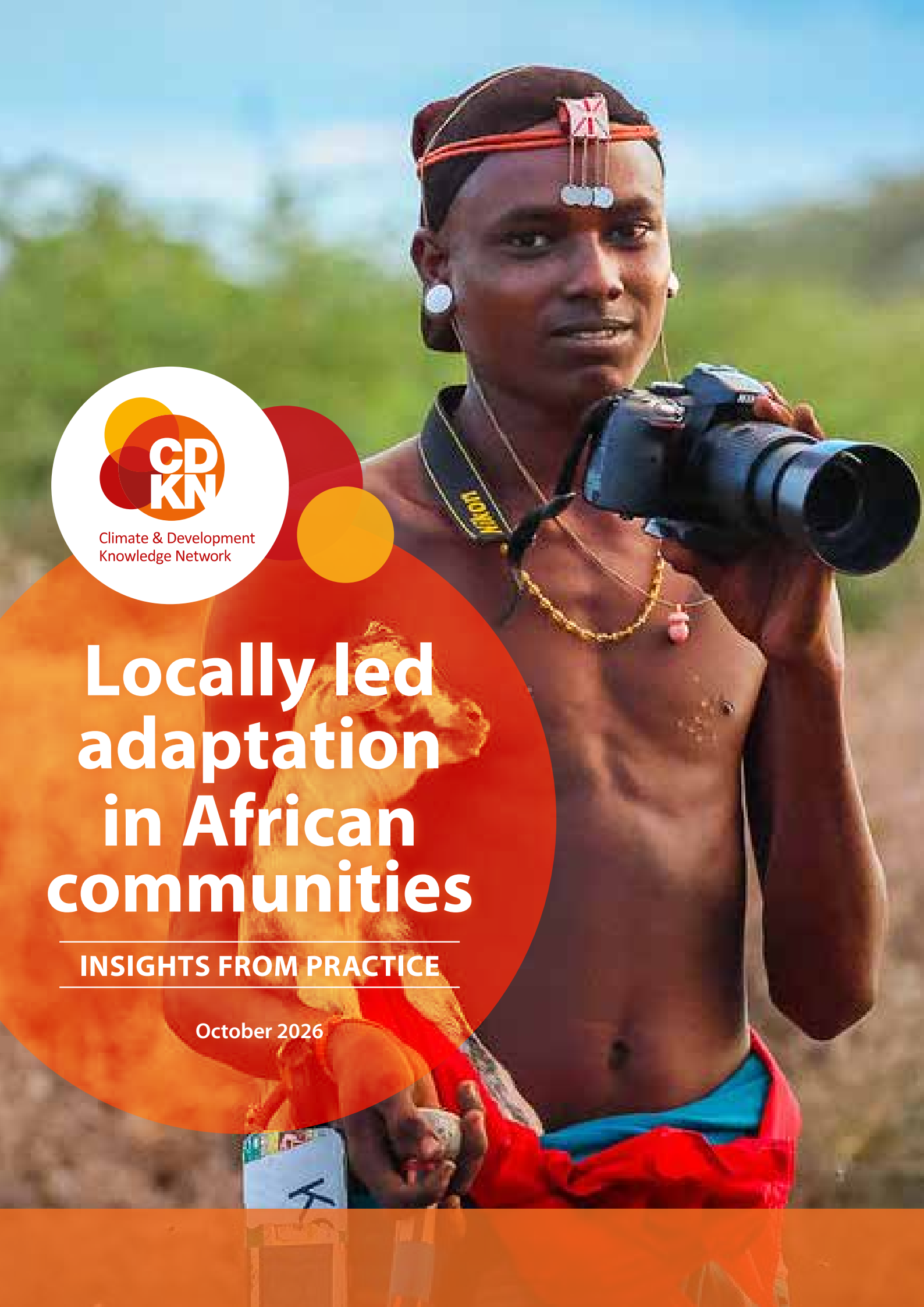


Climate & Development
Knowledge Network

Locally led adaptation in African communities

INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICE

October 2026





An unexpected visitor – when a drone flies in your village in Makueni County, Kenya.

Credit: ADA

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About the Climate & Development Knowledge Network

The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) is a Global South-led programme founded in 2010, and implemented in partnership by SouthSouthNorth, Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (FFLA) and ICLEI South Asia. CDKN works to improve the wellbeing of the most climate-affected people in the Global South, especially marginalised groups, through transformative, climate-resilient action. We work in partnership with the public, civil society and private sectors to mobilise knowledge, leadership and capacity in the Global South from local to global levels.

CDKN Africa advances its three strategic outcomes – gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), equitable climate finance, and ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) – through African-led and people-centred approaches that recognise intersectionality, strengthen local leadership, and respond to continental priorities for climate-resilient development articulated in *Agenda 2063* and the *African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032)*. Guided by its knowledge brokering approach, the programme has generated, connected and mobilised evidence, partnerships and learning to strengthen inclusive climate adaptation across Africa.

CDKN Africa and its partners bring to this report their unique experiences of advancing equitable, community-led adaptation in practice. CDKN has been investing directly in African communities since 2024, through country programmes in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal and Namibia and the ‘Knowledge-to-Action’ (K2A) grants. The authors are practitioners who have learned by doing. Some of the authors are embedded in communities and driving adaptation from the ‘ground up’ through K2A projects. Others are practitioners in CDKN’s national and regional African teams who have supported and facilitated K2A projects and other locally led initiatives.

This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, as part of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) Programme. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, or of IDRC or its Board of Governors, or of the entities managing CDKN.

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Front cover image: A participant of the media lab training on storytelling, filming and photography held in Marsabit, Kenya. (Credit: Moses Harugura, NaPO)

Acknowledgements

The authors extend their special thanks to the editorial team at CDKN: Robin Heuermann, Diana Sousa and Cris Robertson, without whose practical support and wisdom this paper would not have been possible; also the CDKN events and operations team who helped logistically support the delivery of the LLA co-creation process.

The authors also thank the peer reviewers: Georgina Cundill-Kemp (IDRC), Robert Hofstede (Universidade San Francisco de Quito), Maimuna Kabatesi (Vibrant Village Foundation), and Peter Taylor (Institute of Development Studies). The contents of this report are the responsibility of the authors alone.

Abbreviations

AGNES	African Group of Negotiators Experts Support
BPM	Baobab Products Mozambique
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CbA	Community-based adaptation
CDKN	Climate and Development Knowledge Network
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EbA	Ecosystem-based adaptation
ENDA	Environment and Development Action in the Third World
FFLA	Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano
FLoCCA	Financing Locally Led Climate Change Adaptation
GCA	Global Centre on Adaptation
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HOT	Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILK	Indigenous and local knowledge
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
K2A	Knowledge-to-Action
LLA	Locally led adaptation
MERL	Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning
NaPO	Nature and People as One
NAPs	National Adaptation Plans
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO/NGOs	Non-governmental organisation(s)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLWD	People living with disability
PPPs	Public-private partnerships
PPPs	Community-based public-private partnerships
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
UN	United Nations
UNEPFI	United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WRI	World Resources Institute
YEDA	Youth Empowerment and Development Aid

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the experiences of a network of practitioners innovating tailored approaches to locally led adaptation, or LLA, across diverse African contexts. These voices are not normally heard in regional and international debates; the report gives them a new platform. In this way, the report seeks to add depth and richness to international understanding of LLA. For definitions of key climate adaptation and LLA terms used throughout this report, see the Glossary (page 61).

Social equity needs greater prominence in LLA.

LLA debates emphasise the 'local' and 'leadership' elements of LLA, but risk glossing over the critical need for adaptation that is socially equitable. Social equity is a core condition of LLA and a *necessary feature of its enduring outcomes*. By this, we mean that adaptation initiatives must be equitably led by, and fully address, the priorities of specific social groups within communities. This may involve women, young people and people living with disability; but also, critically, the intersecting needs and capacities of different social groups. Such groups have vital knowledge and skills to contribute, as well as specific vulnerabilities to climate change. Centring equity more prominently, from design through the implementation, monitoring and adaptive management of LLA, will advance justice, prove more effective, and deliver true benefits for the most climate-affected people.

Communities should be the key focus.

The term 'local' is often used, in the context of global policy frameworks and investment flows, to refer to large-scale, even national, adaptation initiatives. Initiatives to support LLA require a far more granular, community-centred approach. They must support people within communities to assess climate risk and implement tailored solutions. LLA must make space for, and enable community actors and institutions to engage constructively with policy priorities and investment frameworks that are set at the subnational, national and international levels. There should be a two-way flow of ideas, information and influence; not a 'top-down' approach that merely imposes implementation in communities.

Recommendations

For local implementing actors and for the intermediaries who work with them:

- **Support communities to advance conversations** about climate change in their own language, framed with their own cultural references and dominant concerns, to stimulate a constructive cycle of interest, innovation, learning and action in climate change adaptation.
- **Promote LLA action within existing community institutions** – formal and informal – that are well used and respected by local people, with a view to sustaining capacity over time.
- **Ensure that marginalised and excluded social groups participate meaningfully** in LLA decision-making structures and processes. Explore ways to support their participation so that they are not merely present, but also well-informed and equipped to be influential.
- **Ask funding partners for project planning or readiness support funds** to compensate community members for their time on needs assessment and project scoping work, as required. This should include gender equality and social inclusion, or GESI, needs assessments.

- **Ensure communities' in-kind inputs are costed and fully recognised in external partnerships.** Acknowledging the knowledge, labour, and material assets communities contribute to LLA strengthens the case for true community leadership in deciding how combined external and internal resources are used.
- **Carve a clear, intentional role for local actors**, which is adequately compensated, to educate and inform external partners about the climate risks and impacts in their locality, and local people's values and priorities for action. This 'reset' of conventional donor/recipient dynamics is needed to operationalise equitable, just and respectful partnerships for LLA.

For funding partners:

- **Be guided by the diversity of local contexts.** Start with community knowledge, priorities and lived experience as the basis for designing and evaluating initiatives. Where relevant, steer funding toward local intermediary organisations that can do this.
- Recognise that vulnerability to climate change, as well as the capacity to lead adaptation, is shaped by **intersecting social, economic, and cultural factors** that go beyond single factors such as gender or age.
- **Build from existing local institutions and systems** that have strong community support and are grounded in lived experience, rather than creating parallel structures that risk undermining or overlooking existing capacity.
- **Support knowledge brokers** and local and external intermediaries, where supported by communities.
- **Fund relationships, networks and coordination**, not only individual projects or organisations. Lasting change requires collaboration, trust, and collective action across actors and institutions.
- **Provide multi-year, core financial support**, which is urgently needed for the trust-building and institutional strengthening that LLA requires at community level.
- **In conflict-affected contexts**, go beyond short-term relief to support longer-term, community-embedded and GESI-responsive pathways to strengthening local capacities, livelihoods and adaptation.
- **Uphold safeguarding, rights and ethical standards** as a minimum requirement for partnership.
- **Consider initial planning or readiness grants** to organisations and/or extend grant tenures, allowing the first year to focus on scoping and readiness for further adaptation action.

For governments:

Recommendations for national governments must be context-specific, given the diversity of governance systems across the African continent and the differing degrees of decentralisation. Recommendations include:

- **Legislate for and finance decentralised development**, which spills over into the adaptation domain.
- **Integrate community-led adaptation processes** into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and other national plans and strategies.
- **Systematically recognise the role of gender- and socially-equitable community institutions** in adaptation.

For regional bodies:

- **Embed community-led adaptation** into the implementation of *Agenda 2063* and other continent-wide commitments.



A woman from a pastoral community in Ethiopia's South Omo Zone provides input at a group meeting for a Village Economic and Social Association.

Credit: Kaleb Worku

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LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION

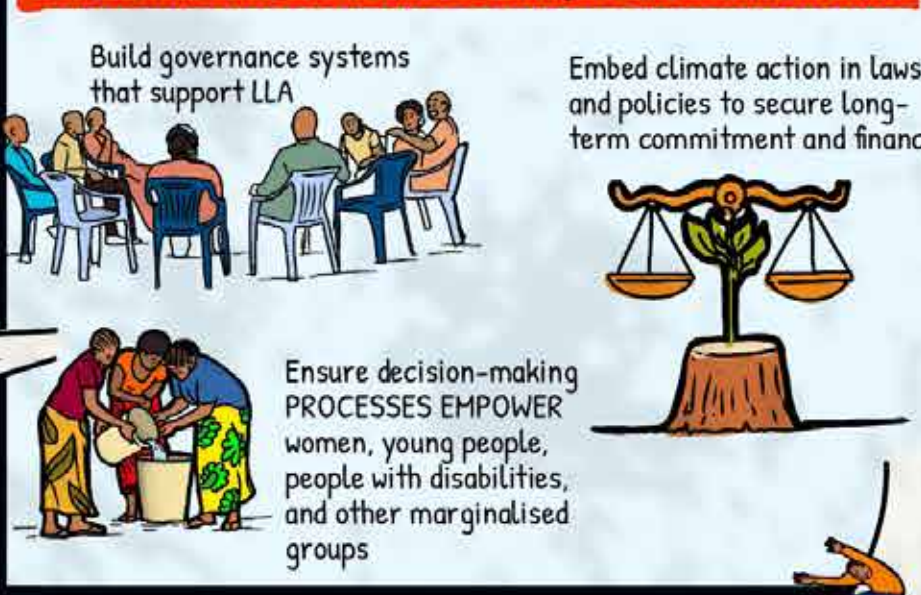
ENABLING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP



CONNECTING DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS



STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS



GENDER EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

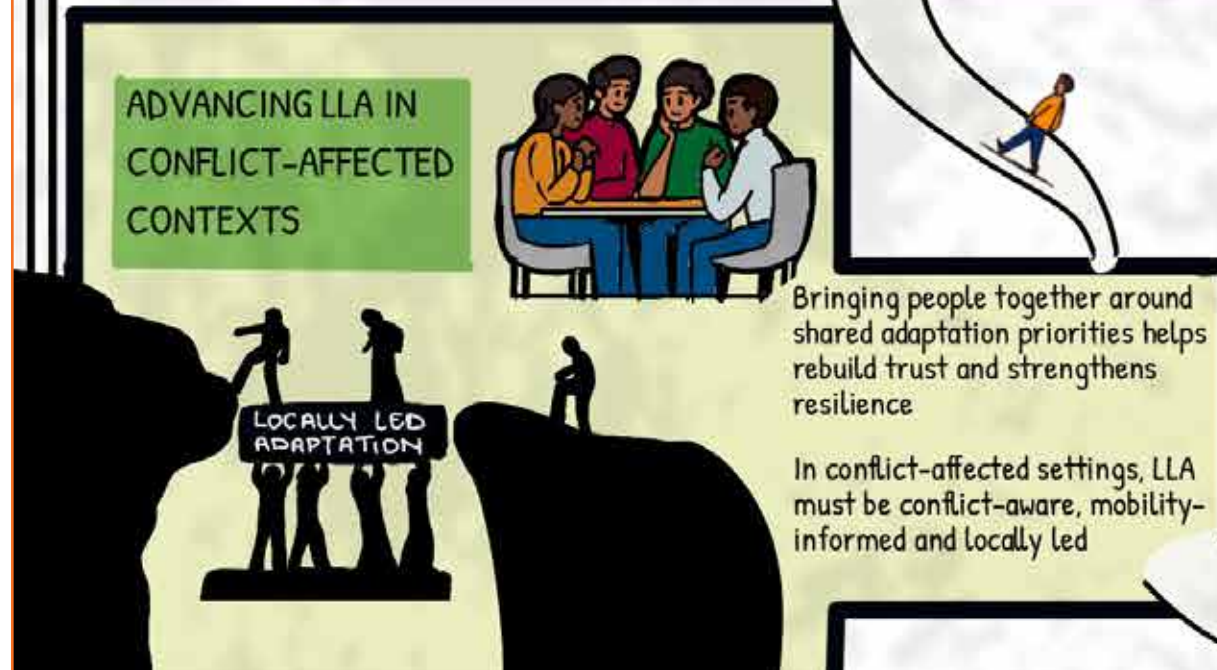
Recognise and support women, young people, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups as leaders

Make national and local climate policies more socially inclusive and gender responsive

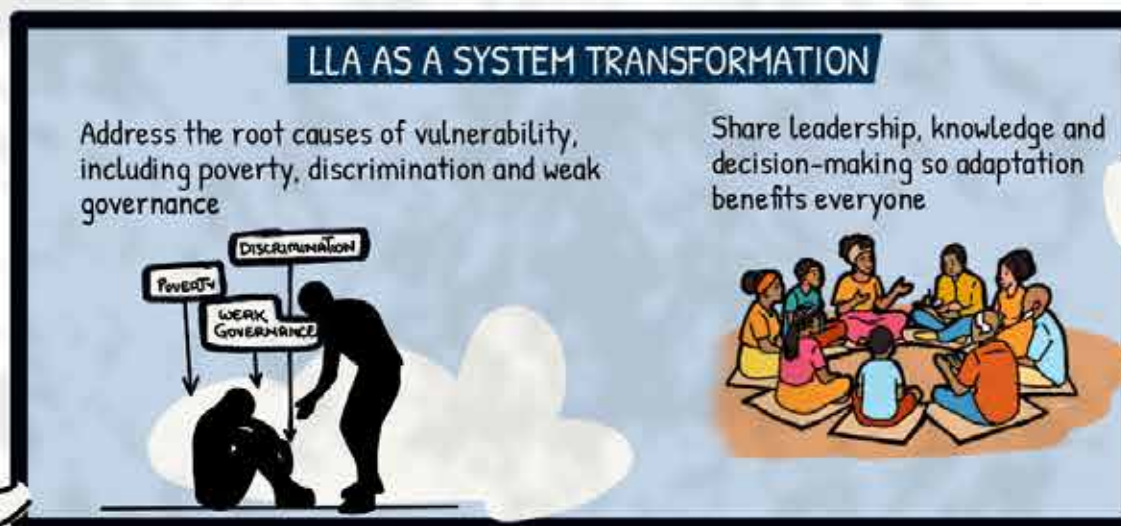
BUILDING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND RESILIENCE



ADVANCING LLA IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS



LLA AS A SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION



1. INTRODUCTION

The case for local leadership

Across Africa, communities have long adapted to climate variability and change through local knowledge, collective action and Indigenous practices. Yet these forms of resilience often remain under-recognised in national climate planning and under-supported by adaptation finance mechanisms. The case for local leadership in climate change adaptation has been building for some years. Rather than implementing activities designed elsewhere, the argument is for local leadership that enables people to identify priorities, assess challenges, make decisions, and drive programme design.

