Chairs report:

Findings from the Adaptation Research Alliance Climate Risk Assessments in LDCs consultative process

October 2021

Contents

1. Background to the exercise

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is a global collaborative effort to catalyse increased investment and capacity for action-orientated research. The ARA aims to promote evidence-based solutions. A key initial mechanism for achieving the ARA aims is organizing and conducting multi-stepped consultative processes. These consultative processes should: i) identify critical knowledge needs for action to ensure that funding is targeted; ii) support a community of relevant stakeholders from science, policy and practice, relevant to specific Topic Areas, who are likely to use the knowledge generated to take action; and iii) lay the groundwork for attracting funder interest and structuring action research programmes.

1.1. Aims and objectives of this process

Leading up to COP26, proof-of-concept pilot processes in four Topic Areas were commissioned to kick-off the consultative processes within the ARA. This report presents findings from the **Climate Risk Assessment (CRA) in LDCs Topic Area** (others were Food systems, global health and gender and social inclusion). As a proof of concept, this was not intended to be an exhaustive exercise that highlighted all the challenges associated with CRAs in LDCs, but aimed to provide a basis for further consultations and action research within this Topic Area. In particular, the consultative process aimed to explore three specific questions:

1. What are the barriers to undertaking and using CRAs that can be addressed through knowledge, research, and innovation?

2. What are the opportunities for overcoming these barriers?

3. What role could practitioners, researchers, donors and ARA play in addressing these barriers?

1.2 Approach and design

Based on the objectives of the consultative processes and following the guidance from the ARA Steering Group, the consultations focused on national level CRAs and elicited common challenges/problems across regions, as opposed to specific country-level challenges. The following activities were implemented:

Consultation stages	Process and outcome(s)
Background/scoping exercise to understand the current landscape of CRAs in LDCs	Acknowledging the huge number of CRAs that have been implemented across LDCs, the consultative process was initiated by selecting four LDCs in different regions and collating information about CRAs that have been implemented in these LDCs. This exercise helped to build an understanding of the landscape of CRAs and consider the design of consultations. In total, 24 CRAs were reviewed across Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Senegal.
Engagement with the Steering Group to inform consultation design	Building on the evidence and findings from the background/scoping exercise, the team proposed an indicative outline for consultations during a meeting with the Steering Group relevant to CRAs in LDCs. The feedback that was provided by the Steering Group during this meeting was incorporated into a scoping report that shared some of the background information, proposed a way forward and listed key stakeholders for consultations.
Initial stakeholder workshop (31 August 2021)	The initial two-hour workshop, which included 22 stakeholders from across the user, CRA practitioner, researcher and donor spectrums, aimed to prioritise barriers and opportunities to effectively undertaking CRAs, as well as knowledge needs themes for further

	unpacking in focused follow-on dialogues. Two case studies of CRAs were shared at the beginning of the workshop to "set the scene". Three dominant themes were identified during this workshop, namely: i) Climate Risk Assessments as an inter-linked issue; ii) data issues; and iii) communication and taking action, to frame the following deep-dive dialogues
Deep dive dialogues and key informant discussions (Dialogues: 9, 13 and 15 September 2021)	Three deep-dive dialogues (one hour each) were undertaken to flesh out the themes that emerged from the initial workshop (see above). These dialogues were voluntary and included between three and seven stakeholders each. Subsequent discussions with additional key informants were also undertaken to generate insights on some aspects of these themes.
Key message distillation	The notes from the three deep-dive dialogues were assessed to distil sub-themes relevant to problems associated with designing and undertaking CRAs, opportunities for resolving these problems and recommendations for acting on these opportunities. These sub-themes were shared with the Steering Group to allow for review and further input. After review by the Steering Committee, the findings were further distilled into a set of six high-level cross-cutting needs.

