

# Making national adaptation plans work for the poor



Canadian Coalition on  
Climate Change  
& Development



Least developed countries (LDCs) can request financial assistance for adaptation through the UNFCCC's National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs). As of September 2009, 43 of 49 LDCs had submitted NAPAs to the UNFCCC Secretariat.

The preparation of NAPAs was largely a positive process, building the capacity in countries to analyze vulnerability and plan adaptation actions. However, it also highlighted weaknesses in the approach, and the complexity of ensuring that planning for adaptation is inclusive and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable.

Based on analysis of NAPA processes in Malawi and Niger, CARE puts forth recommendations for how future financial arrangements for adaptation can better support inclusive, transparent national adaptation planning in LDCs, which recognizes differences in human vulnerability and prioritizes the needs of most vulnerable populations.

## The Research

The research conducted by CARE and illustrated in this case study identifies gaps in the guidelines developed by the UNFCCC's LDC Expert Group (LEG), which are intended to help LDCs identify the most urgent and immediate adaptation needs in an inclusive and participatory manner. As a result of these gaps, and the limited resources provided to LDCs to facilitate inclusive processes,<sup>1</sup> priority actions identified by NAPAs are not specifically targeted to meet the needs of a country's most vulnerable population.

The study is based on research commissioned by CARE in Niger and Malawi. It includes an in-depth review of the NAPAs, plus field visits and interviews of key informants, including members of the respective national NAPA teams, vulnerable communities and civil society groups. Based on the research, CARE puts forth recommendations on how NAPAs (or future adaptation planning processes) can be improved to better reflect and address the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

While generalizations or extrapolations cannot be made based on two cases alone, the research presented here does contribute, nevertheless, to building on what is currently a limited body of knowledge of the NAPA development process, and to a dialogue on how NAPAs can be better used as a foundation for longer-term planning for adaptation.



Agriculture is an important target for the Malawi NAPA, but differential human vulnerability must be considered.

## Country Context

### THE MALAWI NAPA

Malawi's NAPA identifies the main problem as the impact of extreme events (droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall) on food, health, water, and energy. It highlights the Shire River and surrounding area as particularly vulnerable, and proposes five urgent priority adaptation actions.

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/napa/mwi01.pdf>

### THE NIGER NAPA

Niger's NAPA identifies the main problem as the impact of extreme events (drought and, to a lesser extent, floods, extreme temperatures, and bushfires) on crop, livestock fodder, fisheries production, water availability, forests, biodiversity, disease rates and sand-dune formations. It identifies six geographic areas that are most vulnerable to climate variability and change, and proposes 14 urgent priority actions.

[http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8562\\_ner01e.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8562_ner01e.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Countries were allocated US\$ 200,000 for completion of NAPAs.

# The Problem

The research conducted shows that low levels of participation and consultation exacerbated the NAPA bias, facilitated by the LEG guidelines, toward one-off project-based actions that are not integrated into broader development goals of Malawi and Niger. The process gives priority to the main economic sectors, rather than the most vulnerable communities, and emphasizes short-term coping mechanisms in the face of extreme events, rather than longer-term adaptation to chronic, slower-onset changes in climate conditions.

The research highlighted two areas for improvement in terms of consultation and participation. First, while the NAPA teams in Malawi and Niger were multidisciplinary, ownership of the NAPAs was limited to environmental ministries. This had significant implications. In Niger, while all of the proposed priority actions are intended to tackle food insecurity, the NAPA team did not consult meaningfully with food and livelihood security experts. It developed 20 indicators (e.g., income, changes in rainfall patterns, changes in livestock, etc.) for community surveys, but did not build from Niger's extensive, nation-wide livelihood security database.

In addition, the UNFCCC calls for quick assessments of urgent and immediate needs, and for participatory processes and community involvement. But this was a next-to-impossible task, especially as countries have limited capacity, financial resources and knowledge about climate change. As a result, community-level consultations were quite limited in Niger.

In Malawi, the extent of consultation by the NAPA team with community stakeholders varied widely. For example, the team overseeing the gender report held focus groups with 333 people. The team overseeing the wildlife report, on the other hand, met with only six park staff, one traditional authority, three business owners, and four CSO members. In Niger, while the team conducted community surveys, it only had enough resources to travel to one commune (Niger's lowest administrative unit) per region.

## On the Ground

### MALAWI

Malawi's five priority actions are, for the most part, consistent with the national team's problem analysis. The priority actions emphasize biophysical risk and sector impact. Four of the five priority actions aim explicitly to help Malawi cope with and adapt to biophysical risks: more frequent and/or intense floods, droughts, and erratic rainfall.<sup>2</sup> Four out of the five priority actions also specifically target key GDP sectors, including agriculture, forestry, water, and energy and fisheries.

Proposals for the five priority actions include a description of target beneficiaries in categories that are broad and primarily location-based. While it mentions women and people with HIV/AIDS, the NAPA is primarily focused on the Rift Valley as a whole, and while it mentions activities that would benefit communities along the Shire River Basin, it does not identify which specific communities or social groups it would target.

Moreover, human vulnerability is viewed as an externality rather than a determinant of adaptive capacity. The NAPA identifies barriers that may hamper implementation of adaptation options: extreme poverty, illiteracy, poor infrastructure, limited credit opportunities, food insecurity, poor health conditions, and the existence of large numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans. The NAPA also lists lack of land tenure as a potential barrier. It does not mention how the priority actions might address these risks and barriers and strengthen the adaptive capacity of the poorest, most vulnerable groups.