LLA reflects broader trends in international development, favouring the ‘localisation’ of planning and implementation and the delivery of localised development benefits. The African Union’s *Agenda 2063*, for example, sets out a vision of human wellbeing and a healthy environment that nurtures local communities. It calls for “Africa’s unique natural endowments, its environment and ecosystems, including its wildlife and wild lands [to be] healthy, valued and protected, with climate resilient economies and communities” (African Union, 2015: 1).¹ It considers how stronger community leadership can be enabled and, in particular, how Africa’s young people, women, people living with disabilities and other marginalised groups can benefit equitably from development initiatives.

1. African Union (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*; para 10; page 3. https://au.int/Agenda2063/popular_version

Participants practice visual storytelling techniques during the Photography and Videography Storytelling Lab in Marsabit, Kenya, building skills to document community conservation and adaptation initiatives

Credit: NaPO

Funding partners are taking a similar direction: the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has produced guidelines for official development assistance that is locally led, arguing that such approaches can “strengthen the relevance and impact of development, humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions, as defined by those they are designed with and for” (OECD draft 2026: 14).²

Extending the general trend of ‘localisation’ from international development into climate change adaptation support is deeply logical. Climate change impacts are inherently local and vary from place to place. Where you live and work dictates your exposure to climate hazards such as excessive heat, flooding and sea level rise. Vulnerability is also shaped by local conditions, including political, economic and social systems, as well as physical geographies (IPCC, 2021).³ Local knowledge and lived experience are necessary to identify and respond to these complex and intersecting climate risks. Equally, people’s ability to adapt and their preferences for how to adapt are shaped by their social, environmental/ ecological, economic, political, and cultural contexts.

‘Localisation’ of support structures for climate change adaptation implies a multi-scale approach, with local, national, regional, and international approaches nested and complementary. The opportunity is to enable local leadership to flourish within these multi-scale systems. This should happen in ways that allow locally designed and implemented initiatives to flourish, generating local benefits and learning (Lehtman and Tyldesley, 2026)⁴ and creating opportunities to share experiences with others, as this report seeks to do.

Clear evidence shows that top-down approaches to climate change adaptation do not work (Eriksen et al., 2021).⁵ This includes the lived experiences of our author group (see Box 1: Why top-down adaptation approaches don’t work). The Global Commission on Adaptation’s flagship report, *Adapt Now*, flagged the ‘imbalance’ between the extent of action and innovation at the local level, compared with the lack of resources available: “People and communities on the frontlines of climate change are often the most active and innovative in developing adaptation solutions. Yet, too often, they lack access to the resources and power needed to implement solutions” (GCA, 2019: 62).⁶

2. Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, Development Assistance Committee – OECD DAC (2026). ‘[Practical guidelines for supporting locally led development](#)’.
3. IPCC (2022). Summary for Policymakers [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001.
4. Lehtman, S. and Tyldesley, S. (2026). ‘Pathways to locally led adaptation: Lessons for effective climate resilience finance’, Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance report.
5. Eriksen et al. (2021). ‘Adaptation interventions and their effect on vulnerability in developing countries: Help, hindrance or irrelevance?’ *World Development* 141 (2021): 105383
6. Global Commission on Adaptation (2019). *Adapt Now: A Global Call to Action for Leadership on Climate Resilience*. Rotterdam: Global Centre on Adaptation. <https://gca.org/about-us/the-global-commission-on-adaptation/>



Fruit harvesters waiting to transport baobab fruit in the north of Manica Province, Mozambique.

Credit: Micaia Foundation



Community members attend a VSLA awareness session in Mundri West, South Sudan, exploring how collective savings and lending can strengthen household resilience and support local development

Credit: YEDA

BOX 1

Why top-down adaptation approaches don't work

In our direct experiences as authors, the imposition of externally-designed adaptation 'solutions' on communities does not work:

"I see a clear difference when communities own projects like [the Miu Weir dam in Machakos County, Kenya], rather than them being political interventions. In my country, the previous government promised a dam to every village to help with irrigation on their farms. Unfortunately, as we speak, none of these dams is working because it was a top-down approach, which obviously doesn't work."

– Emeffa Ama Ewoenam Atiamoah, Ghana

"Because of national conflict, international donors are not willing to fund the national government directly but funnel finance through multilateral agencies who typically subcontract to NGOs. International agencies have a bias toward demanding ways of working that were effective in other countries, e.g. use of mobile money in Kenya. This is completely ineffective in South Sudan's cash-based economy where electricity access outside the capital Juba (including to charge mobile phones) is almost non-existent. You have to design to fit the context, and that means putting design in the hands of local people."

– Driuni Jakani, South Sudan

Research highlights how little adaptation finance reaches local actors. In theory, bilateral and multilateral development agencies aim to have their funds reach communities directly; in practice, international climate finance is heavily biased towards international organisations, consultants, and national entities.

Even determining how much climate finance is disbursed under the control of local actors is hard to discern because of a lack of transparency. A study by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) found that "local impact or involvement were mentioned in transactions representing less than a third (29%) of total [international adaptation] funding" and "just 0.17% mentioned the terms 'locally led' or 'community-led' across eight years" from 2016-2023 (Treichel et al., 2025).⁷

Together, the reality of localised climate impacts, the strength of local knowledge, the need for locally appropriate solutions, and the 'uneven playing field' of climate finance have fuelled the LLA movement. A consortium of international organisations launched eight LLA Principles in 2019-20. These principles emerged in response to the need for adaptation finance to reach communities directly and the recognition that top-down adaptation approaches are often poorly aligned with local realities and priorities. As of early 2026, the LLA Principles have garnered more than 130 institutional signatories, including governments, leading global institutions, and local and international NGOs. A full list of signatories and related resources is available online. This report adds depth and practical insight to the LLA Principles by drawing on practitioners' and communities' experiences with LLA. In doing so, it illustrates what principles such as local leadership, ownership, equity, and inclusive decision-making look like in practice, while bringing forward the perspectives of organisations and voices often underrepresented in regional and global LLA discussions.

7. Treichel, P et al (2025). *Locally implemented or locally led? Tracking finance for community climate action*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development. <https://www.iied.org/22674iied>

Purpose of the report

CDKN set out to document lessons from its efforts to advance LLA. In this context, CDKN's Africa programme convened sixteen partners from nine African countries for a year-long learning journey on LLA (August 2025-July 2026). This paper is the result of that participatory process.

It began with a workshop in Machakos, Kenya, involving CDKN's Knowledge-to-Action (K2A) projects, country programmes, and partners working with communities in Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Sudan. Participants came from diverse contexts: from conflict-affected croplands, to expansive, pastoralist rangelands; from rural, sacred forests to rapidly growing urban settlements.

The workshop was a space to reflect on the moments where communities genuinely shape adaptation, and on the systemic barriers that continue to limit inclusion, agency, and long-term resilience. The 41 participants (22 women) also explored the institutional, human and financial resources required to achieve and sustain community-driven approaches at scale. They reflected on the conditions needed to embed these approaches more widely within governance systems. This was followed by a year-long process of dialogue, reflection, and co-authorship through online workshops and conversations, which culminated in this volume.

Our interpretation of local leadership

As LLA becomes more widely used, one of our key reflections is that people understand and use the term and the eight LLA Principles in different ways. As part of our intention to add to the LLA debate, we have interrogated the meanings behind 'local' and 'leadership', and asked: does the terminology of 'LLA' go far enough? In this section, we seek to unpack our understanding of LLA terminology, based on CDKN and its partners' practical experiences.

One of our key observations is that stakeholders use the term 'local' in 'LLA' to refer to many different scales of decision-making and action. In some global contexts, such as when discussing the allocation of climate finance, the term 'local' can mean disbursing funds to national actors to spend on locally implemented activities (e.g. Chaudhury, 2020⁸), without true decision-making by local people. We believe this interpretation of 'local' makes it more challenging to have a productive conversation about the change we want to see. In this report, we prefer to specify 'local' as referring to communities (see Box 2: *Who are local communities?*).

We often refer in this report to 'community-led' or 'local community-led' adaptation because it is more precise. This focus on community reflects the reality of the widespread adaptation actions that place-based African communities are already taking and intend to lead into the long term. It reflects the world we want to see: where community priorities and voices lead adaptation partnerships.

Furthermore, our unpacking of 'LLA' finds that others may use the term as a synonym for 'localisation' alone, without the critical social equity dimensions that exist in the underlying LLA principles.⁹ Genuine community leadership is necessary but not sufficient. *Who* within the community is enabled to lead is vital.

8. Chaudhury (2020) provides an example of the use of the term 'local' to refer to country-scale activities: "The role of intermediaries in catalysing climate finance is gaining recognition in global policy and practice space. Climate change, with its global policy and science agenda but local country-level activities, has been an ideal setting for climate finance intermediaries that sit between these two worlds to emerge and enable action" in 'Role of Intermediaries in Shaping Climate Finance in Developing Countries—Lessons from the Green Climate Fund' *Sustainability*, 12, 5507; doi:10.3390/su12145507 page 1 of 17

9. Social equity is Principle 2 of the LLA Principles: Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, disabled and displaced people, Indigenous Peoples and marginalised ethnic groups. For detail, please see: <https://www.iied.org/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation>

Leadership must be socially equitable, meaning it must meaningfully include groups who have historically been marginalised and excluded, such as women and young people in all their diversity. In this regard, social equity is not an 'add-on' but is utterly intrinsic to the effectiveness, sustainability and fairness of LLA. We devote considerable attention in the chapters below to exploring the different geographic scales at which actors are working to enable or hinder LLA, including at the community level. We also examine how socially equitable LLA can be achieved in practice and the results it produces.

Given these reflections, our interpretation of the LLA that is needed across Africa is what we might call 'equitable, community-led adaptation'. However, throughout this report, we avoided creating a new acronym and continued to use the well-known formulation of 'LLA'. Nevertheless, we intend 'local' to reflect place-based local communities, and we consider social equity in local leadership paramount.

Our learning has also highlighted the *benefits and outcomes* of adaptation, as well as the *processes*. The phrase 'LLA' implies a focus on leadership and therefore on the processes of change. There must also be a focus on outcomes: Who benefits from adaptation efforts and how, and is adaptation reaching the most climate-affected people within communities? LLA should deliver equitable benefits and equitable processes, especially for the most climate-affected people. We have tried to weave the narrative threads between the equitable, community-led processes embraced throughout the adaptation cycle and the evidence we have gathered of benefits to different groups within communities.

BOX 2

Who are local communities?

There is no formal definition of 'local community' under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The Conventions invite local communities to self-define themselves.

One definition is provided by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2006)¹⁰, as people who live in a place, are reliant upon local resources, and have "accumulated knowledge, innovations and practices regarding the sustainable management and development of these territories including useful environmental knowledge."

The idea of local communities used in this report is similar: encompassing people who live in a place and depend directly on and manage the environmental resources around them. CDKN uses the term 'local community' in this report to include people with these characteristics in rural, peri-urban and urban environments, and also to include people who are mobile in a landscape: whether they move over a landscape, such as pastoralists, or they have chosen to move to a place for economic, social or environmental reasons. Thus, in our understanding of the term here, 'local communities' can include Indigenous People and 'traditional' communities with very long-term associations with a place, as well as groups of people who have more recently arrived and access and manage the environmental resources of a place in their daily lives. It does not assume a homogeneous social or cultural identity and acknowledges the diversity of experiences, interests, and priorities within groups living in the same place.

10. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2006). 'Who are local communities?' New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfi>

Finally, our learning enquiry has highlighted the diverse intermediary actors involved in conceptualising, financing, delivering, evaluating and learning from LLA. We found that clumping them all together as ‘intermediaries’ without differentiating their roles could be confusing. Therefore, we have sought to distinguish between local intermediary institutions and individuals, and external intermediaries, who are more distant from community processes (see Box 3: *Who are intermediaries?*). We have also set out, in our discussion and recommendations, specific insights for funding partners, whom we also define.

BOX 3

Who are intermediaries?

The idea of intermediary individuals and institutions is widespread in development policy and practice. Intermediaries can simultaneously play multiple roles, at multiple scales of ideas, investment and action. They may help to broker knowledge, innovation and learning – which overlaps with the terminology of knowledge and innovation brokers (Meyer, 2010¹¹; Bielak et al., 2008¹²). They may make decisions, allocate, manage, and exercise accountability relationships around finance in the commercial or public sectors (Dupar et al, forthcoming, 2026).¹³

This report is written by intermediaries in CDKN and its networks, occupying various positionalities and roles in decision-making, management, delivery, and evaluation of LLA. The insights we have derived are sometimes specific to these different groups of intermediary actors. For this reason, to distinguish among three specific groups, we’ve devised these terms for discussion:

- **Local intermediaries** are defined as actors based in local communities. They are often the entities that receive external funds to implement adaptation activities directly in and with communities (e.g. the organisations leading the CDKN K2A projects). They play roles in knowledge and innovation brokering, such as facilitating learning and co-creating knowledge.
- **External intermediaries** refer to actors who receive external funds and channel them to local intermediaries to implement adaptation activities in and with communities. They can also play further roles in knowledge and innovation brokering, such as facilitating learning and insight processes, co-creating and disseminating knowledge and linking to international policy (e.g. the CDKN Africa teams).
- **In this context, funding partners** refer to the direct sources of funding for the work. In the case of CDKN, the funding partners from whom the finance originates are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. However, in this report, we draw on their broader experience in mobilising resources for LLA and climate resilience. The universe of funding partners – and scope of the discussion – is wide and inclusive of: public and private development finance institutions, including national government ministries, international NGOs with their own sources of membership and commercial funding, and philanthropic foundations.

11. Meyer, M (2010). 'The Rise of the Knowledge Broker'. *Science Communication*, 32(2010): 118–127. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1075547009359797>

12. Bielak, A.T., Campbell, A., Pope, S., Schaefer, K., Shaxson, L. (2008). 'From Science Communication to Knowledge Brokering: the Shift from Science Push to Policy Pull'. In: Cheng, D., Claessens, M., Gascoigne, T., Metcalfe, J., Schiele, B., Shi, S. (eds) *Communicating Science in Social Contexts*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8598-7_12

13. Forthcoming GALLA paper on financial intermediaries in LLA in the Global South.

The resilience we want to see

When we consider the benefits of adaptation that we want to see, we hold diverse visions of more resilient individuals and communities. While they differ in their wording, these visions all align with the idea of strengthening people’s adaptive capacity: the capacity to anticipate and bounce back from climate shocks and stresses (see Box 4: Objective: Resilience and Box 6: Understanding capacities).

Our visions of resilience speak to enhancing people’s wellbeing and ecosystem health over time, not just in the short term. We recognise that communities, including marginalised groups, do not merely want to return to the situation they had before climate shocks and stresses. They want to recover in ways that are more resilient and ultimately support enhanced wellbeing and prosperity over time, compared to previous, more vulnerable ways of living.

BOX 4

The objective of resilience

Different articulations of ‘resilience’ by members of our partnership include:

“It’s a community’s ability to withstand the shocks and stresses of climate change, and how the community sees it is them being able to respond to these challenges, e.g. flooding, fires.”