2. Findings and recommendations

2.1 Brief introduction to CRAs based on the scoping exercise

The background/scoping exercise helped to build an understanding of CRAs, which vary in geographical scale, sectoral scope, process and breadth. For instance, CRA's could range from a national, top-down (often data driven), cross-sectoral assessment to a local, sectoral, participatory process-driven assessment. CRAs are founded on the conceptual framework(s) for risk, which are constantly evolving but tend to emphasise multiple interacting elements, namely vulnerability, exposure, and hazards, all of which interact to result in an impact (Figure 1, left). Some assessments that inform understanding of risk focus only on one or two of these elements (e.g. vulnerability, or hazards). Recently, the IPCC 6th Assessment Report (AR6) added a fourth element to the AR5 conceptual framing for climate risks, namely the 'response' to climate risk (Figure 1, right). This response may be in the form of adaptation or mitigation measures that are implemented to address climate risk. This addition reflects the need to consider how responses to risk may exacerbate or mitigate risk and adds a new dimension to the scope of CRAs.

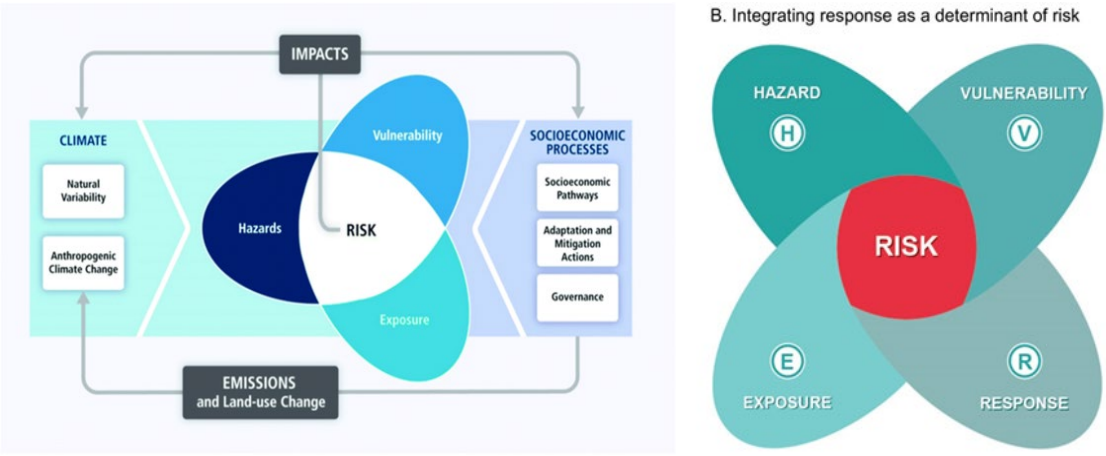

Figure 1: Traditional elements of a climate risk assessment (left); Elements of climate risk assessment including the addition of the response element (right)

2.2 Challenges, knowledge needs, opportunities and recommendations

The table in this section details the full knowledge-to-action needs that were identified during the consultative process, as well as the opportunities and recommendations relevant to these needs that were identified by participants of the consultative process. The recommendations have been linked to stakeholders who are involved in either the commissioning (donors/clients), research (researchers) and/or development of CRAs (practitioners).

Problem / Challenge	Knowledge needs to better support CRAs	Opportunities to address these needs	Broad recommendations	Stakeholder links to recommendations
1. It is often unclear why CRAs are undertaken or what questions or decisions are being targeted. This is particularly true for national scale top down assessments. This impedes the uptake and use of the resultant outputs	Need to define the purpose of CRAs and how they are funded	● Critically assess the need for each new CRA. An alternative is to promote experience or learning from other assessments and their interpretation, rather than performing a new assessment from scratch (which tends to then refocus on gathering and analysing data, often using different models and techniques). The interpretation of multiple sources of risk information (national - local scales, including local knowledge), is often a more productive way forward. ● Work towards mainstreaming CRA processes within institutions (i.e. moving away from donor-funded CRAs). ● Document learning and impact generated during CRA processes to enable future CRAs to be more targeted depending on the application and methodology.	● **Facilitate capacity building and knowledge sharing across the CRA community** ● **Understand the problem that the CRA intends to address:** The CRA problem, scale and process should be bound at the beginning, including how to handle lack of data and/or data/used for assessments at different scales ● **Solicit pre-consultations/concept notes:** Set aside a portion of the CRA budget for planning ● **Allocate resources for developing transdisciplinary partnerships, research and capacity development** ● **Plan for and resource institutional capacity to conduct CRAs** Embedding the CRA process into relevant institutions and ensuring staff availability and training to continually develop and update CRAs in response to country requirements.	CRA practitioners and donors CRA practitioners and donors Donors Donors Donors