Malawi's NAPA team identified the country's most vulnerable regions based on climate risks. That is a good start. However, what is needed now is a firm understanding within those regions of differential human vulnerability.

Men in Marafa village in the Department of Dakoro, Niger, discuss their experiences with climate change.



Photo Credit: Angie Daze

Women in rural Malawi collect a depleting harvest of corn, a staple food in this southern African nation

Photo Credit: Phil Borges/CARE



## NIGER

Niger's team identified priority actions that are consistent, for the most part, with the problem analysis. All of the actions benefit Niger's three most geographically vulnerable areas. All but two priority actions are intended to benefit the agriculture and cattle breeding sectors.

Niger's NAPA identifies which groups are most vulnerable to climate change: farmers, cattle breeders, women, children, craftsmen, youth, elderly and traders. However, these categories describe basically the entire population of Niger. All the priority actions except four identify farmers and/or cattle breeders as target beneficiaries. In the four exceptions, it is not clear which groups the actions are targeting. Three priority actions specifically target women and youth as vulnerable groups.

While it is a positive sign that the NAPA team recognized differentiated vulnerability, none of the proposal descriptions make the link to how exactly the priority actions will reach these most vulnerable groups within the broad categories of vulnerability, especially since the majority of people in Niger are farmers and/or cattle breeders.

## Impacts/Results

The Malawi and Niger NAPA teams did not appear to have deviated very far from the LEG guidelines in developing their NAPAs. Unfortunately, because the guidelines have inherent gaps, and because the resources available for the development of NAPAs did not allow for extensive consultations, the resulting NAPAs are inadequate in identifying and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. Yet the NAPAs are the basis for adaptation action — action likely to be less successful than if the NAPAs were improved to recognize differential human vulnerability.

Recognition of these limitations is particularly important as the global community works to establish mechanisms for financing adaptation. It is unclear what role NAPAs will play in the longer-term financing architecture, but given the resources and time that have been invested in their development, it seems logical that they will serve, at minimum, as a foundation for longer-term planning. As Downing and Osman-Elasha indicate, "The NAPAs, as a process, should not be viewed solely as end-products in themselves, but rather as starting points for developing the adaptation capacity of LDCs."<sup>3</sup> The challenge now is how to correct their shortfalls, build on them, and mainstream them into national development plans and strategies. For this, additional technical and financial assistance will be required.

2 Based on the proposal description, priority action (#2) does not address biophysical risks; it aims instead to deal with the problem of heavy deforestation as a result of increasing population pressure, and it is not clear from the proposal description how activities would address climate variability or change.

3 Downing, T. and Osman-Elasha, B. 2009. National Adaptation Programmes of Action – Lessons learnt in Africa. <http://www.tiempocyberclimate.org/newswatch/comment071203.htm>

As one member of the Niger NAPA team stated when questioned about how the process could be improved:

“The question of adaptation is first a social process. It is society in its cultural, economic and political dimensions that must change. It is these changes that can move the process. All the adaptation documents for the NAPA and the process financed by the GEF, if they take into account the social dimension, can help to transform society, to help it adapt.”<sup>4</sup>

## Lessons Learned

By developing NAPAs, LDCs have taken their first steps toward more comprehensive adaptation assessments and strategies. Near-term financing from developed countries should be available to LDCs so that they can implement the urgent and immediate actions identified. Yet it will be important to apply the lessons learned from the NAPA development experience. Any future adaptation assessments and strategies must put a priority on vulnerable communities, populations and people, and ensure their active and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels.

### I. COMPLETE AND THOROUGH VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS

- The NAPA teams in Malawi and Niger identified vulnerable geographic regions based on climate risks. The NAPAs further include a description of each respective country’s basic national socio-economic indicators. These are important building blocks, but what is still needed is a firmer understanding of differential vulnerability and adaptive capacity within those high-risk geographic regions. Sector impact should be complemented by analysis of differentiated vulnerability and the social, economic and political determinants of adaptive capacity.
- To identify the most effective and locally appropriate ways of conducting this kind of analysis, the experience of in-country experts already working on food security, household livelihood security, and disaster risk reduction should be leveraged, and existing literature and data on vulnerability should be used.
- Assessments should be at the scale of communities, households, and individuals, not only at the scale of sectors and geographic regions as was the case. Assessments should be gender-sensitive and involve local stakeholders. Sufficient resources for inclusive and participatory assessment and planning processes must be provided up-front.

## 2. PROMOTE ACTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

- Vulnerable people and civil society at large should be included in the process to assess problems and identify and prioritize actions.
- Ownership of NAPAs should be created among environment-related ministries, as well as other key ministries, departments, and local governments.
- Better participation, consultation, and public engagement could be facilitated through the establishment or enhancement of a coordinating mechanism within countries to represent all relevant stakeholders. The mechanism would also build on and coordinate a range of adaptation institutions and resources in the country.
- Resources from developed countries should be made available up-front for developing countries to invest in processes and institutions for sustaining planning, implementation, and monitoring of adaptation activities in a way that enables and encourages the participation of all stakeholders, particularly vulnerable population groups.
- In addition, serious consideration should be given to mandating sub-national coordinating committees that can connect more easily with and represent the local-level realities and perceptions of what can and should be done as part of an effective and appropriate adaptation strategy. For many developing countries, this would call for major and sustained institutional strengthening support.



Photo Credit: Angie Daze

Women in Soudoure village in Niger develop a map to demonstrate how hazards are affecting different resources within their community.

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