“It’s your ability to withstand the changing climate, your ability to still have your livelihood, to still have your lives, you know, by virtue of the structures...you trigger around yourself. So, the climate is changing, but you don’t get too disadvantaged.”

“The impact of climate is not just physical, and [some] people are affected mentally, so how can we help communities be more prepared, not just financially or physically?”

“Do we just go back to what it was before, after a shock, or do we progress to a more resilient way? Where does prosperity fit in? Is prosperity our objective for right after the shock, too, or for the long term? These are the critical questions for affected communities”.

“We want to ensure that the community has its own food sovereignty. So, if the community doesn’t have the money to buy seeds, we can make the seeds. We see that it’s important to improve the system.”

To build resilience, you need to identify the underlying vulnerabilities of specific groups so you can target analysis, planning, and action to reduce them. Diverse factors shape people’s vulnerability to both the *initial* impacts of a climate hazard and its *cascading* impacts and can hinder their ability to recover from shocks and emerge more resilient. Vulnerability can arise from:

- Lack of access to resources, including financial resources and productive and adaptive resources in the context of climate change.
- Lack of information, including information about their legal rights and information about weather, climate and risk reduction.
- Power imbalances in terms of who makes decisions and sets priorities: among social groups, political groups, finance donors and recipients.
- Lack of access to legal rights, or legal redress if rights are breached.

Understanding vulnerability as a component of climate risk, together with the mission to strengthen resilience, is the starting point for our discussion of how to advance LLA in the chapters that follow.



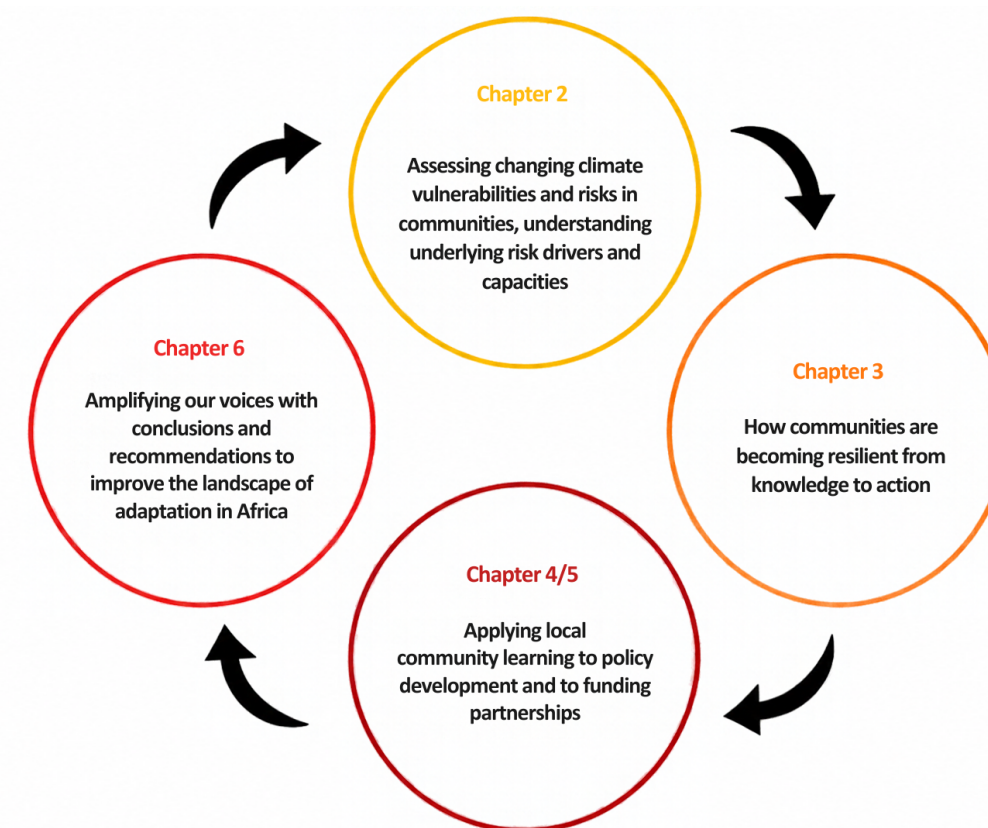
A member of a women's community group sings and dances in Ghana's Upper West Region.

Credit: CDKN Ghana

2. Understanding climate risks and resilience

Having established some of the conditions we consider critical for LLA, chapters two through six describe our iterative cycle of knowledge, action, learning, and strengthening resilience across multiple dimensions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The iterative cycle of knowledge, action, learning and strengthening resilience in chapters



Assessing change

Climate is one of many drivers of change

Key takeaway: African communities are on the front lines of climate change, but climate change is just one of many sources of risk people face, and it can amplify other forms of risk.

Understanding climate risks and impacts starts with community-based work to map observed changes in environments and the impacts these changes have on different groups of people. This includes women, young people, older people, people living with disabilities, and, critically, people with intersecting characteristics, including these and others. This is often framed as the 'climate vulnerability and risk assessment' step in an adaptation process (Figure 1). But climate change is not the lone driver of local changes, and may not even be the most 'front of mind'.



Communities seek to understand how multiple risk drivers shape their environments and wellbeing, and how climate hazards interact with other stresses within society, the economy and the environment more broadly.

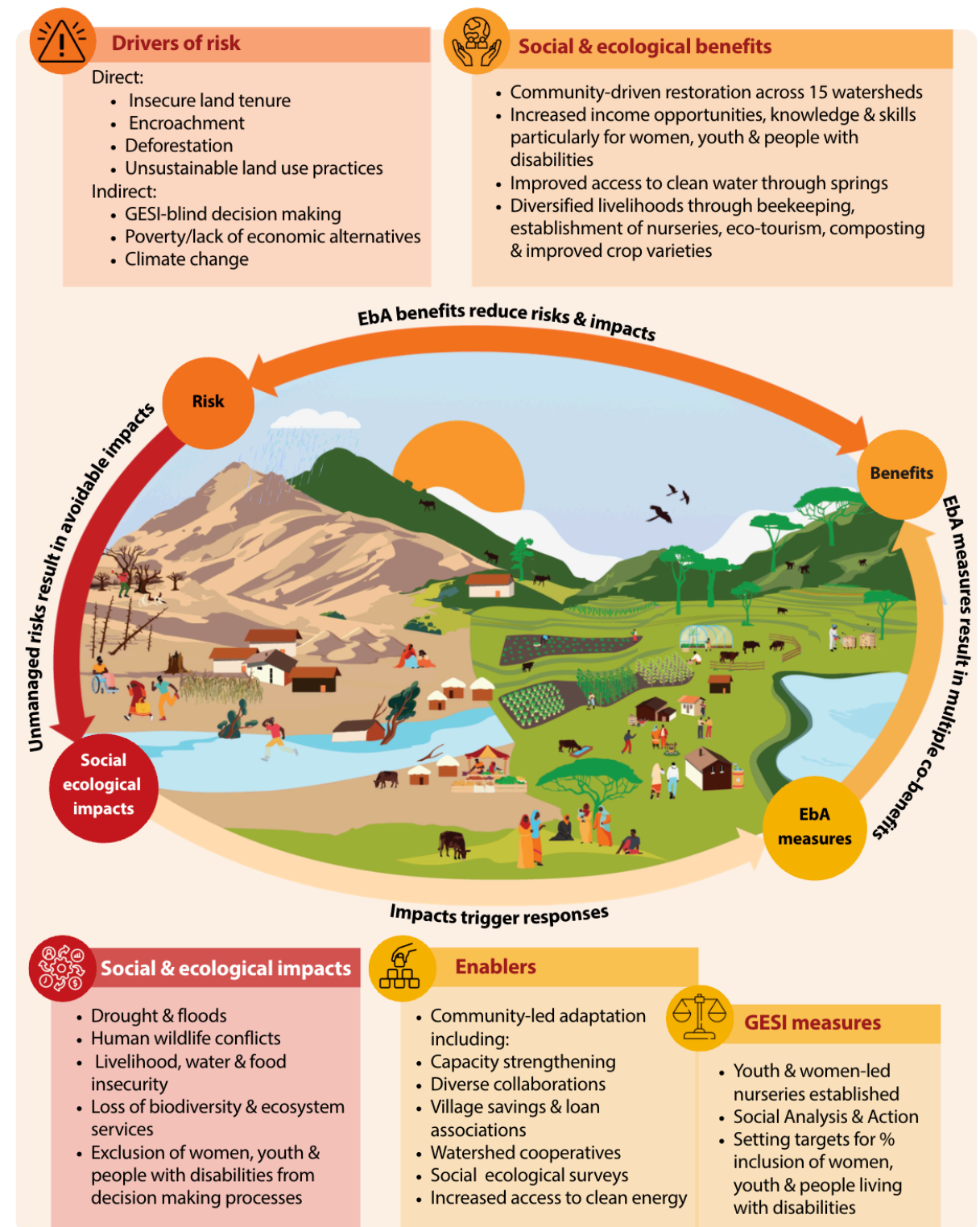
We see complex, intersecting risks with different underlying drivers in the example of communities leading ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains (Figure 2). Here, climate change and variability drive irregular rainfall and hotter temperatures. Communities then face further risks driven by political systems, social norms, and economic contexts. These include land degradation practices, conflict, insecure land tenure and decision-making processes that are blind to gender equity (and equality) and social inclusion. Together, these factors lead to environmental degradation and human hardship. Improving people's wellbeing calls for strategies that address these underlying drivers in combination, such as the watershed restoration initiative described in Figure 2 on the next page, which includes intentional and varied support of marginalised people.

Mapping local capacities and the drivers of risk

Key takeaway: Indigenous and local knowledge are critical for identifying the drivers of risk, the routes to climate resilience, and the capacities for solutions. Intermediaries may bring knowledge to partnerships that complements local knowledge.

Indigenous and local knowledge systems are central to identifying climate risks and local capacities that can underpin solutions. An example of how this Indigenous knowledge is used is the project "Revaluing biodiversity by leveraging African traditional knowledge in Central Benin" by local NGO Survie de la Mère et de l'Enfant (Survie), carried out across six administrative districts in Benin: Dassa-Zoumè, Savè, Savalou, Bantè, Ouèssè, and Glazoué.

Figure 2: Community-led ecosystem-based adaptation in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains



Sack et al. (2026)¹⁴

14. Sack et al. (2026). *Enhancing resilience in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains through community-led ecosystem-based adaptation*. Cape Town: CDKN. <https://cdkn.org/resource/enhancing-resilience-ethiopias-simien-mountains-through-community-led-ecosystem-based-adaptation>

Survie and community members recognise that sacred forests hold cultural and spiritual values and are ecologically important.¹⁵ People living around the sacred forests protect the ecosystems because they believe they hold ancestral spirits, which has helped the forests become biodiversity reservoirs.

The area is water-stressed, and local people recognise the essential role of the forests in regulating water cycles. The project held widespread consultations with community members, including women and young people, chiefs and elders, on how to secure further recognition of sacred forests. These activities led to the resurrection of dormant forest management committees to better manage the sacred forests and so enhance their water-regulating functions – creating greater resilience for people and biodiversity in a changing climate.¹⁶

Scientific knowledge about climate change can also complement Indigenous and local knowledge, advancing mutual understanding among knowledge holders about climate trends and adaptation solutions.

For example, in the Upper West Region of Ghana, deep conversations among CDKN researchers and women farmers revealed complementary expertise with mutual benefit. The researchers provided context for the observed environmental changes, while the women shared how the changes impacted their lives and work, including how women’s experiences varied from men’s. The region is one of Ghana’s most climate-vulnerable areas and communities are impacted by droughts, heatwaves and flash floods.

The film “Voices of Resilience: Amplifying Women’s Voices through Songs for Locally Led Action and Inclusion” (CDKN, 2024a, b) shows how the women farmers and CDKN researchers shared their complementary knowledge to reflect on changing environmental risks. The process aided farmers to systematise their thinking, plan, and act. The women farmers subsequently composed songs about local climate impacts, and how they and their communities could change management practices to become more climate-resilient. The community radio station broadcast the songs and hosted a call-in radio show, creating the opportunity for listeners to engage on air with the content.

“Let’s not cut the trees, let’s not cut the trees. The trees help cool the environment. The trees aid us get rain.”

– Song of the Pavuu Women’s Group, Upper West Region of Ghana (CDKN, 2024b)

Gbankgko Gladys, Pavuu Women’s Group Organiser, related: “Our song is about climate change. And turning that topic into a song is not easy. We gathered information from the book to ensure that our song effectively communicated the message about climate change. We faced challenges because the words were not in our language and collaborating as a team was also difficult, especially when it came to translating English into our own language and making it meaningful” (CDKN, 2024b).

The partnership was ultimately successful, with the CDKN Ghana team concluding that, “This alignment of local and scientific knowledge ensured that the songs were both accurate and relatable to the community” (CDKN, 2024b).

15. For more on sacred forests throughout Africa, please refer to Sinthumule, N. I. 2024 ‘Sacred forests as repositories of local biodiversity in Africa: A systematic review’. *Forest Science and Technology*, 20(4), 337–348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21580103.2024.2397522>

16. Totin, E. et al (2025). ‘Bridging Indigenous and Western knowledge systems for inclusive, forest based resilience in Benin.’ Web article. Cape Town: CDKN. <https://cdkn.org/story/bridging-indigenous-and-western-knowledge-systems-inclusive-forest-based-resilience-benin>



BOX 5

Knowledge brokering in practice

CDKN uses knowledge brokering to enable equitable, sustainable climate action. It connects knowledge producers and its users, facilitating the generation, dissemination, and practical application of knowledge. It also questions what counts as knowledge, challenging the structural and cultural barriers that prevent the recognition of Indigenous and local knowledge. Knowledge brokers’ roles range from synthesising complex information to convening diverse stakeholders and catalysing systemic change. Several key elements are emphasised:

- **Understanding context and power dynamics:** Using varied tools and approaches to analyse their cultural, socio-economic, political and environmental contexts, as well as identify and map stakeholders, along with the power dynamics that define their relationships.
- **Co-creation:** Bringing together diverse sources of knowledge (technical, academic, experiential, local, Indigenous) to co-create insights and interventions that are relevant, inclusive and equitable.
- **Translating knowledge:** Making technical information accessible, appropriate and credible, through clear communications and creative methods, including arts-based approaches.
- **Bridging knowledge and action:** Ensuring knowledge leads to tangible outcomes, whether through institutional change, on-the-ground action, behavioural change, or strengthened capacities, relationships and networks.
- **Enabling reflection and learning:** Supporting ongoing learning and adaptive management, while critically reflecting on the role of the knowledge broker, including their assumptions, biases and perspectives.

“It is not only that local actors, including Indigenous people and their knowledge, speak a different language from scientific communities and external actors. They may also have a completely different conceptual framing. This is what we mean when we talk about different forms of knowledge and different languages coming together.”

– Essia Guezzi, K2A Grants Manager, CDKN

How vulnerabilities and capacities differ within communities

Key takeaway: Local communities are made up of diverse people with different knowledge, skills and characteristics that influence their vulnerability and resilience to climate change. Community-led assessments help identify these differences, while also highlighting community cohesion as an important form of local capacity.

First, community members already are, or have the potential to be, highly capable as adaptation leaders. Communities have diverse capacities, representing multiple forms of knowledge, experience and skills related to climate impacts and solutions. For example, older and younger generations may have very different lived experiences. Women and men’s knowledge and skills may be shaped quite differently by gendered roles.

Second, social capital itself confers significant capacity. Social capital refers to the relationships among people and institutions, including the networks, norms, and levels of trust that facilitate cooperation and collective action within a society. Across our projects, community members often mention it as an important enabler of community-led adaptation action.

Where social capital is lacking, the difference can be notable. For example, this can occur when knowledge disperses through mass displacements or the fabric of community relations is frayed by conflict in areas of upheaval and fragile governance. In these cases, special effort is needed to reduce conflict and rebuild constructive intra- and inter-community relationships, alongside work to address climate impacts and development needs.¹⁷

Third, it is not only individuals’ or groups’ inherent capacities that count. Their ability to act is often constrained by broader social, economic and political barriers (see Box 6: Understanding capacities). To give one example: in several of the contexts where our partners work, a young, unmarried woman may have great talent and ability to lead youth climate action, but still find herself excluded from community decision-making structures and sources of finance compared to someone who is older, and/or married, and/or male. However, this is only one simplified example. Many other characteristics can intersect to create barriers to participation and influence, or conversely confer authority and opportunities for advancement within community contexts. As a result, capacity alone does not determine who can influence adaptation processes. Addressing these barriers is an important part of enabling more equitable and locally led adaptation. The next section explores how intersecting social characteristics can shape people’s opportunities, influence and experiences of climate risk.