2. The current processes of undertaking CRAs have some shortcomings that need addressing in order for CRAs to be more useful.	Need to revise/rethink the CRA process .	● Allow for flexibility in the CRA process to respond to stakeholder needs, logistics etc. Frequent engagements with stakeholders (including "users") on the usefulness/interpretation of CRAs can strengthen these processes. ● Consider CRAs as an iterative M,E & L process, which allows tracking of risk reduction over time as a result of adaptation interventions. ● Recognise the value of a diversity of stakeholders and perspectives (including practitioners and CRA "users") in the process.	● **Encourage flexible CRA approaches:** Build flexibility into the CRA approach. This includes encouraging the value of the process as well as the value of the output. ● **Develop methods for evaluating CRAs that link to existing M,E & L processes:** Develop M,E & L approaches for CRAs, with a focus on linking to existing climate tracking processes. ● **Synthesise information on CRAs that provides guidance.** Develop guidelines for which types of CRA to be performed for different applications. Ensure this guidance is practically orientated - not more guidebooks. ● **Bring various stakeholders (including practitioners and CRA "users") and different types of information into the CRA process:** Practitioners offer practical, on-the-ground knowledge. Realise the limits of academic focussed CRAs and find ways to include non-traditional sources of information to	CRA practitioners, researchers and donors CRA practitioners and donors CRA practitioners, researchers and donors CRA practitioners, researchers and donors

			supplement more academic and research orientated methods.	
3. Climate risks are complex, involving drivers at multiple spatial and temporal scales, and with strong interlinkages across sectors (e.g. water, agriculture, health) and it is impossible to build a complete understanding of a risk context. Pragmatically, CRAs need to focus on particular scales and/or sectors, which can result in misrepresentations of risks. National scale CRAs often don't have meaning at local scales, sectoral CRAs are difficult to use when multiple sectors are strongly related.	Need to better link together spatial and thematic contexts	● Support linkages between the data-based large-scale assessments and the local context. ● Encourage linkages across multiple sectors even when conducting CRAs focused on a single sector. ● Leverage the linkages made across sectors in the CRA to encourage integration across sectors in the decision-making process too.	● **Develop processes, approaches and methods that better integrate local level information in national-scale CRAs (i.e. vertical integration):** Including multiple spatial scales into the assessment (working from the bottom up) allows for vertical integration. ● **Support appropriate participatory processes at the local scale to surface local needs and information relevant to CRAs:** Create spaces that support local-level engagement on issues of climate risk (led by local stakeholders), to build evidence from the bottom up ● **Help countries to define appropriate CRA systems in their country** Include relevant spatial scales and map the key stakeholders: ● **Encourage engagement with interactions within/between risks, which requires more time**	CRA practitioners and donors CRA practitioners Researchers and donors Donors, researchers and CRA practitioners

			and resources e.g. where the interaction of multi-hazards across multiple sectors compound and enhance local risks. Including an analysis of trade-offs between different risk management objectives might also be beneficial	
4. CRAs often take places in siloes, meaning there is limited scope for sharing of lessons. Similarly, access to data is limited, in part because of limited collaborations and/or formal sharing agreements.	Need to collaborate and share	● Involve a variety of actors in the CRA process to share experiences and data. For instance, this may include forming consortia (including private sector, NGOs and government), allowing different actors to participate and share available data. ● Include key CRA user institutions as formal project partners ● Offer a value-add in return for access to primary data i.e. data interpretation, QA/QC and modelled data. ● Centralise CRA reports/outputs and their associated data in a place that is easy to find and accessible. ● Use citizen science approaches e.g. where daunting tasks can be	● **Promote international and regional collaboration** from different societal sectors relevant to climate risk (private sector, NGOs and government): This will help good representation of knowledge and views of and appetite for risk ● **Promote mixed-method approaches across disciplines**: These may include, for instance, participatory stakeholder processes, GIS/ground truthing, multi-criteria analyses and impact evaluations. ● **Fund collaboration activities and data sharing activities**: This could include a system that is maintained by users or an institution with an interest in sharing/using CRAs (for	Researchers, CRA practitioners and donors CRA practitioners and donors Donors