BOX 6

Understanding capacities

- **Capacity is more than technical skills or resources.** It includes the knowledge, experience, relationships and agency that enable people to understand risks, identify solutions and act on their priorities.
- **Capacity exists at both individual and collective levels.** Within communities, it varies according to people’s experiences, social roles and access to opportunities. Collective capacity, including trust, networks and local institutions, enables people to organise and sustain action together.
- **Capacity alone is not enough.** People’s ability to act depends on whether they have access to decision-making spaces, finance and other enabling conditions. Local leadership therefore requires both strong local capabilities and systems that allow people to exercise them.

17. For more insight, please see here: <https://cdkn.org/resource/working-conflict-settings-support-lla>

Recognising and addressing people’s intersectional needs

Key takeaway: When identifying sources of climate vulnerability, risk, and capacity, it helps to establish people’s intersecting needs and priorities across age, gender, wealth, (dis)ability, and other key social and socioeconomic characteristics.

In policies and programmes, it is common to encounter a few main groups that have experienced historical marginalisation and face specific vulnerabilities. These are typically: women, young people, the elderly, People living with disabilities (PLWD) and people living in extreme poverty. We have found that LLA requires a process to go beyond these categories to address people’s intersectional needs. Intersectionality is about recognising that a person can have multiple characteristics that interact to create unique and contextual experiences of power, ability to control resources and direct collective decisions and actions, or of vulnerability and marginalisation.

The social and political space for community members to lead adaptation may be shaped by characteristics such as age, ethnicity or Indigenous status, health status, including whether pregnant, breastfeeding or experiencing a long-term health condition that is poorly mitigated such as HIV/AIDS; and other intersections, such as economic status, education and literacy.

Marital status can also heavily affect one’s standing and influence (or, conversely, marginalisation), including whether a person is single, married, or widowed, and, in polygamous contexts, whether they are a first, second, or subsequent wife and her children. The relevance of these characteristics in exercising adaptation leadership is highly context-dependent.

Adaptation interventions can be designed to lift discrimination and empower people with diverse and intersecting characteristics in a community. It is vital to frame climate risk assessments as intersectional and carry those findings into resilience thinking, action, evaluation, and learning.

The objective is simply that through our forest management committees, we have total inclusion. It’s a strong objective! For women, young people, people living with disabilities to participate, they have to be empowered. It’s not merely that they’re physically present.”

– Franck Adanmado, Survie de la Mere et de L’enfant¹⁸

18. Franck Adanmado, Survie de la Mere et L’Enfant, personal communication, 17 April 2026.



Women, youth, elders, and people with disabilities participate in a community awareness session to review mapping results and contribute to locally led adaptation and evacuation planning.

Credit: YEDA

3. How community-led interventions are increasing resilience

Moving from risk assessment to planning and action

Engaging communities

Key takeaway: *An effective way to advance understanding about climate change in local communities is to use their own language and frame conversations with their cultural references and dominant concerns.*

Local community members have increasing first-hand experience of climate change and its direct and indirect impacts. Depending on their access to scientific climate information, they may have varying degrees of awareness and understanding of climate trends and the implications for how they live and work.

Our partnership has used the following approaches to deepen communities' understanding of climate change and contextualise their lived experiences, as the basis for collective planning and action:

- a. framing messages about climate change in terms of appropriate local references and using the primary preoccupations in people's everyday lives as the starting point (e.g. water scarcity, food insecurity, heat),
- b. translating weather and climate information from technical terms into vernacular languages: some terms may not translate literally, but ideas can be explained in culturally relevant ways in local languages,
- c. engaging with people using media and communication formats that they prefer, that work locally, and that are compatible with their needs,
- d. involving locally-trusted individuals in transmitting new knowledge and practices. This can include elders such as traditional or faith-based leaders, but can also be recognised influencers and change-makers from the social group one is seeking to engage (youth leaders, women leaders, etc).

Two contrasting examples show how these principles have been applied effectively in practice.

In Ghana, CDKN has facilitated 'collaborative hubs' that bring together researchers, media and creative professionals to translate climate science concepts for communities. They recognise that what may work in one community is totally different for the next: careful tailoring of messages is needed. For instance, as described above, community women in the Upper West region of Ghana translated their experiences and responses to climate change into songs in the local language. They collaborated with the local radio station to broadcast them and host call-in sessions to further explain concepts to community members.

In Benin, Survie has used churches as the entry point for discussing climate and management pressures on forests, because churches are primary gathering places where people reflect collectively on their beliefs and actions, and church leaders are well trusted. The project has convened leaders from different church denominations to discuss how sacred forests generate environmental benefits. The sacred nature of the forests arises from traditional Baudouin spiritual beliefs; it is common for community members to be Christian and hold these traditional beliefs simultaneously. Most churches honour the old practices of nurturing and protecting the sacred forest. At the same time, local gatherings have sought to convince the remaining church leaders of the benefits of protecting these forests.

Linking awareness and ability to act

Key takeaway: *Raising awareness of climate risks in local communities is insufficient on its own. People want and need the opportunity to act – with knowledge should come greater decision-making power and support for action.*

Another key finding from our work is that raising awareness about the risks and trends of climate change is not enough; it must be linked to recognising and strengthening capacities for action, so that people have a sense of control and empowerment in their lives, which motivates action.

In Ghana, climate awareness-raising activities are interwoven with skills training in entrepreneurship and advocacy on critical areas, including climate-smart agriculture and forest stewardship (CDKN, 2026a).¹⁹ In Benin, the ‘co-production dialogues’, which seek to enhance collective, community understanding of the relationship between sacred forests and climate resilience, are intertwined with tree-planting activities and pro-active work to increase cooperation between government forest officers, traditional religious authorities and others, and initiatives to identify and support the sustainable cultivation and extraction of medicinal plants for local livelihoods and health purposes (Ayimasse et al. 2026).²⁰

“We recognise that simply informing communities about climate change mitigation or adaptation is insufficient. The moment a community is trained and given the necessary know-how, they are better equipped to handle and implement solutions to local challenges”.

– Anonymous, Machakos workshop

In Manica province, Mozambique, the Micaia Foundation is working in community schools to develop a ‘capability methodology’. This uses posters showing a range of environmental behaviours as prompts for teachers, pupils and families to discuss which activities are harmful or beneficial for the environment. The team notes that this differs from mere awareness-raising. It motivates people to change their behaviour after reflecting on the poster content.

“It’s different from an awareness-raising technique, because starting from looking at the posters, people reflect on themselves and they see, ‘Oh, we’re doing some negative activities. We have to start doing something different.’ So, it kind of creates in them the motivation to change some of the things that they’re doing, because they see it’s a conversation.

– Sao Florence Raposo, Gonzololo Youth Network

The initiative has also engaged schools to pilot climate-resilient kitchen gardens as a practical way of linking knowledge and capacities. After the first year’s work, the schools were enthusiastic and have taken the initiative to continue the gardens even without the involvement of a facilitating organisation.²¹

The journey from awareness to action takes place in community institutions. Section 3b further considers the importance of these institutional arrangements, while sections 3c, 3d and 3e explore how initiatives are reforming community institutions and creating alliances to strengthen the participation and leadership of marginalised groups such as young people, women and PLWD.

19. CDKN (2026a). ‘Youth empowerment for climate action.’ Project web page. Cape Town : CDKN. <https://cdkn.org/project/youth-empowerment-climate-action-ghana>

20. Ayimasse F. et al. (2026). ‘Stewarding nature through culture: Lessons from Indigenous knowledge systems for biodiversity protection in Benin.’ Web article. Cape Town : CDKN. <https://cdkn.org/story/stewarding-nature-through-culture-lessons-indigenous-knowledge-systems-biodiversity-protection-benin>

21. Hosia Mavoto, personal communication, 25 March 2026.

Forging sustainable local institutions and alliances for LLA

Utilising existing community institutions

Key takeaway: *LLA is most effective and more likely to be sustainable when embedded in community institutions, whether informal or formal state institutions, while ensuring socially equitable approaches remain central to implementation.*

Adaptation is effective when grounded in local institutions that communities already respect. These might be development institutions formally recognised by the state, such as schools, or, equally, traditional and informal community institutions such as natural resource management committees, farmers’, fishers’, and livestock producers’ groups, women’s groups, and local chieftaincies. In the context of managing natural resources for climate resilience, effective local institutions provide a forum for defining or clarifying management rules, as they have for centuries or millennia.

For example, in Mount Marsabit, Kenya, the Herder Conservation Network has been instrumental in helping pastoralists adapt their livelihood practices to less predictable rainfall. The Herder Conservation Network has adopted a mobile phone app to help herders map rangelands and forest patches and the different animal species found there. The community now uses this information to understand species distribution and abundance and identify pressures on species. A sustainability plan has been developed, including a season-by-season annual grazing strategy that allows communities to move from one place to another without depleting the area’s resources. Together, these efforts represent a systemic transition toward locally led, knowledge-driven conservation and resilience (CDKN, 2026b).²²

At times, community institutions exist but need to be fortified to spearhead adaptation action, as in the case of Beninois forest committees. An important nuance arises in this case: the forest committees were existing local institutions that could form the basis for reviewing and enforcing forest protection and sustainable management regimes (see quote below). The embeddedness and cultural acceptability of these committees was important to build upon. However, historically, they had been dominated by older men, with lesser roles and influence from young people, women and people with disabilities. For this reason, Survie intentionally worked with the local forest committees as an entry point for spearheading local climate resilience, linked to cultural heritage, health and livelihoods; however, in so doing, they also worked to increase the representation and meaningful participation of historically disadvantaged groups on the committees.²³

“We realised last year that there are sacred forests that have management committees, and there are some that don’t have any at all. Sometimes, where there’s a five-member committee, you only see three members because people have left. We are in the process of remobilising people to set up committees of three, five or seven members, and this is where we bring in the notion of GESI fundamentally, because, in these committees, we propose that there are young people, women and even people with disabilities and other marginalised people so that everyone can participate in the management of sacred forests. There will be training for them that will focus on how to co-manage the forests with the [government] administration.”

– Bernard Gnantonou, Survie

22. CDKN (2026b). ‘Technology, tradition and co-existence.’ A CDKN photo story. Cape Town: CDKN. <https://www.southsouthnorth.photos/technology-tradition-and-coexistence?source=share-SouthSouthNorth>

23. Natacha Reinebigo, Survie, personal communication, July 2026.

Forming collaborations between local government and civil society

Key takeaway: A common, emergent theme is that local governments and civil society actors (both as individuals and organisations) appreciate collaborating at the local level to conceptualise, plan, implement and evaluate LLA. Intermediary organisations may, when invited by these actors, play a useful role in introducing expertise and facilitating knowledge flows.

Adaptation measures may be initiated by local government or by civil society organisations. In either case, these actors find it useful to build government-civil society bridges to facilitate and accelerate action.

Cooperation with government anchors civil society initiatives in legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks at the local level. Local government actors often say they consider civil society buy-in to be critical for designing and implementing climate resilience initiatives effectively – although local governments also have a role in sanctioning the ability of civil society to do this.

“In all our actions, when they are developed, we start from the assumption that the government must recognise and legitimise these activities.”

– Hosia Mavoto, Micaia Foundation

These collaborations go beyond being a start-up requirement, or a licence to operate. They underpin the prospects of adaptation and resilience for the longer term. Aligning institutions’ mutual incentives and collective benefit at the local level provides the foundations for sustainability.

“It is absolutely necessary to take stock to know the level of involvement of the different stakeholders and how each can really benefit from the initiative. It is necessary to have a basic diagnosis that will allow us to better profile the interventions. Once this has been done, it is absolutely necessary to try to put the public authorities and the stakeholders together at the local level.”

– Franck Adanmado, Survie

The scope of collaborative arrangements varies from one context to another. That is because the architecture and degree of authority held by local government institutions vary widely from one African country to another. National and local circumstances determine how government and civil society can engage and interact. For example, in Benin, community stakeholders found that their local government counterparts lacked sufficient funding and human resources capacity to implement joint initiatives to the extent they hoped for.²⁴

By contrast, in Kenya, the country’s 2010 constitution devolved much development planning authority, and related development budget allocation, to the county level. There is now ample opportunity to integrate climate change adaptation into County Integrated Development Plan processes. Kenya’s decentralisation has enabled climate-smart decisions to be made close to the people affected by them.

Building from these experiences in Kenya, one of CDKN’s initiatives has been to support and contribute to the development of an online tool to support monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes from

24. Bernard Gnantonnou, Survie de la Mere et L’Enfant, personal communication, 17 April 2026.

county to national level and vice versa. This demonstrates how an intermediary organisation, like CDKN, can play a catalytic role in fostering greater knowledge flows between community members, local civil society institutions, and local governments.

CDKN is co-developing this digital Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting, and Learning (MERL) tool in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the Council of Governors, and the county government of Makunei and Vihiga for piloting, together with a Ministerial Indicators Handbook led by the World Resources Institute. Technical support for the development of the MERL Tool is provided by AGNES Africa. The tool formalises a process for compiling and feeding climate-related programming experiences from the community back to the county level and vice versa, with intentional design to capture the feedback from women, young people and historically marginalised groups.²⁵

“We are supporting communities to actually feed back to the county government, and the county government then is able to allocate budgets for, let’s say, operations and maintenance, or even managing that MERL platform forever, so they can harvest data for them to be able to know how to better utilise that information for future investments.”

– Esperanza Karaho, CDKN Kenya

A barrier to collaborative working at the community or county level can be competing activities and time constraints for government and community members. One practitioner noted, “Everybody is so busy, so many priorities in place...the time factor is something very important.” However, legal frameworks or, simply, explicit agreements among institutions can still be important enablers for genuine progress.

For example, the CDKN-established Sustainable Land Management Platform in Saint Louis, Senegal, brought together researchers, farmers, climate change practitioners and local government technical services as a community of practice. To strengthen government engagement, the Governor of the Saint Louis region issued a Decree, the highest order from regional government, formally mandating government support for and participation in the platform.

Local governments have also learned from experience; one Kenyan practitioner noted that a county government’s early effort to prioritise its budget lines without community engagement had fallen flat. They learned to make sure to consult meaningfully with community members before devising the next round of priority investments.²⁶

25. MERL Toolkit is still in development.

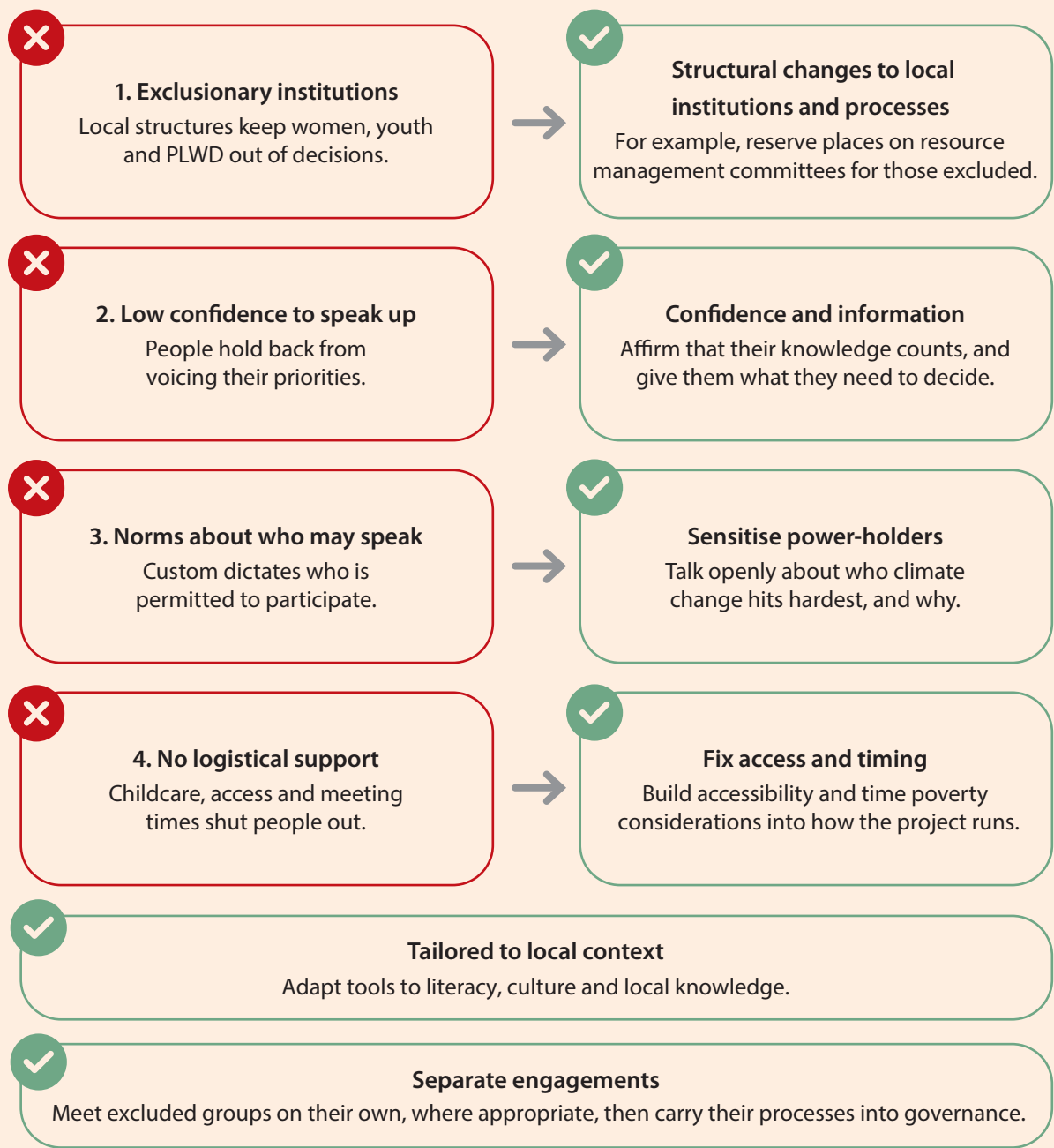
26. Source: Anonymous participant, Machakos workshop.

BOX 7

What participation should be

We find that conventional adaptation projects often consult marginalised groups as a box-ticking exercise, if at all. It is not enough for excluded groups to be consulted if their participation is merely passive and ineffective. Our projects have explored how to enable meaningful participation, ensuring that diverse community members’ priorities and needs actually shape adaptation responses. This starts with explicitly identifying barriers to meaningful participation, and addressing them.

Figure 3: Barriers to meaningful participation and some entry points to unlocking them



Barriers

We have identified the barriers for excluded and underrepresented groups such as women, young people and PLWD to participate in adaptation decision-making as:

- political and institutional structures that exclude them
- limited confidence to speak up and express their priorities
- deeply ingrained cultural norms that shape what is expected or who is permitted to participate
- lack of logistical support to attend meetings (e.g. childcare and breastfeeding spaces, step-less access, aides for the visually impaired, and timing of events that conflict with their schedules, etc.)

Some potential approaches to unlocking barriers

We have identified effective strategies for addressing and overcoming these barriers, such as:

- making structural changes to local institutions and processes to be more representative and inclusive of diverse community members (e.g. reserving places in natural resource management committees for representatives of marginalised and disadvantaged groups)
- strengthening the confidence of under-represented groups that their knowledge is valid, while equipping them with the information and resources needed to participate effectively in decision making
- community sensitisation on role sharing (e.g. discussing explicitly with power-holders the differential impacts of climate change on different groups in the community, the constraints and disadvantages to adaptation that they face and how to overcome these)
- ensuring that accessibility barriers and time poverty, such as limited time due to work, caregiving and other responsibilities, are addressed in project implementation (e.g. meeting times and physical access barriers)
- tailoring inclusion strategies for local contexts (e.g. adapting tools and approaches to match the unique experiences of the community groups and cultural considerations such as their literacy and numeracy, opening opportunities for them to share and demonstrate their distinct Indigenous and local knowledge and skills)
- holding separate engagements for excluded groups where appropriate, to ensure their unique voices are heard and equally considered; these viewpoints can then be integrated into community and local governance processes.

These are general entry points. More detail on improving the meaningful participation of excluded groups is unpacked in the sections below.

Fostering youth leadership and intergenerational collaboration

Key takeaways: Young people are already leading LLA initiatives and working alongside elders to co-create and share knowledge across generations. Strengthening these efforts requires local institutions to create opportunities for youth leadership and intermediaries to provide targeted support for youth-led and intergenerational adaptation.

Powering up youth leadership of adaptation initiatives and supporting the intergenerational transfer of climate-resilient knowledge and practice have emerged as foundational elements of equitable, community-led adaptation. Several CDKN projects take youth empowerment as the starting point for action.

For example, in Kenya, adolescents have become increasingly involved in environmental restoration through the youth-led non-governmental organisation Nature and People as One (NaPO)'s football-inspired 'Conservation Cup' in Marsabit (NaPO, 2026)²⁷. The Conservation Cup is a football tournament designed to encourage youth participation in environmental restoration: to enter the competition, teams must plant a certain number of trees in a defined area to combat deforestation. There are also rules around nurturing and maintaining the trees. So far, the organisation has successfully restored 600 hectares of degraded rangelands and forests, while shifting structures and practices through mobilising youth for restoration through recreation and sport. In parallel, NaPO is actively mobilising community actors to generate the Participatory Forest Management Plan 2024-2029, which was adopted and validated by over 50 actors, including local government, NGOs, and Community Forest Association groups.

Projects involve young people as both 'implementers' and 'ambassadors,' giving young people a chance to influence both policy and practice. For example, in Ethiopia, a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Community of Practice (CoP) among government ministries now involves youth networks in its knowledge exchange and training activities. It is taking a 'training of trainers' approach to capacitate youth leaders in climate-smart, socially inclusive planning and delivery skills, and equip them to transfer their skills to other young people using a locally led adaptation approach in their home communities.

"The plan is, if we have all these capacitated experts and youth groups who are going to implement on the ground, then you can influence the local-led adaptation processes in the country."

– Arsema Andargatchew, CDKN Ethiopia

Intergenerational knowledge transfer is central to youth empowerment. For example, during the NaPO Conservation Cup tree-planting sessions, elders are invited to participate and share their cultivation techniques.

In Cameroon, Grand Slam's Urban Art 4 Climate initiative has been using slam poetry competitions to raise awareness about climate change across the towns of Maroua, Bertoua, Douala, and Kribi.

27. NaPO (2026). 'Nature and People as One: The Movie.' Marsabit, Kenya: Nature and People as One. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyXK9vENjA>



Participants of the Urban Art for Climate project in Cameroon, which promotes climate awareness through creative expression.

Credit: Grand Slam

It has empowered over 800 young people aged 15-22 – including 300 girls – to raise their voices on climate issues and share their messages within their communities. Participants say this has greatly increased their confidence and sense of hope in their ability to manage the environment more sustainably. They have done this through a blend of climate education, traditional craft skills, and creative expression. The emerging 'artists' are promoting climate-resilient, culturally rooted livelihoods. They are challenging social norms – particularly about the default use of plastic disposable goods, when biodegradable goods made sustainably from natural materials may be used instead, and provide green jobs too.

The initiative revives artisanal skills of older generations that are slowly dying out, such as crafting hats from recyclable natural fibres. Training in these traditional trades is intended to both preserve Indigenous knowledge and perpetuate eco-friendly modes of production and consumption that avoid the polluting aspects of modern consumer society.

"All the grandparents, parents, are complaining that the young people are fleeing to the big cities – for example, to become taxi drivers in Yaounde. So they identified that there is a possibility to promote more eco-friendly trades from their region that are Indigenous, such as improved cookstoves, straw weaving. Imagine if these young people are the decision-makers, the ministers of the future. We have forged a mindset for the future."

– Arnaud Baana, Grand Slam



Football players planting trees as part of the NaPO Conservation Cup in Kenya, linking youth engagement, environmental restoration, and climate action.

Credit: NaPO

"[For me] it's a feeling of joy, because I didn't know before how to make tables and benches in bamboo and with raffia. Now I know how to make these."

- Zalifou Alex, Urban Art 4 Climate Laureate, Cameroon²⁸

A CDKN-supported initiative in Mozambique is firmly situated in intergenerational collaboration. In the districts of Guro, Tambara, Sussundenga, and Macossa, Gonzololo Youth Network has been addressing a growing disconnect between younger generations and the traditional knowledge systems that historically underpinned social organisation, agricultural production, and community climate resilience. Elders' knowledge includes farming practices, local climate forecasting methods, seed conservation, natural resource management, community governance structures, and cultural mechanisms for transmitting values and skills.

When intergenerational sharing of this knowledge declines, local adaptive capacity weakens, as many of these knowledge systems function as community-based risk management and climate response mechanisms. In response, the project is implementing a structured process to value, recover, and systematise this knowledge by establishing a 'Traditional Knowledge Bank.' This participatory mechanism reclaims, validates, and revitalises local expertise, repositioning elders, experienced farmers, and community leaders as active custodians of climate intelligence.

Traditional agricultural knowledge fairs are being organised as public spaces for exchange, practical demonstration, and exhibition of local seed varieties, resilient farming techniques, and community-based adaptation experiences. These fairs strengthen social recognition of local knowledge, reinforce community pride, and stimulate intergenerational dialogue, contributing to the revitalisation of production systems adapted to local ecological conditions. In addition, young people interview elders one-to-one to capture and document their knowledge, while also sharing what they have learned about new methods such as composting in a true knowledge exchange.

University of Zambeze scientists are also helping to integrate traditional and scientific knowledge by training rural producers in the conservation of local seeds. This includes measures such as protective storage techniques for local seeds. The university's role is an example of how a local intermediary can contribute expertise and material support to enhance the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge and strengthen resilience.

"We have already lost a lot of local genetic heritage due to the lack of appreciation and promotion of this knowledge. Now our objective is to understand the importance of genetic sovereignty and sustainability, based on the principle that the best seed conservation technology lies in the use of seeds with resilient genetics and adapted to local conditions."

- Hosia Mavoto, Micaia Foundation

28. Grand Slam (2025). Video, Special Grand Focus: Urban Art 4 Climate Voix d'Actions en Faveur du Climat et l'Environnement, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ki8dX2WeD1o>

Strengthening women’s leadership

Key takeaway: Many of the well-established approaches to advancing gender equity in sustainable development also apply to LLA. Across our projects, women demonstrate valuable knowledge and skills related to natural resource management, shaped by their gendered roles. When women can exercise meaningful leadership in LLA, these capabilities contribute to more effective and inclusive adaptation outcomes. This is not only about equity, but also about strengthening resilience for communities as a whole.

While GESI and intersectional issues are cross-cutting throughout the experiences described in this report, as discussed earlier, we now turn to specific needs emerging for women’s and girls’ empowerment, and for male allyship to bolster women’s and girls’ leadership of adaptation.

Specifically, women and girls experience climate change and its cascading impacts differently from men and boys and may have distinctive insights, skills and forms of knowledge to bring to climate solutions. By law, women may have rights to lead effective, ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change, such as land tenure in customary and state law. However, due to social norms, their rights may not be recognised and enforced in practice, limiting their wellbeing and agency.

This is why women and girls must be involved equitably in all aspects of community-led adaptation. Allyship for women’s empowerment must be strengthened across communities – including men championing the cause.

“One of the leading slam poetry laureates whom we selected, you don’t see her face in the final line-up, and it’s because, at the eleventh hour before the finale, she became embroiled in an early marriage, what you may call a forced marriage, and that is one of the themes we need to take up and confront here.”

– (Male) Trainer, Urban Art4Climate, Cameroon²⁹

At the strategic programme and project level, our projects have addressed these realities by:

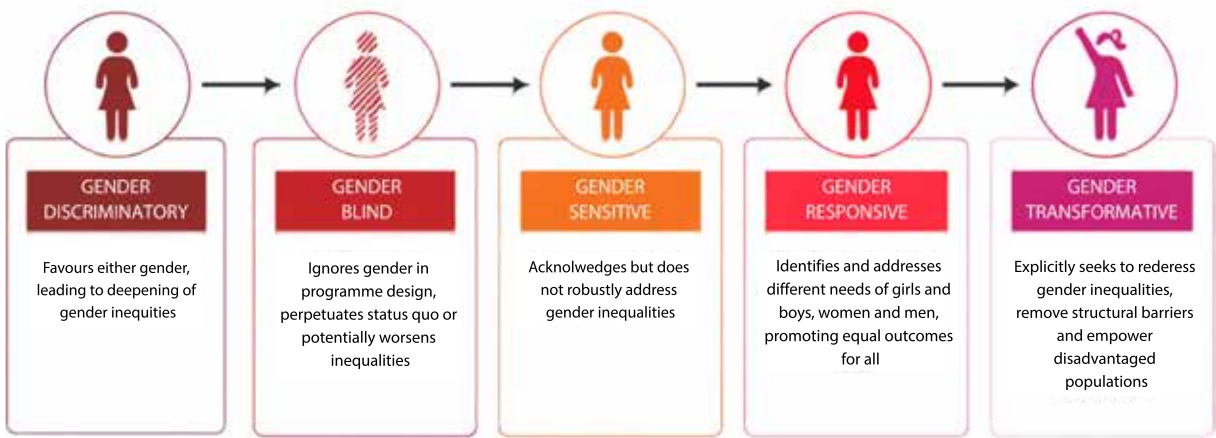
- **Seeking to take a phased approach to strengthening women’s inclusion**, which may be described as advancement along the GESI continuum (see Figure 3) – from a GESI-responsive to a GESI-transformative approach, noting that change is a process that takes time.
- **Developing mainstreaming guidelines and tools to support effective GESI integration** (see, for example, elements of the CDKN GESI training kit for Ethiopia, which is meant for use at provincial, municipal and local levels).³⁰
- **Decentralising GESI analysis and facilitation skills** and so strengthening the capacities within communities for this essential and nuanced approach: resisting the idea of long-term dependency on GESI consultants and seeking to embed the skills sustainably at the local level (Bamanyaki and Dupar, 2025).³¹

29. Grand Slam (2025). Video, Special Grand Focus: Urban Art 4 Climate Voix d’Actions en Faveur du Climat et l’Environnement, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ki8dX2WeD1o> minute 2:50

30. CDKN (2026). Ethiopia Community of Practice for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. Web page. Cape Town: CDKN <https://cdkn.org/project/ethiopia-community-practice-gender-equality-and-social-inclusion-gesi-climate-change>

31. Bamanyaki, P. and Dupar, M. (2025) ‘Gender and social inclusion: Time to stop outsourcing?’ Blog. <https://cdkn.org/story/gender-and-social-inclusion-time-stop-outsourcing>

Figure 3: The GESI integration continuum



Source: UNICEF and Interagency Working Group (UNICEF, 2024)³²

Women’s specific knowledge of natural resources and their skill in natural resource management, as well as their limited tenure rights, are fundamental considerations for climate-sensitive contexts.

This is the case in Senegal’s coastal zones, islands, and inland wetlands. On Niodior Island, in particular, the commitment of women and local organisations to prevent sea level rise from degrading arable land and to prevent local firewood collection from further degrading the mangroves is resulting in innovative solutions to environmental degradation. Women value, maintain and re-establish shell middens (Hardy et al 2016),³³ while solar-pumped irrigation provides them with a means to improve agricultural productivity and related nutrition and income security.

Local groups are organised so that each member can strengthen their economic empowerment by generating income from market gardening. This is especially important since, on these islands, food supplies depend on economic power (direct access to financial institutions and/or financial support from the diaspora), the tides (a safety issue), rainfall and winds (during the rainy season), and the availability of canoes (a mobility issue). Local women’s commitment to resilience aligns perfectly with the agenda of local authorities: authorities have provided concrete support by allocating several hectares of land to women, who have difficulty acquiring it on their own – a matter of social justice.

Elsewhere in southern Senegal, local ecological clubs are strengthening girls’ leadership in adaptation and environmental stewardship. Four ecological clubs in five schools in Kolda engaged more than 2,000 learners and teachers over a year, strengthening environmental stewardship and climate awareness among the next generation of local leaders through inter-environmental competitions, agroecological training, seed planting and the establishment of school food gardens. The ecological clubs focus on increasing and strengthening the participation of young girls in decision-making, as girls are traditionally excluded from community activities.

Working as an intermediary and facilitator, CDKN helped foster leadership among pupils as agents of sustainable development by setting up executive committees for each environmental club that allow both boys and girls to volunteer for positions; now, 60% of the Executive Chair or Deputy Chairperson roles are held by girls.

32. UNICEF (2024). Applying the Gender Integration Continuum to Social Protection A Guidance Note for Assessing the Level of Gender Integration in Social Protection Policies and Programmes. Rome: UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/10031/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-GRASSP-Design-Guidelines-2024.pdf>

33. Hardy et al (2016). Shellfishing and shell midden construction in the Saloum Delta, Senegal, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 41(2016):19-32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2015.11.001>

Elevating people living with disability

Key takeaway: *People living with disabilities face distinct and often overlooked climate risks. Equitable LLA requires their meaningful inclusion in decision-making processes so that adaptation actions reflect their needs, priorities, and rights.*

PLWD are among the most vulnerable to climate change. There is not enough data on who they are and how climate change impacts affect them.³⁴ Climate trends and extreme events can even be the cause of further disability. For example, malnourishment can be worsened by climate change (leading to illness and stunting of children’s growth), and climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria are expanding to new areas under climate change. Increasingly frequent extreme weather can cause injury and illness.

Local support for PLWD varies greatly. There is a pressing need to consider PLWD’s range of needs in equitable, community-led adaptation processes so they can lead safe, dignified, and productive lives.