		accomplished by distributing small tasks to many volunteers and combining the results.	storing CRA reports/outputs and their associated data). This could also include ongoing collation and synthesis of data from social media and publicly available data relevant to vulnerability and risk. Encourage data and analysis sharing to break down the silos in funding interventions.	
5. Access to, and appropriate use of, data is a common problem in undertaking CRAs	Need to standardise data use and/or data access procedures	● Develop standards for data and methods used in CRAs ● Develop standard operating procedures for access and sharing of public funded data and CRAs	● **Set up quick access resources:** These would provide useful data resources for CRAs. This could also include development of a diagnostic of the sources and type of information that is available to perform the assessment ● **Promote regional agreements across countries to enable access to data:** The ARA network could be leveraged to facilitate this.	Researchers and donors Researchers and donors
6. Often, undertaking CRAs is an additional burden on already overstretched resources. There is also a lack of capacity to understand and act on the outputs of CRAs	Need to overcome knowledge and resource capacity constraints	● Citizen science offers opportunities for raising awareness and collecting local level data and information ● Encourage cross-organisational learning and fertilisation of ideas and	● **Promote capacity building to use different types of data:** This should include an identified minimum standard and guidelines for collecting and using different types of data.	Researchers and donors

		approaches (e.g. between institutions that have a lot of experience in doing CRAs and others). ● Leverage the awareness raising potential of national level assessments ● Develop institutional capacity to interpret existing CRAs, particularly in terms of understanding the complexities of the data and methods and uncertainties	● **Link CRAs to existing adaptation projects to capitalise on existing resources**: This will also enable the CRAs to be more focussed and incorporate the needs of those projects and actions. ● **Develop training (including materials) on all aspects of the CRA process, including interpretation and use.** ● **Lobby governments and institutions to recognise the value of CRAs.** Promote the hiring of staff and development of institutional capacities to take on the development and use of CRAs.	CRA practitioners and donors CRA practitioners, researchers and donors Donors
7. There is often a lack of plans or funding to sustain, communicate or implement recommendations resulting from the CRAs.	Need to ensure sustainability of the outputs of CRAs	● Use national level assessments to justify the need for follow-on projects. ● Design geographically and problem/design focussed CRA ● Investigate the potential value of intermediaries in interpreting the results of CRAs and championing action. ● Connect CRAs to national resilience/adaptation/risk management M,E & L	● **Include better understanding of the decision context to ensure sustainability of the outcomes:** include people from private sector, government/NGOs etc in the CRA process and steering committees etc. Where possible identify quantitative thresholds (and risks of exceedance etc) related to damages and/or design risks as a	CRA practitioners

		processes. Linking into these processes will help availability of information, communication of results and sustainability of initiatives	way of promoting decision-relevance. ● **Make sure communications are decision relevant:** This may include solutions-based information or narratives/storylines of change ● **Investigate the option of setting up formalised intermediaries for interpretation of data and information/knowledge:** These may be hosted or supported by universities but will need to be funded by public funds to guide action on climate risk	CRA practitioners Donors

2.3 Recommendations to the ARA

The ARA is in a unique position in terms of its global network of partners. This global network can be leveraged to achieve goals that individual research projects could not. While the table above provides detailed findings from the consultations, three high-level themes for enhancing CRAs in LDCs have been drawn to structure overarching recommendations to the ARA. The recommendations within each of these themes are aligned with the ARA theory of change functions of: advocacy, research, planning and cooperation and mobilisation of resources.

Recommendations aligned with the ARA:

1. **Improve current theory and practice of CRAs**
    a. ***Advance understanding of complex risk:*** *Mobilize funding* and *coordinate action research partnerships* to advance understanding of complex risk including cascading risk and risk pathways through both environmental and socio-economic vulnerability and drivers. This would include the propagation of risk and risk management across spatial scales, across different time scales, and interactions across sectors or within nexus (e.g. water-energy-food).
    b. ***Advance integration of different types of risk knowledge:*** *Coordinate action research partnerships* and *co-creation spaces* focused on developing approaches to integrating broader types of risk knowledge into CRAs including social science concepts, socio-economic data, and qualitative evidence. This would involve both the assessment of current risk through the integration of different types of knowledge about current vulnerabilities, exposures, perceptions, behaviour, and risk pathways, as well as approaches to assessing future risk through the use of participatory socio-economic scenario development.
    c. ***Advance integration of risk assessment across scales, sectors, and space:*** *Mobilise resources* and *coordinate partnerships* across research, practice, and donors, to advance the integration of multiple spatial scales (local to regional), sectors, and spaces (including trans-boundary) into risk assessments. This would build on (1a and b), improved understanding of complex risk and complex risk management and how this requires a broader concept of risk and a broader scope for risk management. This could culminate in the development of a decision tree or principles for integrating complex risk into CRAs.
2. **Improve standardisation and sharing**
    a. ***Advance sharing of primary and assessment data*****:** Develop principles of data sharing and access and *advocate* for the uptake of these across the ARA partners. Data sharing should include primary data (e.g. vulnerability and exposure mapping, hazard data, etc.) as well as CRA results (e.g. risk maps) to encourage building on prior assessments and leveraging existing datasets.
    b. ***Support data standardization and access*****:** *Mobilize funding* to coordinate and support relevant regional partners to provide a data coordination, standardization, and access role within regions and/or within sectors.
    c. Encourage sharing of methods and approaches: *Advocate for and coordinate* partnership learning and sharing of methods, lessons learned, and challenges to encourage collaboration rather than working in isolation.
3. **Improve the uptake and impact of CRAs in decision making**
    a. ***Advance understanding of how to integrate CRAs into existing frameworks, institutions, and systems:*** *Mobilize funding* and *coordinate action research*

partnerships to research the seamless integration of CRAs into existing management and planning frameworks (e.g. municipal spatial development planning), institutional systems, and M,E & L systems (e.g. national indicators on climate action). This research should result in robust approaches to continuously updating CRAs as well as improved understanding of the capacity and institutional barriers to the use of CRAs.

b. ***Enhance the capacity to use outputs from CRAs in decision making:*** *Mobilise funding and transdisciplinary co-creation spaces* to advance the capacity to effectively use CRAs in decision making. This would include primary capacity building activities, as well as more in depth participatory processes to identify and remove capacity gaps at individual and institutional/relational levels.

3. Reflections on the process

3.1 Reflections on the efficacy of the consultation process for CRAs in LDCs

The team leading the consultation enjoyed engaging with a range of stakeholders involved in CRAs. While the online format was suitable for these consultations, which aimed to draw together and consolidate insights across a range of geographical contexts, the team noted "zoom fatigue", which is a challenge in today's online working world. This fatigue was evident in the decrease in participation in the follow-on dialogue processes. It will be useful to compare the process for this Topic Area with others that have employed a different approach to understand how a broad range of stakeholders from different areas might be most effectively engaged. Perhaps a preliminary participant's survey (as employed by another Topic Area) may help to focus the first engagement more.

The team has reflected on the nature of the findings from the process, which include those related to the practice of CRA and the CRA community. The ARA aimed to identify "critical knowledge needs" for particular CRA users through these consultative processes, which could be used to scope research priorities. However, the consultations with producers and users of CRAs have surfaced challenges, opportunities and recommendations that go broader than research opportunities. They rather cut across different stakeholder groups and have implications for CRA practice more generally. These findings reflect the messiness and interconnectedness of the CRA space and the challenges associated with separating research/knowledge from action.

3.2 Reflections on the ARA consultative process and structure

While the team agrees with the extremely participatory approach of the Topic Area consultations in principle, the multiple advisory committee engagements were time intensive for all involved, further contributing to "zoom fatigue". For instance, while the input of the Steering Group was very valuable and much appreciated, many of the steering group constituents were valuable stakeholders in their own right. In acknowledgement of this, the steering group members were invited to take part in the consultation process. A smaller steering group (more appropriately scaled to the scope of the consultation process) might be more efficient in future consultative processes. It would be beneficial to undertake a review of the process across and between Topic Area consultations to compare outcomes and outputs from various meetings and understand how the overall exercise might be streamlined. Perhaps some of the information shared during the ARA meetings could be shared using different formats such as voice notes, short information briefs etc.

Annex

Participant List:

Name	Organisation/institutions
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Paul Desanker	UNFCCC LEG
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Ram P Lamsal	UNFCCC LEG
Ravi Bhalla	Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning (FERAL)
Robina Abuya	Kenya Markets Trust
Ying Wang	UN Environment