An example of how disability concerns have been mainstreamed in adaptation action is in Mwala Sub-County in Kenya. The Miu Weir project is an initiative to manage scarce freshwater resources for household and agricultural needs in a climate-resilient way. A Ward Climate Change Planning Committee governs it. This Committee includes community representatives, specifically those representing PLWD, which is required by law, as well as community-based and faith-based organisations, young people and women. The group wrote a successful proposal to national and local authorities for funds for a sand dam and water infrastructure that they would manage locally. Once they secured the funds, a public participation activity was held to ensure the project aligned with the community’s needs, including PLWD’s expressed needs.

Innovating the use of technology

Key takeaway: *Local communities are determining how introduced technologies can be adapted and merged with Indigenous and local knowledge to accelerate and improve the effectiveness of LLA.*

Local communities are capitalising on introduced technologies to bolster their adaptation efforts. Sometimes it is necessary and desirable to introduce new technologies that aid communities to manage scarce resources better. Even if a technology is already well established globally (e.g. solar photovoltaics), it may not have reached the ‘last mile’ in African communities for various reasons of access, equity, and inclusion. As the title of this section indicates, the examples below are not about the technology itself. The innovation is that communities determine how these technologies are used to support LLA.

In South Sudan, a project delivered by Youth Empowerment and Development Action (YEDA) provides solar-powered irrigation for vegetable growing with transformational effects. This is a direct response to the unreliability of traditional rainfall patterns, which has left communities with no certainty about when to plant and harvest. Small-scale, solar-powered irrigation systems put water management under communities’ control. Through CDKN support, YEDA and local partners at the Humanitarian OpenStreetMapping Team (HOT), are also implementing a hands-on hazards and solutions mapping exercise with the local community that aims to map the locations vulnerable to flooding and the resources available to prevent and cope with such risks.

34. UN DESA (2024). Disability and Development Report 2024: Accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities. UN DESA.
<https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/DDR2024-Full-Report-Final.pdf>



Women from Mundri West County in South Sudan engaging in a mapping workshop hosted by HumanitarianOpenStreets.

Credit: HOT

In Mount Marsabit, Kenya, community members are compiling information about climate and environmental change using the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART). This smartphone application enables members of the Herder Conservation Network to log wildlife species, monitor wildlife movement, and analyse these alongside resource use and resource availability patterns, such as the location and status of water holes.

Nature and People as One (NaPO) has partnered with the Herder Conservation Network to train herders to use the SMART tool in the local language, Samburu. The tool displays icons of different animals, such as elephants, which helps users who cannot read. After the training, herders have been able to log the species they see. As discussed earlier, the community now uses this information to understand species distribution and abundance, identify pressures on species, and develop sustainable management plans. They have devised a sustainability plan including a season-by-season annual grazing plan, and the community is now able to move from one place to another without depleting the resources of the area.³⁵ This presents an example of combining Indigenous knowledge and local ownership with digital information and tools.

"This enables local people to view integrated information about the movement of the livestock, the wildlife and the resources available. The information supports decision-making that, in turn, drives sustainability. For example, the information provides a picture of where the wildlife are at this time of the year, and which species are located where. From this, we are able to help and inform the community on the different spaces they can utilise and also move according to the seasons.

– Loitiptip Loronyokwe, NaPO

35. Source: Loitiptip Loronyokwe, Machakos workshop.



Women from Mokori village in Kenya fetch water from a natural water storage at Mokori Rock.

Credit: ADA

Communities mobilising their own resources

Key takeaway: The overwhelming trend observed is for local communities to pursue self-financing modes that will sustain LLA in the long term: this includes use of revolving loan funds to support climate-resilient economic activities, and user fee-based models for climate-resilient goods and services. Development of value chain activities is also favoured. As a suite of options, these avoid reliance on external funders beyond start-up funds, where needed.

Communities have been adapting to climate variability and change for millennia. Current rates of climate change are unprecedented, indeed, but community responses can build on the existing adaptive, entrepreneurial and self-help mindsets and resources they possess. This section deals with communities' mobilisation of internal financial resources in response to climate change. It draws on the development of CDKN's 'Ideas to Impact Toolkit',³⁶ which describes a two-track approach whereby internal financial resources can be deployed for adaptation action in a long-term and sustainable manner, though not typically covering large investments. Larger-scale expenditures typically require external financing, but need to be managed carefully for financial and social sustainability (which we touch upon in the next section).

In monetary terms, communities are familiar with operating a range of small-scale and self-financed modalities, such as village savings and loans associations. These have different names and forms, and can be embedded in traditional and religious rules for money lending. They are also being deployed in forms that target demographic groups who are underserved by modern banking infrastructure, such as women and young people. YEDA have supported village savings and loans associations in South Sudan, which are one such example.

It can be useful to distinguish between financial needs for climate-resilient and adaptive goods and services that generate a financial return (i.e. the initial costs can be paid back), and those that cannot feasibly generate a monetary return. Loans to micro or small private business owners can reasonably be expected to be paid back, for example, and are a popular choice for self-sustaining community funds.

Business-based, entrepreneurial models for financing adaptation include:

- In Ghana, CDKN is actively working with the private business sector so they can participate in climate action initiatives. This includes small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and informal sector businesses. Private sector engagement is critical for supporting resource mobilisation for local climate action, especially financing climate action that aligns with local adaptation priorities. They are brought together with the community to identify climate adaptation investments that they can make.
- In northern Mozambique, a long-term partnership between the Micaia Foundation and Baobab Products Mozambique (BPM), a leading producer and exporter of high-grade organic certified baobab powder and baobab oil, shows how inclusive business models can transform both livelihoods and social dynamics. BPM provides a fair, transparent market for baobab, paying higher prices and sourcing directly from women. Thousands of women are now engaged as suppliers in a formalised, growing value chain. Training in harvesting, literacy and leadership strengthens women's confidence and participation. Women are organised into networks and associations, increasing their influence in decision-making.

As a result, baobab has shifted from an informal, low-value economic activity to a commercial value chain with international reach. Women are gaining greater control over income and increased participation in household decisions. The value chain provides a climate-resilient source of income in a drought-prone region, and sustainable harvesting and forest management support long-term environmental resilience (Kingman, 2026).³⁷

36. Read about the Ideas to Impact toolkit here: <https://cdkn.org/resource/ideas-impact-toolkit>

37. Kingman, A. (2026). *Advancing gender equity and climate resilience through baobab fruit value chains*. Cape Town: CDKN. <https://cdkn.org/resource/advancing-gender-equity-and-climate-resilience-through-baobab-fruit-value-chains>

Investments in public goods and services at the local level can also generate a financial return, in whole or in part, if fair user fees are charged, as in the case of the Miu Weir project in Machakos, Kenya. This initiative was started with public monies from Kenya's Financing Locally Led Climate Change Adaptation (FLoCCA) programme. In this case, the capital costs of constructing a weir were too great for the community to bear alone. Still, the community can make ongoing maintenance self-sustaining through user fees.

The special case of conflict-affected contexts

Key takeaway: *Climate change can exacerbate existing conflicts, while conflict can undermine adaptation efforts. LLA solutions that integrate resilience building, natural resource management, and peacebuilding can help communities address both challenges together.*

We face different forms of conflict in our societies that directly affect how we can confront climate change. Conflicts worsen the impacts of climate change on already-vulnerable communities in Africa. At the same time, climate change amplifies social and economic discord. Some societies have open armed conflict; others have high levels of interpersonal violence and criminality, which impede everyday living. Conflict can arise between pastoralist communities due to resource-based competition for scarce grazing land and water during drought. In other cases, conflict results from political instability and civil unrest. This often disrupts local governance, livelihoods and long-term resilience-building efforts.

A less visible but consistent form of conflict across many settings is interpersonal violence based on gender. This is seldom highlighted but is a universal affliction in all societies. Gender-based violence hides largely in the shadows: shrouded by survivors' unwarranted feelings of shame and their reluctance to speak out, for fear of repercussions or lack of exit strategies. This is an often overlooked and under-recognised form of conflict.

Although the forms of conflict mentioned above are varied, they all intersect with other daily pressures, responsibilities, and climate hazards. This creates contexts where people, from the individual to the national level, are forced to make trade-offs. When faced with direct and targeted threats to safety and resources, adaptation and future planning often fall by the wayside, as communities facing repeated displacement and insecurity may hesitate to invest in long-term infrastructure or livelihoods when their futures remain uncertain. This is reflected across many areas of CDKN's and partners' work. In South Sudan, open armed conflict shapes how people can invest in the future; in CDKN projects in Northern Kenya, resource-based conflicts occur between pastoralist communities; and in Cameroon and Mozambique, political instability disrupts project activities. Below, we discuss YEDA's work in South Sudan in more depth.

In South Sudan, conflict has coincided with increasingly unpredictable rainfall, flooding, and prolonged dry spells. Yet the national government has limited capacity to focus on, or finance, climate change adaptation efforts. Its focus has been forging peace and mobilising resources to support humanitarian efforts for people affected by conflict or climate-related hazards such as flooding. Strengthening resilience and investing in longer-term climate change adaptation have not been pressing priorities. This is partly because humanitarian relief agencies in South Sudan have focused on immediate relief and have not adequately incorporated assessments and investments in longer-term climate resilience building.

In response, YEDA, which began in 2008 with a mission to advance local conflict mediation and peace, is now also spearheading climate-resilient agriculture in local communities while maintaining its goals of peacebuilding and strengthening trust and social cohesion.³⁸ This work takes into account the social, psychosocial and institutional realities that shape how people experience uncertainty, displacement, trust and future planning. It also considers the barriers related to physical access and armed groups controlling territory and movement. YEDA's work illustrates how adaptation in fragile settings can intersect with broader efforts to strengthen social cohesion and create pathways for future-oriented engagement.

38. Source: Driuni Jakani, Machakos workshop

"...in South Sudan in the early 80s up to the 90s, the rainy season starts from April and ends in November, and the local population knows when to plant their crops and when to harvest and also when the dry season approaches. But now, with the effects of climate change and the weak policies that we still have based on colonialism, people are destroying forests and so on...people never understand what is taking place. So with flooding and the long dry spell, we as organisations are marking the areas most affected by climate change. And by doing so, we are also raising awareness to the population of the real impact [of climate change]."

- Driuni Jakani

YEDA's work shows the importance of conflict-informed adaptation, which recognises the additional burdens and challenges that arise in fragile and conflict-affected settings. For adaptation work to be sustainable and impactful, it must factor in the multitude of intersecting challenges and risks that shape life in fragile contexts. It must also recognise the reality that people face immediate threats that may feel more pressing than the sometimes abstract framing of climate change. Adaptation must be designed for prolonged uncertainty rather than assuming stability and continuity. LLA becomes particularly important when the state cannot effectively carry out adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In these contexts, the imperative for local communities to lead adaptation and risk planning becomes even greater.

BOX 8

Human-wildlife conflict

Human-wildlife conflict is one of several forms of conflict that can affect adaptation efforts. Alongside armed conflict, political instability, interpersonal violence and competition over natural resources, it can undermine livelihoods and increase vulnerability, particularly for communities already facing climate-related pressures. For many rural communities, this means crop damage, loss of livestock, damaged infrastructure and risks to physical safety, especially in areas bordering protected areas.

In Kenya's Mount Marsabit area, NaPO has worked with communities to reduce human-wildlife conflict while supporting climate resilience and environmental restoration. One example is the promotion of beekeeping. Strategically placing beehives around farms helps deter elephants from entering agricultural areas, reducing crop damage while also providing households with an additional income source through honey production. The NaPO-established Herder Conservation Network (HCN)³⁹ brings together herders from different settlements. Drawing on their knowledge of the landscape and local community dynamics, HCN members identify areas with frequent human-wildlife conflict and help target interventions that protect both people and wildlife.

Using a smartphone application, (discussed on page 41), HCN members record wildlife movements and key rangeland resources such as water points. This information helps communities anticipate wildlife movements and reduce the risk of harmful encounters. Herders also share their findings with their wider communities, helping to strengthen relationships and trust. These approaches do not eliminate conflict entirely. However, they help communities find practical ways to reduce harm, strengthen coexistence and support both livelihoods and conservation.

39. Read more: [Technology, tradition and co-existence: How one CDKN partner is working with pastoralist communities to monitor and steward their environment](#)

4. The critical role of national and subnational policies

The devolved character of government

Key takeaway: LLA depends not only on community leadership but also on enabling governance systems. National and subnational institutions play a critical role in devolving authority, strengthening local capacity, and creating the conditions for communities to lead adaptation. These governance systems differ significantly from one African country to another.

National and subnational policies can create supportive, enabling conditions for equitable, community-led adaptation to thrive. They can also advance coordination and resolve trade-offs among development actors in the national context. Effective LLA depends not only on community leadership but also on governance systems that devolve authority, legitimise local knowledge, strengthen institutional capacity, and remove barriers that prevent local actors from leading adaptation.

Different governance systems require different strategies to enable local leadership. For example, as discussed earlier, Kenya has devolved a significant portion of development planning, budget allocation, and monitoring and evaluation to county governments under its national Constitution. This has enabled individual county governments to establish the legal frameworks to enrich community participation in climate-resilient development and monitoring systems.

In Ethiopia, where government administration and policymaking is more centralised, CDKN's work has rather focused on creating enabling environments for knowledge diffusion and capacity strengthening at the national level, with the expectation that these efforts would cascade to sub-national and local levels through the national GESI Community of Practice. By embedding equity considerations within national monitoring frameworks, the platform is helping to create supportive conditions for more equitable climate action and development outcomes at sub-national and local levels.

In Namibia, policymaking is also centralised and the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) serves as the central coordinating body for climate action. From 2022 to 2026, CDKN, through the University of Namibia, worked to decentralise climate action through integrating adaptation into sub-national disaster risk reduction committees. CDKN collaborated with a range of national and subnational institutions in these efforts: MEFT, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, 12 of the country's 14 Regional Councils, and the Office of the Prime Minister.

Leveraging community experience to secure enabling policies

Key takeaway: The relationship between policy and LLA is reciprocal: policy can enable LLA, while successful LLA can help shape policy.

Local actors can innovate in their local area, demonstrate effective approaches and tangible achievements, and use these test cases to drive policy change at a broader national level. In Benin, Survie facilitated local processes for forest protection in community-owned and managed sacred forests. It advanced biodiversity conservation by promoting species linked to deities honoured in the *Voudoun* religion and respected widely by adherents of other religions. It set up 12 nurseries where traditionally-used plants are being nurtured for medicinal and religious purposes. Thousands of seedlings have already been planted, and the nursery establishment is intended to sustain efforts over the longer term. This work has served as an important demonstration model that has enabled Survie to successfully advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and practices related to sacred forests in biodiversity conservation policies and strategies.

As a result, national and local biodiversity and ecosystem management frameworks formally recognised Indigenous environmental knowledge. Certain municipalities are considering mainstreaming sacred forest management systems into their environmental strategies, particularly in the District Development Plans.

Identifying and addressing policies that hamper local action

Key takeaway: While enabling policies are essential for LLA, legal, financial, and social barriers must also be addressed to ensure communities can act and thrive.

Although this progress in enabling policy is greatly welcome, barriers remain in national policies that – if lifted – could further spur community-led adaptation action. Survie has highlighted that in Benin, national law does not permit tax relief for charitable donations. This creates a major disincentive for charitable giving to NGOs and local not-for-profit entities undertaking LLA. Providing tax relief would be a critical requirement to unblock individual and philanthropic giving. This is a reminder that a wide range of enabling laws and policies in a national and subnational context may be needed to permit equitable and community-led adaptation to flourish – and some of these policies may not even be specific to adaptation. Furthermore, enabling laws are necessary but not sufficient; changing social norms and behaviours, and resourcing policy implementation and law enforcement, are also required.



Handing over CDKN communication materials to a participant during the GESI National Workshop in Windhoek, Namibia.

Credit: CDKN Namibia



Amanda April from CDKN leading group discussion session on sustainability at the Machakos workshop in Kenya.

Credit: CDKN

5. How external financing partnerships can strengthen equitable, community-based adaptation

"Locally led is about acknowledging what the community knows and needs. Second, it is about knowing what support they need. This is because accessing climate financing and managing it could be technical, where they will need support; this should come from them. For example, they can say, 'this is what we need' and the call to action should be from different communities, sub-national level institutions or population groups. They are not homogeneous."

– Margaret Angula, CDKN Namibia

Devolution, downward accountability and community leadership in funding partnerships

Accountability to local communities in funding partnerships

Key takeaway: Local communities, often through partnerships among local community institutions and local intermediaries, are identifying and partnering with external funding partners to boost community climate resilience, as part of their visions for sustaining resilience over a long-term horizon.

Financial resources are urgently needed to accelerate equitable and community-led adaptation. External finance must be provided in ways that are specifically accountable to communities, to be truly effective. Across the projects, practitioners consistently emphasised that effective adaptation finance begins not with donor priorities, but with community-defined priorities. External finance is most effective when it responds to locally identified needs, strengthens existing institutions and reinforces community agency rather than creating dependency. Otherwise, external funding relationships risk burdening community institutions and undermining the resilience they are intended to support.

"Becoming fluent in donor language tends to make finance more accessible... What is worth not compromising on [is]: who decides, why it matters, who leads. If your community decides the priority, saying so usually matters more than dressing up a proposal in donor language."

– Ameil Harikishun, CDKN Finance for Resilience Lead⁴⁰

40. Read about the Ideas to Impact toolkit here: <https://cdkn.org/resource/ideas-impact-toolkit>

Resourcing for transparency and accountability processes

Key takeaway: Transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation are essential for effective and sustainable LLA, but they do not happen automatically. They require deliberate investment: a dedicated budget is needed to support these aspects of LLA.

Finance is not just required for what donors sometimes narrowly refer to as the adaptation activity, but also to support genuine process elements of community-led organisation needed to make adaptation work. This includes resources for:

- Core institutional strengthening,
- time for facilitation and engagement of community members to co-define problems and solutions,
- ethical and safeguarding procedures.

In other words, putting transparency, accountability and meaningful participation into place are processes that do not just happen; they require adequate resourcing: Participation itself is an investment.

“The key element is transparency. Through all the processes, you need to be transparent with the communities. Before we started locally led adaptation, we had partners implementing, and once they do a closure, the community would feel like this was not their project, and instead it belongs to the partner. But once you go with a transparent model that picks them from the most local and listens to their voices, then they own it and ensure that the project is sustainable.”

– Ajelicah Mulwa, Kenya

In Kenya, the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Natural Resources, and Forestry (MECCF), and county climate change units, have formed a partnership with multiple expert and non-governmental groups (as discussed on page 35) to co-develop a standardised indicators handbook and a digital Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting, and Learning (MERL) tool. The aim is to deliver greater transparency and accountability on how climate funds are being spent at the county level and are benefitting communities (Karahö, 2025).⁴¹

In Namibia, CDKN facilitated climate vulnerability and risk assessments in Namibia’s rural districts, and the associated adaptation planning. Community members know best what adaptive actions can be planned for the short, medium, and long-term, and how to involve local institutions. CDKN’s role was to help communities articulate priorities in ways that were meaningful both locally and within donor funding systems, articulating “what they already know, what they need, what they can do on their own and what external support is needed for each context”, according to lead facilitator Margaret Angula. Based on this planning exercise, the Indigenous San people have now trialled new rangeland management approaches to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

41. Karahö, E (2025). ‘Measuring impact: Kenya’s innovative approach to tracking and reporting climate action impact’. Web article. Cape Town: CDKN. Accessible at: <https://cdkn.org/story/measuring-impact-kenyas-innovative-approach-tracking-and-reporting-climate-action-impact>



A meeting between members of a Village Economic and Social Association in Ethiopia’s South Omo pastoral community.

Credit: Kaleb Worku

Many sources of resilience support

Key takeaway: Building resilience is not only about accessing climate finance. It is about connecting different financial structures and resources in ways that support community priorities. This could involve ‘in-kind’ contributions of materials and knowledge for communities to access and manage directly.

Although support for resilience is often conceived via a climate finance or disaster risk finance lens, in reality, it should be viewed and mobilised far more broadly. It is about the intersection of different financial structures, from local to international, and how the decision-making and management of these funds can be devolved to community level.⁴²

Community and intermediary organisations can be supported to strategically combine different sources of external funding to advance locally defined priorities. To leverage tools, knowledge and human resources, it helps to have a strategy that sustains activities across the engagement, investment and impact of multiple projects.⁴³

Further, community actors can be entrepreneurial about securing partnerships that provide in-kind donations from partners: if provided on the communities’ terms, these can be as useful as pure cash donations. NaPO in Kenya has negotiated for the use of ground transport from the Kenya Wildlife Service to assist the community-led Herder Conservation Network in its task of mapping wildlife movements and environmental change and for soccer teams to attend the Conservation Cup. NaPO also secured an in-kind partnership with a media company to produce a professional film about the Conservation Cup (NaPO and Routes Adventure, 2025).⁴⁴ They have found the film to be highly effective in raising the profile of their work, nationally and internationally.

42. Source: Ameil Harikishun, Machakos workshop.
43. Source: Prince Ansah and Valerie Nutakor, CDKN Ghana, personal communication, May 2026.
44. NaPO and Routes Adventure (2025). ‘NAPO Conservation Cup: The Movie’. <https://cdkn.org/resource/video-napo-conservation-cup>

External funding as a catalyst in a longer journey

Key takeaway: External funding is only part of the adaptation journey. Its greatest value lies in helping communities build lasting capacity, ownership, and resilience.

Ultimately, as community actors recognise, external funding for adaptation is only a part of a longer journey in community histories of adapting to climate change. As well as considering how different forms of external assistance can fit together, and how international or non-governmental sources of funds complement government initiatives, community organisations are considering external funds as catalysts for what will come next, rather than a short-term intervention. For example, project funds are being used for one-time capital costs for critical adaptation infrastructure that can later be maintained through community contributions, or to strategically augment core knowledge systems and processes, such as documenting and applying Indigenous knowledge, with a view to the long term.

“If you empower the community to be able to build initiatives from within and to discuss their problems and have the capacity to present these problems to any partner, then they can be able to fundraise by themselves. They will therefore not have to wait for the next time SSN or another partner comes. They can continue with their work on their own, and even through their own local governments.”

– Ajelicah Mulwa, Kenya

How peer exchange and network building can strengthen community leadership

Key takeaway: Peer-to-peer learning among community adaptation leaders is a powerful catalyst for strengthening and accelerating LLA, enabling communities to adapt and build on ideas from other contexts.

Peer-to-peer learning among community adaptation leaders is a particularly catalytic activity that needs financial support to be enabled. The CDKN LLA workshop in Machakos, Kenya in August 2025 was the catalyst for this report and spun off many new ideas for community action, and productive new relationships among peers. The gathering enabled us to identify many ways of ‘cross-fertilising’ ideas from one locality to another.

For example, Grand Slam Cameroon expressed the inspiration they drew from CDKN Senegal’s model of ‘maisons d’incubations’ (knowledge incubation hubs) where Indigenous knowledge is used as a springboard for innovating new climate resilience approaches.

A colleague from Mozambique was inspired by what the Kenyan communities have done to retain freshwater in semi-arid conditions using sand dams, because they also utilise sand dams in Mozambique. A Mozambican participant notes how Kenyan communities using the Miu Weir dam have gone even further, because they go beyond damming the water “to include a system for distributing the water and creating a whole irrigation network. This is a lesson we can take back to our communities.”



Participants playing the knowledge brokering card game, 'All Hands On Deck', at the LLA workshop in Machakos, Kenya.

Credit: CDKN

South Sudanese colleagues were exposed to ideas from Kenyan and Ghanaian local action, which inspired them to become even more pioneering in their community context:

“We want to be a pioneer in LLA in South Sudan by linking the policymakers, the resource providers and creating a network between the service providers and the local community. We want to create that network with countries like Kenya and Ghana, which have the LLA projects and policies, and we will be able to borrow from them and incorporate into our communities and try to understand how to implement them.”

– Driuni Jakani of YEDA

Peer-to-peer learning is a critical enabler of accelerating equitable, community-based adaptation, as demonstrated by these CDKN examples. National and international actors often ask how LLA can be scaled; this question raises more questions about what ‘scale’ means when we know adaptation efforts must be locally specific. A community-based view asks: how can locally appropriate, community-led initiatives be deepened and improved based on insights from other communities facing similar challenges?

6. Conclusions and recommendations

We interpreted LLA as 'equitable community-led adaptation'. In Africa, and with this understanding, LLA is fundamentally about who drives decisions, not about implementing predefined technical activities. This emphasises the importance of ensuring that decision-making power is shared equitably across different social groups, particularly those who have historically been excluded due to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, or other intersecting forms of marginalisation. This is the difference between 'locally- or community-led' and 'locally implemented'.

Communities across the region are innovating with hybrid knowledge systems, combining Indigenous knowledge, lived experience and scientific information in context-specific ways. These approaches demonstrate that effective adaptation is not about choosing between knowledge systems, but about creating opportunities for them to complement one another.

The experiences documented in this report also show that communities are not passive recipients of adaptation support. They are already adapting, innovating, mobilising resources and responding to climate risks. The challenge for governments, funders and intermediaries is not to create local leadership, but to recognise, strengthen and support it.

Effective, equitable, community-led adaptation depends on governance systems that enable inclusive local decision-making and include predictable, flexible finance. We acknowledge the importance of law and policy frameworks that enable this, and the ways that they are shaped subnationally, nationally and internationally.

While all programmatic approaches should be agile, not static, and grounded in social realities, this recommendation is especially salient in contexts affected by conflict and rapid demographic change, including population movement, and extreme weather events and ongoing climate impacts.

Community actors are working hard to implement adaptation and put it on a sustained financial footing, even when support from external partnerships is insufficient. Community actors are making scarce resources go far:

- **Using what they have to press ahead with adaptation** – protecting local natural resources and using them mindfully– and where possible, restoring them, for healthier ecosystems to sustain communities.
- **Deploying knowledge in its diverse forms** – and recognising how differing kinds of wisdom and skill lie with different members of communities and can be activated to understand and respond to climate change.
- **Self-organising to protect, nurture and share local and Indigenous knowledge** of climate-resilient practices that was being lost. These are precious assets in communities and ones from which external partners could also learn, if they are willing to partner on a respectful and humble basis.

Information about climate change is truly valued and needed to guide local actions. However, it requires a combination of actors to tailor and translate climate information to be useful at the community level.

Community actors are open to innovation and to seeing how action-oriented coalitions at the local level deploy introduced technologies to support equitable, community-led adaptation. These local action coalitions, many in schools and educational establishments, are also introducing innovative practices (e.g. in agriculture) and adapting them to local climate, environmental and social conditions.

Community actors want participation to be real – not consultation for consultation's sake. Meaningful input is needed from all community members to shape adaptation interventions, determine who is involved, who benefits, and ultimately achieve sustainable, more resilient outcomes. From these overarching conclusions, and from the detailed examples in this paper, we have developed recommendations on implementing and supporting LLA for specific stakeholder groups. These recommendations follow.

Recommendations for local implementing actors

We, as local implementing actors, including local intermediaries, recommend to others who have similar roles the following:

Engagement, awareness and capacity-strengthening

- **Support communities to advance conversations about climate change** in their own language, framed with their own cultural references and dominant concerns, to stimulate a constructive cycle of interest, innovation, learning and action.
- **Promote LLA action within community institutions that already exist and are well used and respected by local people.** These institutions might be 'development institutions' formally recognised by the state (e.g. schools), but it is equally important to engage through traditional and informal community institutions (e.g. natural resource management committees, farmers', fishers' and livestock producers' groups, women's groups and local chieftaincies).
- **Explore whether any facets of existing community-based institutions (informal and formal) could be strengthened – if relevant – to make them even more effective** at supporting the generation and diffusion of climate knowledge and action.
- **Take a long-term view of institutional strengthening**, considering how community institutions and the capacities they foster can be sustained over time.

Equity and inclusion

- **Ensure that marginalised and excluded social groups are involved and participate meaningfully** in LLA decision-making structures and processes. Explore ways to even better inform and support their participation, e.g. giving people information about their legal rights, climate change, opportunities to participate and lead – so that they are not merely present, but also well-informed and supported to be influential in these processes.

Partnerships and funding relationships

- **Communities' in-kind inputs should be costed, and the value of these contributions should be fully recognised in any external partnerships.** Communities are already contributing vast amounts of their own knowledge, labour, and material assets into adaptation. Recognising this contribution should shift the basis for partnerships, reinforcing the case for community leadership in deciding how combined external and internal resources are used.
- **Carve a clear, intentional role for local actors, which is adequately compensated, to educate and inform external partners** (including external intermediaries and funding partners) about the climate risks and impacts in their locality, and about local people's values and priorities for action. External actors typically lack sufficient knowledge of local dynamics: they should be viewed as learners, too, and the comparative expertise of local actors should be fully acknowledged. This 'reset' of conventional donor/recipient dynamics is needed to operationalise equitable, just and respectful partnerships for LLA.
- **Ask for project planning or readiness support funds to compensate community people's time on needs assessment and project scoping work**, as needed. This should include resources for GESI needs assessments.
- **Consider external project funding as a 'catalyst' or accelerator for what comes next in building community resilience.** Project funds could launch new initiatives or strategically strengthen what

communities are already doing, while building long-term community capacity. Readiness support can help community-based organisations build on previous projects rather than repeat or duplicate them. Design for communities, governments, movements and networks: the social fabric that will survive far beyond a project or grant cycle.

- **Explore ways for communities to leverage in-kind contributions from funding partners.** If communities need further input from external actors, they may want to explore whether they need money or would be satisfied with materials, technical assistance, or other kinds of support they define as beneficial. The key is that external contributions should respond to community priorities and strengthen long-term resilience, rather than create dependency or additional burdens.

Recommendations for local governments

- **Recommendations for local government must be context-specific, because of the diversity of governance systems across the continent.** It is difficult to give very specific recommendations for local governments 'as a whole' on how to support, enhance and implement LLA. This is because governance systems and the extent of autonomy at the local government level vary widely. This includes how much autonomy local governments have to access resources, including raising revenues, and then to allocate spending on adaptation: this varies greatly from one African country to another. Indeed, it is hard to talk about LLA without acknowledging the overall extent of decentralised decision-making, including budgetary authority, in a country.

Recommendations for external intermediaries

Intermediary organisations can:

- **Be guided by the diversity of local contexts** and not assume that an adaptation solution in one place is the model for another place.
- **Start with community knowledge, lived experience and priorities.** Frame adaptation around how communities understand climate impacts and solutions, using local languages, cultural references and everyday concerns.
- **Build from existing local institutions and systems.** Communities already have formal and informal institutions that support learning, decision-making and action. Rather than creating parallel structures, build on institutions that are trusted, legitimate and effective.
- **Invest in knowledge brokering.** Support trusted actors to convene stakeholders, bridge different knowledge systems, strengthen networks and relationships, and help translate knowledge into equitable, community-led climate action.
- **Adapt approaches for conflict-affected contexts.** Local institutions may have been disrupted or eroded. Equitable, community-led adaptation must be flexible and responsive to these realities, while creating opportunities for local participation and leadership.
- **Recognise that vulnerability and adaptive capacity are shaped by intersecting social, economic and cultural factors.** Seek to understand differences in experience, priorities and agency within communities, and how factors such as age, disability, displacement, ethnicity, livelihood, social status and access to resources influence participation and resilience. Doing so can help avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

Partnerships and funding relationships

Intermediary organisations should recognise that adaptation partnerships can unintentionally create new risks or reinforce existing inequalities if they are not grounded in local realities.

Intermediaries can provide appropriate support and reduce unintended risks by:

- engaging respectfully with community actors to understand their priorities and support needs;
- understanding the roles, responsibilities and inclusiveness of local institutions, including who is represented and who is excluded;
- acting as a 'constructive friend', being clear about the support they can provide while remaining flexible and responsive to community needs; and
- acting as a 'critical friend', sharing insights, asking challenging questions and supporting collective learning and adaptive management.
- Upholding safeguarding, rights and ethical standards as a minimum requirement for partnership, including established principles such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent and the protection of community rights and wellbeing.

Recommendations for national governments

National governments can support the following areas:

Enabling systems and policies

- **Rethink conventional development mindsets: LLA is a necessary shift in paradigm and in accompanying systems, policies and practices to acknowledge people's existing resilience, and enhance it.** Each African country has its own specific governance system: LLA, as we interpret it as equitable and local community-led, should be understood in terms of what is appropriate for each one and how policies can be developed to enhance community-led efforts and support to them, in each country.
- **Legislate for and finance decentralised development, which spills over into the adaptation domain.** Create or strengthen subnational climate finance mechanisms and invest in facilitation and participatory approaches – although recognising that some African nations are further along this road, like Kenya, and need to deepen the monitoring, evaluation and learning to reveal more about 'how' it works.

Equity and inclusion

- **Integrate community-led adaptation processes into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and other national plans and strategies.**
- **Systematise the recognition of gender- and socially equitable community institutions.**

Partnerships and funding relationships

- **Create the right conditions for the establishment of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in general, and community-based PPPs (PPPCs) in particular, to advance LLA.** This can and should recognise the great diversity of private sector actors domestically (both nationally and locally) who can contribute to realising local sustainable development: many are small and medium-sized enterprises, already embedded in communities or interested in opportunities tied to resources and ecosystems.

Recommendations for funding partners

Funding partners, whether national, regional or international, can:

- **Fund relationships, networks and coordination, not only individual projects or organisations.** LLA depends on strong connections across communities, institutions and governance scales. Financing should recognise the time and effort required to coordinate across groups, strengthen relationships, foster peer learning and support collaboration among actors operating at different levels.
- **Provide multi-year, core financial support, which is urgently needed for the trust-building and institutional strengthening that LLA requires at community level.** If funding is too short-term, recipients will not have sufficient time to generate meaningful benefits; it is important to allow time and support to work through a cycle of action, learning, understanding benefits, and adjusting approaches to create a strong legacy.
- **Build strategically on what already exists.** Rather than reinventing approaches or creating parallel initiatives, funding should strengthen and connect existing efforts, institutions and learning that are already working equitably and effectively at community level.
- **Consider initial planning or readiness grants to organisations** (both community-based organisations and intermediary ones working with communities) to scope and validate ideas, including how to build on what exists. **And/or extend grant tenures** (which is a systemic issue) and allow for the first year to focus on scoping and readiness, with sufficient resources to make this meaningful. Such support can also enable communities to document priorities, undertake needs assessments and **recognise the value of communities' in-kind contributions, including time, labour, and local knowledge.** External support can complement and strengthen these existing community investments.
- **Invest in climate-resilient development in conflict-affected contexts.** In settings affected by conflict or displacement, external investment should go beyond short-term relief to support longer-term, community-embedded approaches to resilience. This includes flexible, context- and GESI-responsive support that strengthens local capacities, livelihoods, and adaptation pathways in ways that reflect shifting realities and community priorities.

Further recommendations for international actors

Regional bodies such as the African Union can:

- **Embed community-led adaptation** into the implementation of *Agenda 2063* and other continent-wide commitments.

International institutions such as development finance institutions can:

- **Recognise that African communities are already adapting; international actions must strengthen local initiatives and not undermine them.** A degree of humility is required by international institutions on how their contribution may fit. International institutions add greatest value when their contributions strengthen and build on community-led initiatives, rather than unintentionally displacing or undermining them. This requires a willingness to listen, learn and work in ways that are responsive to community priorities and leadership.
- **Recognise African local and community leadership, strengthen African intermediary organisations and invest in peer-to-peer learning,** so that the strong roots of resilience in Africa can be further nurtured and supported appropriately – utilising the talents, skills and knowledge that already exist.

ANNEX

CDKN Africa projects and programmes

Enhancing biodiversity using traditional African knowledge, Benin

Survie de la Mère et de l'Enfant, Cercle de Développement des Initiatives Féminines, Bureau d'appui Conseil d'Afrique pour les Réalisations, and Association pour la Promotion des Initiatives Locales worked in Collines, Benin to:

- Strengthen capacity to protect sacred forests, native species, and vital resources by embedding traditional knowledge in daily forest management.
- Document Indigenous methods of sustainable forest management to be ready for integration into ecosystem plans and the (upcoming at the time of writing) national Biodiversity Bill.
- Validate co-led governance with spiritual leaders, authorities, and grassroots actors, setting a precedent for culturally grounded ecosystem-based adaptation across the region.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/project/enhancing-biodiversity-using-traditional-african-knowledge-benin>

Urban art for climate, Cameroon

Grand Slam National, ABOK Art, Mbar Mart Sarl, Voice4thought, and Coupe d'Afrique de Slam Poésie worked across four towns in Cameroon to:

- Empower 30 young artists in Maroua, Bertoua, Douala, and Kribi to champion climate action.
- Build confidence and leadership in 72 girls through inclusive creative spaces.
- Engage female trainers as role models, supporting 18 girls per city and challenging gender norms.
- Harness youth creativity for activism, making storytelling a tool for careers, climate education, and behaviour change in urban areas in Cameroon.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/project/urban-art-climate-cameroon>

Ecosystem restoration and governance by Indigenous communities, Kenya

Nature and People as One (NaPO) worked to:

- Secure institutional commitment from the Kenya Forest Service to validate and implement a community-led forest management plan for Mount Marsabit.
- Support community-led dryland forest and rangeland restoration through Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) and football tournaments to engage young people (the NaPO 'Conservation Cup')
- Support real-time monitoring of wildlife and pastoral movements, through the Herder Conservation Network to help mitigate human-wildlife conflict and protect ecosystems.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/project/mobilising-locally-led-action-restoration-and-governance-mount-marsabit-kenya>

Learning for resilience, Mozambique

Micaia Foundation and Gonzololo Youth Network worked in Manica province to:

- Initiate 30+ community-led climate actions that draw strength from both Indigenous practices and climate science to address real, local challenges.
- Strengthen climate literacy among youth, especially young women, through learning exchanges that bridge rural and urban perspectives.
- Produce open-source, context-specific learning materials that enable others to replicate our integrated approach to climate education and action.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/project/supporting-local-adaptation-efforts-leverage-scientific-and-indigenous-knowledge-western-mozambique>

Climate on the map, South Sudan

Youth Empowerment and Development Aid (YEDA) and Humanitarian Open Street Mapping worked in Mundri County to:

- Develop the first climate risk maps for Mundri County to inform local decision-making in a high-risk area.
- Co-create a community disaster response plan with authorities and NGOs to strengthen flood preparedness.
- Enhance natural resource protection by combining geospatial data with Indigenous knowledge to combat deforestation and restore ecosystems.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/project/identifying-climate-related-risks-and-adaptation-measures-through-infrastructure-mapping-south-sudan>

CDKN Ghana programme

CDKN's Ghana country programme supports:

- Youth-led organisations to successfully influence climate policy across governance scales to effectively address community needs.
- Grassroots groups and young entrepreneurs to demonstrate greater financial autonomy by securing climate finance and implementing impactful, locally driven projects.
- Enhancing climate literacy in vulnerable communities (Upper West, Upper East, Northern, and coastal regions) through innovative tools and strategic media engagement.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/regions/ghana>

CDKN Ethiopia programme

CDKN's Ethiopia country programme supports:

- Youth-led climate groups to strengthen their institutional capacity through the national Community of Practice, to have a stronger voice in national networking events.
- Youth-led climate groups with technical assistance and grants to explore further funding.
- Integrate GESI considerations in Ethiopia's national climate policies and plans, through a national multi-stakeholder platform: the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Community of Practice.

This is part of the programme's longstanding work with Ethiopia's climate coordinating institutions, including the Climate Resilient Green Economy Facility and the Ministry of Planning and Development, to mainstream GESI for climate action across sectors and government departments.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/regions/ethiopia>

CDKN Kenya programme

CDKN's Kenya country programme supports:

- The development and integration of a Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) tool into national and county government frameworks to improve the tracking of locally led climate finance investments, delivery and project data.
- Strengthened community, county, and ministry capacities on MERL, climate finance, and tracking outcomes.
- Enhanced gender-responsive leadership capacity in Kenyan counties to improve the governance and sustainability of climate investments.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/regions/kenya>

CDKN Namibia programme

CDKN's Namibia country programme supports:

- Sub-national disaster risk management committees to integrate climate change.
- National and sub-national governments to strengthen their capacity for inclusive and gender-mainstreamed climate action.
- Enhanced capacity to access climate finance in Namibia.

The team is also developing a GESI resource pack with the Ministry of Gender Equality Social Welfare, Namibia Nature Foundation, Environmental Investment Fund and academic researchers to support climate professionals.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/regions/namibia>

CDKN Senegal programme

CDKN's Senegal country programme supports:

- Improved living conditions for local coastal communities, especially women, in the Petite-Cote region of southern Senegal.
- The creation of an enabling environment for local authorities to engage and support local actors in their initiatives.
- The establishment of a web-based resource centre to respond to recurring requests for local and Indigenous information and knowledge around locally-led climate adaptation practices.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/regions/senegal>

CDKN LLA project page

Webpage on CDKN's website highlight LLA as a priority action area.

Visit: <https://cdkn.org/project/locally-led-adaptation-priority-area>

Glossary

Glossary of climate change adaptation concepts and definitions

Adaptation : The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects. The goal is to moderate or avoid harm or to exploit beneficial opportunities. For example, switching to drought-resistant crops is an adaptation measure. This is distinct from mitigation, which focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change itself.

Bottom-up approach: A strategy where planning and decision-making start at the local or community level before progressing to higher, central levels. This contrasts with a top-down approach, where national governments or international bodies formulate strategies and then pass them down for implementation. LLA champions a bottom-up approach to ensure solutions are relevant and sustainable.

Capacity strengthening: Is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world. An essential ingredient in capacity-strengthening is transformation that is generated and sustained over time from within; transformation of this kind goes beyond performing tasks to changing mindsets and attitudes.

Climate finance: Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.

Climate justice⁴⁸: A concept that frames climate change as an ethical and political issue, not just an environmental one. It recognises that the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities contribute the least to climate change but suffer its worst effects.

Community-based adaptation (CbA) : A practical methodology that puts the principles of LLA into action. CbA is a community-led process where local groups identify their climate risks and priorities and use their knowledge to implement adaptation projects. It is fundamentally a bottom-up approach.

Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) : EbA is the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall adaptation strategy to help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. EbA aims to maintain and increase the resilience and reduce the vulnerability of people and the ecosystems they rely upon in the face of the adverse effects of climate change.

GESI (gender equality and social inclusion) : A framework that recognises that climate change impacts are not gender-neutral and affect different social groups disproportionately. GESI ensures that climate action addresses the differentiated impacts of climate change on marginalised groups, particularly women and socially excluded populations (the elderly, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples), while promoting equitable participation in climate solutions.

The concept of social inclusion in climate action recognises that multiple, overlapping systems of inequality shape climate impacts. Social inclusion encompasses processes that ensure individuals and groups have access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes necessary for full participation in society. It emphasises both distributive justice (fair allocation of resources and burdens) and procedural justice (meaningful participation in decision-making processes).

Finance for resilience: Finance for resilience refers to the mobilisation, allocation, and management of financial resources in ways that enable individuals, communities, businesses, organisations, countries, and systems to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, recover from, and transform in the face of shocks and stresses – such as those caused by climate change, economic volatility, or social disruption – while strengthening their long-term capacity to thrive. It encompasses a range of strategies, from microfinance for vulnerable populations to green bonds for large-scale infrastructure projects, all aimed at building capacity to withstand shocks and stresses.

Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) : Indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. Local knowledge refers to the understandings and skills developed by individuals and populations, specific to the place where they live. These forms of knowledge, jointly referred to as Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK), are often highly context-specific and embedded in local institutions, providing biological and ecosystem knowledge alongside landscape information.

Knowledge brokering: The process of facilitating evidence-based decisions and climate action through increasing the accessibility of information; translating and tailoring information to be relevant, credible and understandable; integrating different knowledge types through co-creation across a range of stakeholders and sectors; and surfacing and addressing the systemic barriers that prevent sustainable and equitable climate outcomes. CDKN has defined knowledge brokers as facilitators of change who strengthen relationships, networks, and understanding of the climate challenge, drawing on diverse types of knowledge and experience, to ensure appropriate decisions are taken and implemented for a more climate-resilient world.

Locally led adaptation (LLA): LLA is an approach to climate change adaptation that empowers local communities to lead the design, implementation, and monitoring of solutions. It recognises that local people possess essential knowledge about their environment and social systems, making them best placed to address their unique climate challenges. The focus is on shifting power and resources from traditional top-down models to local actors.

Loss and damage: Loss and damage is a general term used in UN climate negotiations to refer to the consequences of climate change that go beyond what people can adapt to; for example, the loss of coastal heritage sites due to rising sea levels or the loss of homes and lives during extreme floods. This also includes situations where adaptation options exist, but a community doesn't have the resources to access or utilise them.

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs): A process established under the UNFCCC to help countries conduct comprehensive medium- and long-term climate change adaptation planning.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs): The climate action plans submitted by each country that is a party to the Paris Agreement. NDCs outline how a country plans to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts.

Paris Agreement: A legally binding international treaty on climate change. 195 Parties adopted it at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015. It entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its overarching goal is to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.”

Resilience: The capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event, trend, or disturbance. Resilient systems can respond or reorganise in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation.

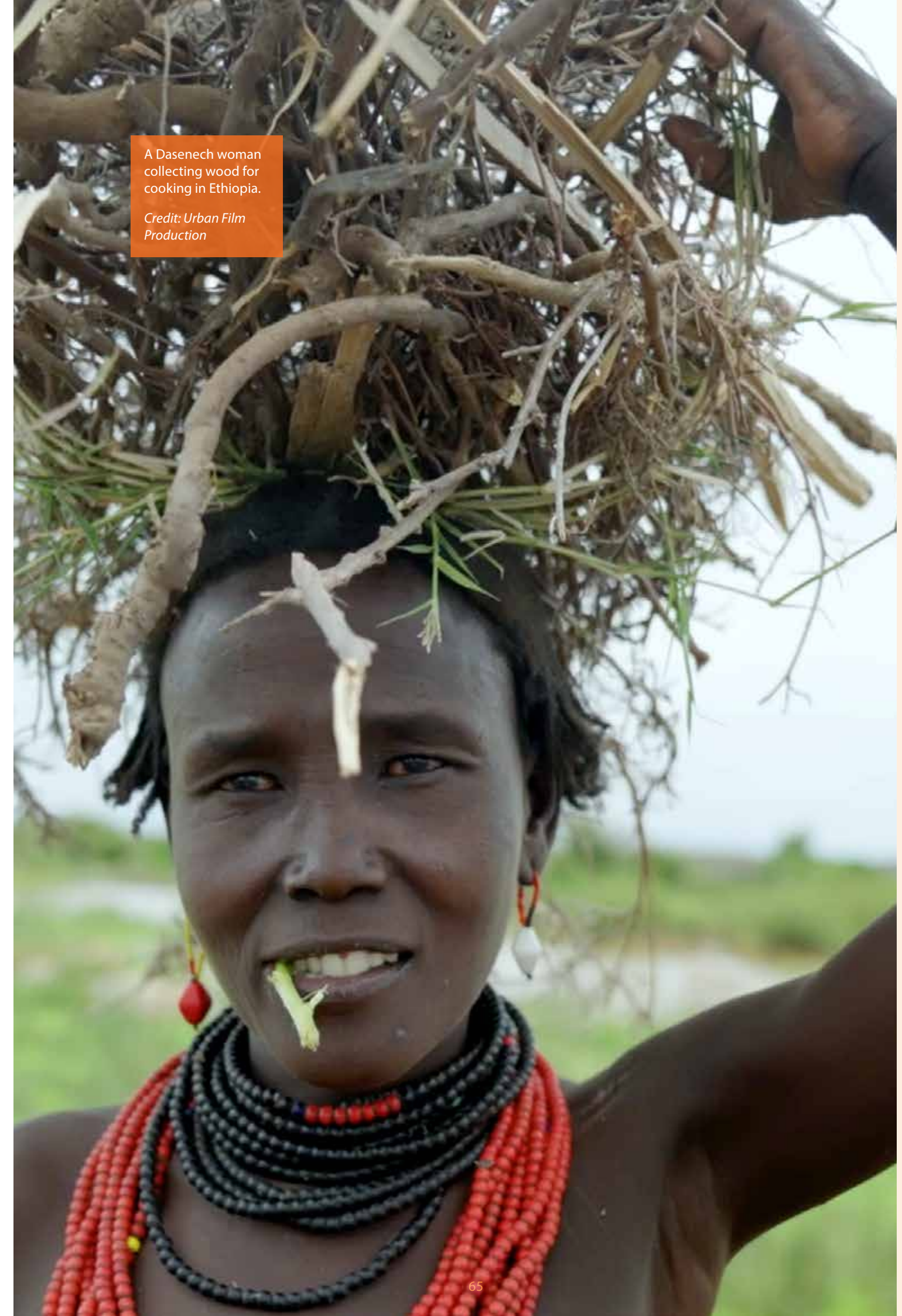
Stakeholder engagement: The process of actively involving all parties who have an interest in or are affected by a project or policy.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): The main international treaty, established in 1992, for combating “dangerous human interference with the climate system.” It provides the foundation for global climate action and hosts annual negotiations called Conferences of the Parties (COPs).

Vulnerability : Vulnerability is the propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected. It results from a complex set of drivers and interacting conditions within a system that derive from historical and prevailing cultural, social, environmental, political, and economic contexts.

A Dasenech woman
collecting wood for
cooking in Ethiopia.

*Credit: Urban Film
Production*





A documentary team interviews a woman from a pastoral community in Ethiopia's South Omo Zone (Credit: Kaleb Worku)

About the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)

CDKN is a Southern-led global programme, established in 2010 to enhance the well-being of those most affected by climate change – especially women, girls and marginalised groups – through transformative climate action. Its current five-year phase (2022–2027) supports equitable, locally-led, financed and ecosystem-based climate responses that mobilise the capacity and leadership of local actors, including community organisations, governments, researchers and civil society groups, across the Global South. CDKN is managed by SouthSouthNorth, in partnership with Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (FFLA) and ICLEI South Asia, and co-funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and Canada's International Development Research Centre.

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Netherlands

CDKN funders



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This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, as part of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) Programme. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, or of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) or its Board of Governors, or of the entities managing CDKN.